

# Participatory Development and Governance in Rural India: A Case Study of Palli Sabha in Odisha

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**Abstract:** *Participatory development in rural India has received special significance in recent years following institutionalisation of participatory democracy through the Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment of India. Although the constitutional amendment has sought to institutionalise villagers' participation through a body called Palli Sabha/Gram Sabha, some states like Kerala, Rajasthan and West Bengal and Odisha have created new institutions closer to the villagers to ensure participation of the citizens. The present paper seeks to analyse the working of the Palli Sabhas as participatory development democratic institutions in Odisha. The study was carried out purely based on primary survey with individual interviews and participant observations also were employed. The study has found the lack of awareness among the villagers about the usefulness of the meetings and flow of inadequate developmental funds from government leading to lack of interest among villagers. Adequate participation of people in the village assembly is the key to success of any participatory development process. The findings of the study indicate that the basic purpose of holding of Palli Sabha meetings is still to be achieved. And there is still a long way to go.*

**Keywords:** Development, Participatory, Governance, Palli Sabha/Gram Sabha and Meeting

## 1. Introduction

Participatory development is a process by which the efforts of the people are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve social, economic, political and cultural conditions of the society, to integrate the local communities into the life of the nation, and allow them to contribute to the progress of the nation (McPherson, 1982). In participatory development, people take active and influential part in shaping decisions that affect their day to day lives (OECD, 1993).

The process of development is not only the sole responsibilities of the community of the state, but also it involves collective responsibilities as well. The understanding of this dynamics of partnership and engagement between government, civil society and donors remains a critical concern. Participation of people in different institutions is recognized as a means of development and empowerment. Without participations of people in various institutions the development and empowerment cannot be possible effectively. The empowerment would be possible through the adequate participation of people in decision making process. The aim of the participatory development is to "enable people to present share, analyse and augment their knowledge as the start of the process. The ultimate outcomes are enhanced knowledge and competence, and ability to make demand, and to sustain action (Chambers, 1994).

Although participatory development had been vague as a development agenda since the 1950s; it has gained its momentum only in recent years. The reasons behind its renewed importance may be the following. In modern times, it is recognized that participatory development can help meet development objectives of growth, equity as well as more recent concern for sustainability, good governance and democratization. The participatory development lies in a new people-centred vision and development, which replaces

the top-down procedures with approaches based on combine learning and negotiation (World Vision International, 2004). In this sense, the primary goal of participatory development is to engage local communities and all other stakeholders by creating "invited space" for participation. It also promotes creation of voluntary associations for community development, which can identify, plan, control, maintain and use local resources for all-round development of local communities. The rapid growth of such "citizens" initiatives is said to have emerged as a new accountability agenda. The voice of the people is at the core of such initiatives as it may be argued that more the citizens are informed about the crises and needed responses, the more they likely to hold people's representatives electorally accountable (World Bank-2004).

In this context, India has also received its significance momentum since 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment in 1992 which included the Gram Sabha or village assembly as a participatory body for decentralized governance along with a three-tier system of Panchayats from village to the district. Article 243(b) of the Indian constitution envisages Gram Sabha as "a body consisting of persons those registered in the electoral rolls relating to the Gram Panchayat at the village level". The Gram Sabha provides each and every voter of the village to participate in decision-making process at village level. The idea of involvement and participation of people in their development through the institution of Gram Sabha was incorporated in the village Panchayat Acts passed by some of the provincial legislations in British India.

## 2. Review of Literature

Some of the state legislative provisions indicate that the Gram Sabha (GS) or Palli Sabha (PS) meetings are not held regularly and effectively. The Madhay Pradesh study has done by **Participatory Research in Asia** (PRIA) shows that the villagers pointed out that the Gram Sabha had passed a resolution to construct the school building replacing the one-

roomed tin-roofed structure. But it did not come up. The Sarpanch replied that he had no money for this purpose.

The study had further showed that the attendance was low because the villagers were not aware about the dates of the meetings fixed by the Government due to the publicity of Gram Sabha meetings. Even the Sarpanch did not know when the next meeting was due.

**Nirmala Buch** conducted a study of 11 Gram Panchayats in Madhy Pradesh in December 1997 and found that far from an adequate number of Gram Sabha meetings even all the Panchas were not present. To cap it all, there was no quorum in more than 50 per cent of the Gram Sabha meetings. There was a provision for mandatory attendance of one-tenth members in the Gram Sabha. Women are finding it difficult to attend as the timing is sometime in the forenoon i.e. between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Most of the women are not aware even of the rudiments of the Gram Panchayat. The issues discussed do not seem to interest the lot of the villagers and hence, expect stakeholders, others shy away from the Gram Sabha. There are various issues have come out through this study.

A study conducted by **John Oommen** in two Panchayats in Kerala has shown that the people are in favour expanding the role of Gram Sabhas. They want the Gram Sabhas to give final seal of approval of the activities of the Gram Panchayat. The people interviewed have suggested that the Gram Sabha will perform its duties in time provided people are made aware of its role in development activities. Once their needs are taken into consideration, they will automatically attend the meetings in large numbers and participate effectively in the activities of the Gram Panchayat.

In West Bengal Gram Sabha created by the amendment of the West Bengal Panchayat Act in 1992, had started working well. **Webster's** research demonstrated that apart from the compulsory meetings of the Gram Sabha, the informal mighty discussions in some localities, regular public meetings were other form of participation. **Lieten** remarked that although the boktrita culture was not altogether absent in the Gram Sabha meetings, participation used to take place. Almost one fourth of the males he spoke to stated that they participated in the meeting.

**M. Ghatak & M. Ghatak** conducted a study on the functioning of Gram Sansad in a cross-section of 20 villages in May 1999. The study brings out certain important issues. It shows that the largest single category was agricultural labourers followed by farmers with less than two acres of land who attended the meetings. This study also found that proposal for road repair, where the tube well should be installed, who should receive loan as opposed to broader issues which political parties, trade unions or peasant organisation are concerned with, such as, economic liberalisation, privatisation of public sector. The study also reported that the rich people do not attend meetings. This study has indicated that rich villagers do not attend because they are not given their due in the meetings in terms of their traditional social prestige, not to speak of getting any economic benefit from government programmers. It applies to Odisha as well.

**Sujit K. Dutta** in an article cited an example of the success of the Gram Sabha in Tripura. He stated: "The institution of Gram Sabha is dormant in most of the North Eastern States precisely because its peer group i.e., the Gram Panchayat is non-existent. However, in Tripura the Gram Panchayat does exist and it is the executive body of the Gram Sabha. Here, the members of the Gram Sabha actively participate in the entire village affairs and developmental activities. Even in implementation part of any scheme, the Gram Sabha ensures community participation, collective decision-making, monitoring and evaluation". Regarding the relationship between Gram Sabha and Panchayat, **George Mathew** stated: "The Panchayats will be effective only if Gram Sabhas meet regularly with maximum participation of the people. At the same time, Gram Sabha will be effective only if the Panchayati Raj institutions are strong".

**Snehalata Panda (1996)**, in her study in Odisha she found women are interested to participate in politics because of due to mandatory provisions of reservation. The reservation of women in Panchayati Raj which creates women's empowerment and taking decision through participation known as participatory democracy for village community development. It has been observed that most of the women members those are from non-political background and had enter into politics due to their family members or political favouritism. The important aspect of the study is that the women who are not willing to enter into politics they have great maturity in outlook, more enthusiasm, rising political understanding, and rising of their perception of role and responsibility.

**Mahi Pal** has done a study on Gram Sabha meetings in India in 2009. He selected only one district namely, Sirsa district of Haryana State of India with main objectives of involvement and participation of villagers in the process of their socio-economic development. There he found various issues of Gram Sabha meetings and also found attendance of villagers in the Gram Sabha meetings are slightly high due to the awareness among the villagers. Almost all the meetings in the Gram Sabah the villagers were present but the Sarpanch were not aware regarding the Gram Sabha meetings. However, presence of more than 50 per cent of the members of GP in these meetings were a positive development in itself, in view of the fact that neither the members of the GP are keen to attend these meetings nor is the Sarpanch interested in inviting the members to the meetings. The study found that there are various grievances were raised in the Gram Sabha meetings like drinking water, school repairing, electricity etc. And also found unavailability of doctor, medicine and unavailability of x-ray machines etc. Similar problems are raised in relation to animal discrepancy.

### 3. Research Problem

The above literature shows that Palli Sabha was there in Odisha Panchayat legislation but it remained only in law book because of lack of political and administrative attention. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 provides the Palli Sabha or Gram Sabha as the direct participation of people at the grass root level. It is also known as the grass root democracy. This amendment was made when Biju Patnaik was the chief minister of Odisha.

The Biju Patnaik Government was attached a lot of important matters like reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and reservation of seats for women at the village level. The provision of Palli Sabha or Gram Sabha came into existence during the Congress government.

But Gram Sabha led only a formal existence. It was there only in law books on Panchayats without any practical implication. After the Seventy Third Amendment of the Constitution, Odisha like West Bengal created a body called Palli Sabha to institutionalize participation effectively. But there is paucity of empirical studies to demonstrate what is happening on the ground. This had prompted the researcher to conduct this kind of study.

Above the backdrop, it is highly relevant to assess the roles and functions of Palli Sabha and the general perceptions of Panchayat members in terms of Participation and decentralized governance process. The study was conducted by researcher in late 2014 on citizens participation in Palli Sabha meeting in Odisha is general and Kuligan Gram Panchayat is particular which is situated in Balasore district under the Remuna block. Due to some circumstance the researcher did not get much time to explore it. The study has brought out some crucial issues and suggests for future improvement.

#### 4. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the roles and functions of Palli Sabhas in terms of the legal provisions;
- To assess the nature and extent of participation of the villagers;
- To capture the general perceptions of the members about the usefulness of this body;
- To make a check list of the village development programmes which figure in the agenda of the Palli Sabha meetings and to analyse the reactions of the members present in the meetings;
- To tap the perceptions of the GP members about the Palli Sabhas;
- To collect data and analyse issues raised in the meetings keeping in mind gender dimension of participation;

#### 5. Sample size

This study covers 150 respondents drawn from the universe. The data have been collected from both participant and non-participant members in the Palli Sabha meeting from one Gram Panchayat (GP) namely Kuligan Gram Panchayat which is consist of six villages namely Reheng, Tentulia, Gambharia, Kuligan, Ganjia and Bedipur. From the universe, the samples were selected randomly for both male and female respondents.

#### 6. Methodology and Data Sources

The research tools adopted for the survey include structured schedules, interview guide, observation guide and case studies. The primary data have been collected through interviews with the members of the GPs. The information

and perceptions of respondents and other primary data have been captured through structured and unstructured interviews with the members of the GPs, members of the Palli Sabhas and officials. Case studies have also been done to gain insights into the working of the Palli Sabhas. Focus group discussions also conducted with a select group of respondents for gaining deeper insights into the dynamics of the Palli Sabhas and verification of the data and information collected. Participant observation technique was also employed to generate and verify the data. The secondary data have been collected from various published reports, books, research papers and government documents and relevant legislations and rules thereof.

### 7. Result and Discussion

The Palli Sabha or Gram Sabha embodies what is called instruments of the deliberative democracy. The present study attempts to identify the roles and functions of Palli Sabha in different villages in Kuligan Gram Panchayats, Odisha. The present study also explores the participation of people in Palli Sabha meetings and their roles, functions and benefits which have been serious issues in local governance. Specific attention is being paid to both of the participant and non-participant members in the meetings. The insights from the field are very interesting. It is significant to note that the ground experiences brought out some useful factual information in which I intended to draw a real picture of ground reality.

It is significant to note that the level of education of members of both men and women would give insights to understand the method of holding the Palli Sabha meetings. These six villages have different dimensions of all aspects but educational level of men and women of these villages are given below:

**Table 1: Educational qualification of all respondents**

Education Level	Men	Women	Total	Per cent (%)
Illiterate	43	11	54	36.00
Primary	33	7	40	26.66
Upper Primary	21	3	24	16.00
Secondary	19	3	22	14.67
Higher Secondary	6	-	6	04.00
Graduates	4	-	4	02.67
Total	126	24	150	100.00

Source: From field survey

The above table indicates that the educational level of all respondents of both participant and non-participant members. Among the respondents 36.00 per cent of the respondents are illiterate, 26.66 per cent of the respondents informed that they attend primary school, 16.00 per cent respondents response that they are just upper primary, 14.67 per cent of the respondents informed that they are secondary education, 4.00 per cent of respondents are higher secondary and 2.67 per cent of the respondents have passed graduation. From this survey, it has been found that total 45.83 per cent of the female respondents are illiterate out of total female respondents and total 34.13 per cent of the male respondents informed they are illiterate. It signifies that the male members are better than female members.

**Table 2:** Caste- Wise Distribution of Educational Level

Level Education	Total SC persons	% SC persons	Total ST persons	%ST persons	Total Other persons	% Other persons
Illiterate	38	48.72	5	83.33	11	16.67
Primary	23	29.49	1	16.67	16	24.24
Upper primary	7	8.97	0	0	17	25.76
Secondary	7	8.97	0	0	15	22.73
Higher secondary	2	2.56	0	0	4	6.06
Graduation	1	1.28	0	0	3	4.54
Total	78	100.00	6	100.00	66	100.00

Source: From field survey

The above table shows that the caste-wise educational level of all respondents in different social groups. Out of total 150 respondents the Scheduled Caste respondents are 78. Among the Scheduled Caste (SC) respondents 48.72 per cent of the respondents informed that they are illiterate which is higher, 29.49 per cent of the SC respondents reported that they have passed primary education, 8.97 per cent of the SC respondents said that they have reached secondary education, 2.56 per cent of the SC respondents said that they are higher secondary and only 1.28 per cent of the SC respondents told that they are graduates out of 78 SC respondents. Out of 150 respondents the numbers of Scheduled Tribe respondent is 6. It is significantly note that 83.33 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes are illiterate. It is clearly understood that Scheduled Tribes are more illiterate than the other social groups. Among these social groups nobody moves from upper primary to graduation level. Out of total ST respondents 16.67 per cent of the respondents told that they attend primary education which is lower literacy among Scheduled Tribe respondents. It means that these social groups are not much educated among all social groups. Among all the respondents the total number of Other Categories is 66. Among these social groups 16.67 per cent of respondents reported that they are illiterate, 24.24 per cent of the respondents said that they have completed primary education, 25.76 per cent of the respondents informed that they have completed upper primary, 22.73 per cent of the respondents said that they are secondary, 6.06 per cent of the respondents said that they are higher secondary and 4.54 per cent of the respondents told that they are graduate which is higher than other social groups. Here, I found Other Category is more educated than Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories as well. There are villages where the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities are living but they are not highly educated because due to lack of well economic condition, lack of responsibility and less knowledge upon usefulness of education among these social groups. It is observed that the literacy rate of higher caste is relatively high in the GPs.

Two different sets of questionnaires were prepared for two different respondents. One set of questionnaire is addressed to the participants and non-participants members in the meetings and their number is 98. Another set of respondents are regularly participate in the meetings and their number is 52.

**Table 3:** Gender-wise distributions of participant and non-participant respondents

Total Male participant (%)	49(89.09)	Total Male non-participant (%)	35(81.40)
Total Female participant (%)	6(10.91)	Total Female non-participant (%)	8(18.60)
Total (%)	55(100.00)	Total (%)	43(100.00)

Source: From field survey

The above table shows that researcher asked the question regarding participant and non-participant of respondents in the Palli Sabha meetings. Among the respondents 56.12 per cent of the respondents informed that they are seldom attend the meetings due to the various problems faced by the members and their number is 55 out of 98 respondents. Out of 55 respondents, the 89.09 per cent of the male respondents and 10.91 per cent of the female respondents have informed that they hardly attend the Palli Sabha meetings. 43.88 per cent of the respondents informed that they never attend the Palli Sabha meetings and their number is 43. Out of 43 respondents the 81.40 per cent of the male respondent and 18.60 per cent of the female respondent they never attend Palli Sabha meetings due to the several reasons.

**Table 4:** Village-wise distributions of participant and non-participant

Village Name	Total participant	In %	Total non-participant
Reheng	5	9.10	11
Tentulia	3	5.45	13
Gambharia	7	12.73	9
Kuligan	14	25.45	4
Bedipur	12	21.82	4
Ganjia	14	25.45	2
Total	55	100.00	43

Source: From field survey

The above table indicates that the participant and non-participant respondents among six villages. Researcher has taken sample from ground those respondents who did not participate in the Palli Sabha meetings. Among the six villages in the village of Reheng only 9.10 per cent, in Tentulia 5.45 per cent and in Gambharia 12.73 per cent of the respondents informed that they seldom attend the meetings. In these three villages the attendance of respondents are low which is relatively compared to other villages. Among six villages Reheng and Tentulia these villages are SC dominated area. In the village of Kuligan, Bedipur and Ganjia most of the respondents informed that they seldom attend the meetings. Here researcher has identified that many people in these villages are aware about the Palli Sabha meetings. On the other hand, the 25.58 per cent of the respondents in Reheng, 30.23 per cent of the respondents in Tentulia, and 20.93 per cent of the respondents in Gambharia they have informed that they never attend the meetings. Remaining three villages namely Kuligan (9.30 per cent), Bedipur (9.30 per cent) and Ganjia (4.66 per cent) of the respondents informed that they never attend in the Palli Sabha meetings. It is observed that in these three villages members never attend the meetings. The researcher has found that there are several problems faced by the members thereby they are not interested to attend the meeting. It is observed that those respondents who are government employees they never attend the Palli Sabha meetings due to their traditional social prestige. Here the researcher points out that lack of responsibility,

communication, lack of enthusiasm, lack of awareness and apathy among the villagers are the major problems for low attendance of members in the Palli Sabha meetings. These are the major problems in which members are generally do not interest to attend in the Palli Sabha meetings. On further investigation it came out that they did not attend due to the lack of time.

It may be analyzed that almost all the respondents in the Gram Panchayats are familiar with the Palli Sabha meetings. Out of 98 respondents, the 97.00 per cent of the respondents said that the Government (Block) sends a letter with guideline to Gram Panchayat for conducting the meetings in every village. Gram Panchayat has responsibility to convey the people regarding the Palli Sabha meetings either beating of drum or by any announcement. According to respondents, Gram Panchayat decides when the Palli Sabha will be held; also has responsibility the date, time and place should be decided by the Gram Pranchayat. Among the respondents 32.00 per cent of the respondents reported that the Executive Officer (EO), Ward members and members of the Palli Sabha meetings they decide the electorate members, practically who is eligible for avail benefits. All the respondents informed that the Palli Sabha meetings are held at the public places. According to all respondents, the ward member presides over the Palli Sabha meetings; in his/her absence a senior member can preside over the Palli Sabha meetings. Among the respondents 14.00 per cent of the respondents have reported that the village members have rights for selection of areas where the work of construction should be done. It has been noticed that any respondent could not report about the budget or social audit of Gram Panchayats which is the major factor in a financial year. 77.00 per cent of the respondents reported that they are well aware about the roles and functions of Palli Sabha and 23.00 per cent of the respondents were confused about the Palli Sabha meetings because they have little knowledge about it. Here the researcher identified that those members never participate in the Palli Sabha meetings they also aware about the roles and functions of Palli Sabha meeting. Those respondents hardly attend the meetings they reported that the size of the attendance of Palli Sabha is 20 to 30 members or 50 to above members are attending in the meetings including female members. Out of 98 respondents 14.00 per cent of the respondents have reported Palli Sabha meetings hold in the presence of police for avoiding violence among villagers. 47.00 per cent of the respondents they felt that sometimes the discussion of any issue relating to village development are hold in a discipline manner. 39.00 per cent of the respondents told that some of them abusing each other during the meeting hours. These are the major reactions of members during the Palli Sabha minutes.

**Table 5:** Issues discussed in Palli Sabha meetings

Name of Facilities	Total number of respondents who has received facilities	Percentage
Road repair	14	50.00
IAJ	16	57.14
BPL	21	75.00
APL	7	25.00
Job Card	10	35.71
Toilet	2	7.14

Source: From field survey

The above table shows that these are the major issues are being discussed in the Palli Sabha meetings. Among the respondents 95.09 per cent of the respondents told that road repair, 97.95 per cent of the respondents told that Indira AwaasYojana (IAY), 89.79 per cent of the respondents told that Below the Poverty Line (BPL), 58.16 per cent of the respondents told that Old age pension, 18.57 per cent of the respondents informed that Above the Poverty Line (APL), 45.91 per cent of the respondents reported that Widow Pension (WP), 6.12 per cent of the respondents told that Digging pond and only 16.53 per cent of the respondents have informed that Job card, these are the major issues are being discussed in the Palli Sabha meetings. In this regard Odisha has gained its significance for providing these facilities.

It has been observed that those respondents who do not participate in the Palli Sabha meetings they are also aware about the various issues. When the researcher asked the question regarding the last Palli Sabha meetings almost all the respondents are not aware about when the last Palli Sabha meetings were held, even they could not recall the date and venue of the last Palli Sabha meetings. As per the Odisha Gram Panchayat Act, the Palli Sabha should be held in the month of February in a year but from researcher's investigation it indicates that almost all respondents informed that the Palli Sabha meetings do not takes place in a proper time thereby the attendance of members are low. Month of February and March are the suitable time for them to attending meetings because in these months they have no work in their field. In contrary, almost all respondents informed that the Palli Sabhas are conveyed at such time when they are busy in their agriculture and other works. Therefore, the low attendances of members are being seen.

In this section it deals with those respondents who regularly attend the Palli Sabha meetings. It provides various insights regarding the roles and functions of Palli Sabha meetings and their facilities received from different institutions. The general perceptions of members have also been taped. And several issues have also been collected by the researcher from field survey.

The researcher has been taken respondents from six villages with the distribution of male and female members respectively. And their total number is 52. 10 of them were female and remaining 42 were male members who regularly attend the meetings.

When researcher asked the questions about the source of information of the Palli Sabha meetings, 30.77 per cent of the respondents reported that they get information from Panchayats, 13.46 per cent of the respondents informed that they receive through neighbours and 55.77 per cent of the members told that they get information through both the neighbours and Panchayat members. Almost all the respondents reported that they are familiar with the roles and functions of Palli Sabha meetings. Almost all the respondents regularly attend the meetings because they need to develop their socio-economic status, need some benefits and they need social justice through the regular participation in the Palli Sabha meetings. When the researcher asked question regarding the received of facilities, 53.85 per cent of the respondents told that they have received facilities

from various schemes and 46.15 per cent of the respondents informed that they have not received any sort of facilities. Some of the members informed that they have not received any kind of facilities even BPL card or Antyodaya card also which is the minimum requirement for each and every poor villager. There are so many problems facing Panchayat members those respondents who have not received facilities. For this reasons, lack of participation, inadequate government fund and due to the cheating of local politicians these are the major causes in which they deprive.

**Table 6:** Facilities received from various schemes among 52 respondents

Name of the issues	Total respondents views	In %
Road repair	94	95.09
IAY	96	97.95
BPL	88	89.79
Old age pension	57	58.16
APL	28	18.57
Widow pension	45	45.91
Digging pond	6	6.12
Job card	16	16.53

**Source:** From field survey

The above table shows that the facilities received by respondents from different institutions through participation in the Palli Sabha meetings. Among the respondents 50.00 per cent of the respondents have informed that Panchayat has done road repair, 57.14 per cent, 75.00 per cent, 25.00 per cent, 35.71 per cent, 7.14 per cent of the respondents noticed that they have received Indira AwaasYojana, Below the Poverty Line (BPL card), Above the Poverty Line (APLcard), Job Card and Toilet respectively out of 28 respondents who have received facilities. Out of 52 the remaining 24 respondents reported that they have not received any facilities. When the researcher asked question regarding, what is the reason for not receiving the facilities? There are various problems that they are depriving. 16 per cent of the respondents reported that local politicians are cheating them, 87.05 per cent of the respondents told that rejects of the applications after the meetings are over and 75.00 per cent of the respondents noticed that the rejects of the name of the members from the first list in the Palli Sabha register. These are the major reasons for not receiving the facilities. Here the researcher comes know the government has a legal provision for selection of the various schemes from the village level. Those Panchayat members name is in the first list which is recorded in the Palli Sabha register the Block can select their name from first list to last list.

**Table 7:** Facilities received from different social groups:

Name of categories	Facilities received	Percentage	Facilities not received	Percentage
SC	18	64.29	9	37.50
ST	0	0	6	25.00
Others	10	35.71	9	37.50
Total	28	100.00	24	100.00

**Source:** From field survey

From six villages the researcher has found there are different social groups opinions regarding the facilities those members who are regularly participate in the Palli Sabha meetings. Among the respondent 64.29 per cent of the Scheduled Caste reported that they have received very least amount of facilities and 35.71 per cent of the other

categories reported that they have also received facilities from different schemes. But in this fact, the all Scheduled Tribes respondents reported that they have not received facilities. 37.50 per cent of the Scheduled Caste respondents said that they have not received facilities and 37.50 per cent of the others categories respondents informed that they have not received facilities due to the various problems which have been described in this section. Generally, the people are facing several problems and nobody ready to respond their demands.

The fact is that, all the respondents opined that all the villagers in the Gram Panchayats are generally not interested to attend the Palli Sabha meetings. Among the respondent 88.46 per cent of the respondent informed that time is not convenient for holding the meetings. 88.61 per cent of the respondent told that local politicians are creating panic situation among the members of Panchayats. In this sense, the researcher has found that the local politicians are taking the money from some poor villagers but they do not work for them. Moreover, 94.23 per cent of the respondent and 75.00 per cent of the respondents noticed that due to the rejection of application after the meetings are over and due to the rejection of name from first list in the Palli Sabha register they are not interested to attend the meeting. Use of bad language during Palli Sabha meeting which villagers are hardly interested to participate and 65.38 per cent of the respondents told that they engage in their personal work therefore they are not much interest to attend the meetings. Due to the lack of adequate government fund villagers are generally not interest to attend the meetings.

At this juncture almost all the respondents informed that women members participate in the Palli Sabha meetings but not in a large number. Among the respondent 71.15 per cent of the respondents informed that they are not much educated therefore they are not interested to attend the meetings. 42.30 per cent of the respondents told that they are not well aware about the meetings. 51.92 per cent of the respondents told that they think that male members have more efficacies to attend the meetings. 28.84 per cent of the respondents told that they think that they have nothing to do in the Palli Sabha meetings. 34.61 per cent of the female respondents noticed that they are busy in their family work like care of child, cooking of food and other domestic works in their family. These are the major problems of women members in which they are not willing to attend the Palli Sabha meeting. The researcher has found that women are finding it difficult to attend as the timing is sometime in the forenoon i.e. between 11 am and 1 pm. Most of the women are not aware even of the rudiments of the Gram Panchayat. 69.39 per cent of the respondents have informed that Palli Sabha meeting should be held at 12.00 to 1.00 pm this time is convenient particularly for male members. 30.61 per cent of the respondents reported that the Palli Sabha meetings should be held at 3pm to 4 pm which is convenient particularly for women. Almost all the respondents noticed that gender issues do not figure in the discussions because many female members who attend the meetings prefer to remain silent. While speaking to them the researcher have come to know some of them were not allowed to speak because of time constraint.

Most of the respondents reported that Sarpanch and ward members they seldom attend the Palli Sabha meetings. Consequently, respondents informed that there is no such role and regulations for Sarpanch/Pradhan to attend the meetings but ward member has little role to attend the meetings and preside over the Palli Sabha meetings. In the absence of ward member meetings are presided over by one of the senior members present in the meetings. 57.69 per cent of the respondents informed that the Sarpanch/Pradhan do not participate in the Palli Sabha meetings because they are busy in their personal work.

All the respondents have reported that as per the Odisha Gram Panchayat Act, the meetings of Palli Sabha should be held in the month of February in every year but due to the government delay the meetings of Palli Sabha does not hold in proper time. While speaking to them there were no such Palli Sabha meetings in the year of 2013 due to the

Panchayat election. When researcher wants to know regarding when the last Palli Sabha was held? Most of the members they were confused even they could not say the date and venue of the last Palli Sabha meetings. Most of the members informed that the last Palli Sabha was held in 2012 but they did not recall the month, date and venue of the meetings. In this fact, the researcher has checked the last Palli Sabha register and found the total information about it. The last Palli Sabha was held in the month of October, 2012 at six villages. Among the six villages the last Palli Sabha was held in Kuligan (3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012), Reheng (4<sup>th</sup> October 2012), Ganjia (5<sup>th</sup> October 2012), Bedipur (8<sup>th</sup> October 2012), Gambharia (9<sup>th</sup> October 2012), and Tentulia (10<sup>th</sup> October 2012) respectively. And all the Palli Sabha meeting was held at the public places. There were various issues were discussed in the last Palli Sabha meetings relating to the village development.

**Table 8:** Village-wise distribution of attendance of members in Palli Sabha meetings, 2014

Village name	Total voters	Participant voters	% of total voters	Male participant	% of Total males	Female participant	% of Total females
Reheng	1191	57	4.79	42	6.68	15	2.66
Tentulia	345	22	6.38	19	9.95	3	1.95
Gambharia	429	29	6.76	22	9.36	7	3.60
Kuligan	2116	165	7.80	137	12.36	28	2.78
Ganjia	692	45	6.50	14	3.86	31	9.42
Bedipur	749	47	6.28	36	9.28	11	3.04
Total	5522	365	6.60	270	9.27	95	3.60

**Source:** Palli Sabha minutes of the six villages

From the above table it shows that the total voters of GPs as per the voter list of 2014 and participation of male and female members in the Palli Sabha meetings in six villages. All the meetings in all the villages were held in the month of December, 2014. It is evident from this table that in the village of Kuligan 7.80 per cent of the total voters were participated in the Palli Sabha meeting which is very high among six villages. In the village of Ganjia 9.42 per cent of the female voters were participated in the Palli Sabha meeting which is comparable with other villages respectively.

**According to the Panchayat members what should be done to increase attendance of the members in the Palli Sabha meetings? There as follows:**

- 63.46 per cent of the respondents have informed that the Palli Sabha should be held twice or thrice in a year to ensure regular interaction between the Panchayats and the members in the Palli Sabha. It might motivate the villagers and generate their more active interest.
- 94.23 per cent of the respondents have reported that the Palli Sabha meetings should be held at convenient time to increase the attendance of members.
- 53.84 per cent of the members reported that the meetings of Palli Sabha should be held in during the month of February or March to ensure more attendance.
- 84.61 per cent of the respondents have informed that government should be provided adequate fund to poor villagers.

The finding of the study is very significant. From the preceding discussions and observations it demonstrates there are several problems of people for participating in Palli Sabha meetings which is called direct democracy. From the

study, it indicates that there is still lack of participation of people and holding unannounced meeting at times when most of the villagers were away at work. The holding of meeting is not convenient for most of the people particularly for women. So women find it difficult to attend as the timing is sometimes in the afternoon. It is observed that the Palli Sabha should be held in the month of February in every year, but the meetings are not holding at the proper time due to government negligence. Lack of political will is another obstacle for participation. It has been observed that most of time Ward members and Sarpanch hardly attend the meeting. Inadequate government resources by the higher level of authority is an another obstacle for low attendance of people in PS meeting. This is generally due to the lack of ability of local authorities to realize their revenues for many reasons. From the participant observation it is observed that most of the villagers were not aware about the purpose of the holding of meeting due to the lack of publicity or announcement. Long distance is another problem from house to venue of the meeting therefore people are finding it delay to attend the meetings. The major findings from the participant observation are the Human Development Issues like health, education; food and nutrition are hardly discussed in the meeting. Younger people do not attend in large number because they feel that they have nothing to gain. A large number of the members belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities attend meetings but do not benefit much because of local politics and inability to voice their demands effectively. The study reveals that the local politicians are taking money from poor villagers but they do not work for them.

## 8. Human Development Issues

Human Development Issues pertaining to education, health and issues like food, nutrition are hardly discussed in the Palli Sabha meetings. Almost all the respondents noticed that there are no discuss about these issues. From participant observation it has been noticed that there are no such discussions about health, education, food and nutrition during the Palli Sabha meetings. These are the essential issues identified by the researcher from field survey through participant observation. When the researcher asked question, why these issues are not discussed in the Palli Sabha meetings? All the respondents informed that the Government does not provide details guideline relating to these issues. If government provides then only one or two issues may keep for discussion. So these are the major reason in which they do not discuss on Human Development Issues in the Palli Sabha meetings. All respondents reported that everyone allows speaking freely but sometimes they oppose each other for certain issues. Those respondents seldom attend the meeting they informed that there is no such restriction among villagers. According to respondent the attendance of female members in the meetings are very low due to lack of convenient hours. Almost all the respondent informed that female members participate in the discussion but sometimes they do not take part in the discussion due to the time constraints. Among the respondents 97.22 per cent of the respondent informed that younger people do not attend in large numbers because they think that nothing happened in the Palli Sabha meetings. Here the researcher identified those respondents who had not participated in the Palli Sabha meetings they have also received facilities. Finally I can say these are the major problems have found during the field hours.

Literacy is an important factor in participating in Palli Sabha meetings. In developing countries like India poverty and literacy act as an important impediment in participation. It is observed that one, who has to spend much of one's time in the Palli Sabha meetings in both ends, cannot find time to attend the Palli Sabha meetings. Due to the lack of literacy most of the villagers are not interested to attend the Palli Sabha meetings. The study has proved that the Panchayats are dominated by higher caste and also has brought out the literacy rate of higher caste is relatively high in the Panchayats. So these are major findings of the study in which justifies the research hypothesis.

## 9. Conclusion

The study shows that there may be several arguments for and against both the people's participation and roles and functions of Palli Sabha meeting. The main argument for it, that it creates 'invited space' and 'popular space' for all voters irrespective of gender. It helps them to raise their voice for government benefits and to know the roles and functions of Palli Sabha in which it would make government more transparent and accountability. The central argument against is the negligence of government over the public policies which it leads local elite empowered. Inadequate of government resources is the main cause for low attendance of people in the meeting. Local politicians are also playing

important role in carrying out the issues of villagers and creating disturbance among the villagers.

Despite above argument, there is great belief that in our Indian context, Participation and Governance are the best way for the people for strengthening their socio-economic conditions as well as to create a large platform to involve in decision making process. The empowerment of people irrespective of gender is most important for local government. Efforts of the people and the creation of awareness among the people with PRIs are key to the success of India's governance. Strong authority, united self-governing bodies, equal distribution of benefits, knowledgeable members, and involvement of people has to take into consideration. They should hold Panchayat keeping in mind gender dimensions are there. In addition, community involvement and decentralization of power may be best way to understand the present scenario of India's governance.

## 10. Suggestions for the Improvement

- 1) There should be mechanisms or ways for a continuous and constant information dissemination regarding the role and importance of Palli Sabha to the people
- 2) It is better to hold this meeting in a suitable place to be decided by the members in the meetings. It should sufficiently large to contain at least 20 per cent of the total members
- 3) It is necessary to develop awareness among the Panchayat members
- 4) Vigilance committee should be set in Odisha to scrutinise the ongoing and completed works of Panchayats. Incidentally such committees are there in Bihar, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh
- 5) Sabha meetings should be preceded by small *para* meetings. Incidentally it yielded desired results in the early years in West Bengal as is evident from studies done by GK Lieten, Neil Webster and Prabhat Datta
- 6) The local villagers' organizations like clubs, women's groups should be mobilized to carry on campaigns about the meetings in addition to drum beating. And also to mobilise the community people the local media such as newspapers, news channels should be involved in the dissemination of the information about the importance of Gram Sabha/Palli Sabha
- 7) Basic issues like identification of beneficiaries of all rural development programmers' in which the poor villagers are interested, should be done in the meetings
- 8) Human development issues pertaining to health, education, food and nutrition should be discussed in the Palli Sabha meetings.
- 9) There should be provided adequate government fund to poor people to ensure large participation in the meetings
- 10) There should be created effective atmosphere where the people would feel free to speak about their problems
- 11) The law should be amended to ensure mandatory presence of the ward members and Sarpanchas in all Palli Sabha meetings as in West Bengal failing which there should penal provision
- 12) There should be a mandatory agenda in the meetings to discuss the performance of the Panchayats and the members should be given time to reflect on this matter freely and openly

- 13) Panchayats should be empowered to send these proceedings to the higher level body for taking necessary actions against the erring political leaders
- 14) The law should also be amended to make it mandatory for the GramPanchayats to consider recommendations of the meetings of the Palli Sabhas as in Kerala and West Bengal to generate more active interest about Panchayats among the members
- 15) In order to ensure holding of meetings at regular intervals there should be stringent legal provision and inability on the part of the Panchayats to hold the meetings should be sternly dealt with as the appropriate legal provision incorporated in the Panchayat legislations
- 16) The meetings should be held at a time which is convenient for all villagers, particularly for women
- 17) There should be regular publicity through advertisements in the newspapers and local cable channel about the significance, month, date and time of the meetings at the initiative of the advertisements in the Department of Panchayati Raj, Government of Odisha
- 18) The importance of Palli Sabha should be taught at the primary and secondary school levels to make the future members aware about these participatory democratic institutions. Debates, essay writings competitions about the Palli Sabhas may be organised in schools to sensitize the school students
- 19) Youth should be assigned some responsibilities in the implementation of development programmes to enkindle in them a new spirit of participation in the implementation of the developmental programmes
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