



The Leadership Qualities among the Elected SC/ Dalit Village Panchayat leaders in Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam District Tamil Nadu- A Focus Group Discussion

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Abstract

India is the largest democracy in the world. The administration in the country is democratic where institutions of Panchayatraj hold a right place in the constitution. India is primarily a land of villages and the number of villages in India is 6, 38,588 and 16317 villages in Tamilnadu according to 2011 census and the real progress of the country directly depends upon these villages. The vast majority of the Scheduled caste (SC) people are dwelling in the villages. They have been the victims of Indian caste system for hundreds of years. Although the practice of caste system is the single most degenerative and divisive issue that faces our society today. So they need to be involved in planning, decision making, monitoring and execution of development programmes in order to hasten the process of development. Their participation is thus, essential not only to enlist the support of the masses for development policies but also to seek their whole hearted participation in both formulation and implementation of policies and programmes. In order to be meaningful, development endeavors have to be based on felt needs of the people to whom they are meant. It is because of this fact that Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been given prominence in India's rural development setup. With this concept the elected Dalit/SC Panchayat leaders are to be motivated to improve their participation, leadership, decision making and Involvement in the Panchayat Raj Institution.

Keywords: Leadership Qualities, Dalit, Panchayat, Tamilnadu, Group Discussion.

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Introduction

The focused group discussion being a scientific tool to learn the in-depth study about people's feelings, interests, perspectives, opinions and knowledge about the topic of research interest, the researcher prepared a schedule for the two focus group discussion and was conducted. And those two FGD (Focus Group Discussion) was conducted for the SC/Dalit Panchayat Leaders in two various places Parish hall –Vadagarai near Aduthurai (First FGD-Respondents 12, Moderator: Dhiyya MSW), Immaculate Matriculation School- Thiruvaiyaru (Second FGD-Respondents - 11, Moderator: Nandhini MSW). For clear understanding very brief definition is given below for the important words and dimension of Leadership qualities:

Elected SC Panchayat Raj Presidents

In the present study Elected SC Panchayat Raj Presidents are those who are elected for the Village Panchayats in Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam Districts of Tamilnadu.

Participation in Panchayat Raj Institution

It refers the different mechanisms used by the

SC/Dalit Panchayat Leader/President in the Panchayat Raj Institution for the people of the Panchayat Raj Institution to express their opinions and ideally influence regarding Panchayat Raj Decision for the development.

Decision Making in Panchayat Raj Institution

The thought process of the SC/Dalit Panchayat Leader in selecting a logical choice from the available options.

Leadership in Panchayat Raj Institution

Leadership in PRI refers to the process of influence in the Panchayat Raj in which the elected village panchayat president has influence in which he can enlist the aid and support of the people in the concern PRI in the accomplishment of the common task in PRI.

Involvement in Panchayat Raj Institution

The act or process of SC/ Dalit Panchayat Leader of taking part in his/her Panchayat Raj Institution as President/Leader.

Preparation

Approaching Focus Group Facilitation

For each group, the researcher appointed a

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moderator and the researcher himself as an assistant moderator. The moderator lead the discussion, kept the conversation flowing and took few notes to remember comments that respondents may want to use later. The assistant moderator took comprehensive notes, handled the environmental conditions and logistics, responded to unexpected interruptions and kept the track of time.

Focus Groups were appropriate since the researcher want to do the qualitative study: So the researcher...

- Explored the depth and nuances of opinions regarding the leadership qualities of the Dalit/ SC Panchayat Leaders and in depth the Decision making, Participation and Involvement.
- Understood the differences in their Decision making, Participation and Involvement.
- Understood what factors influenced their Decision making, Participation and Involvement.
- Designed the results.
- Captured opinions and perspectives of a program's target respondents
- Learned more about respondents by observing their interactions.

In the Focus Groups the moderator was asked not to do:

- No Need to ask respondents sensitive information.
- No Need of statistical information about an entire population of their area.
- Not to continue conversation with emotionally or politically charged respondents.

In the Focus Groups the moderator was asked to:

- Ensure confidentiality
- Maintain high respect for the respondents and their views.
- Both verbal and non-verbal languages observed.

The Physical Environment

It is important to choose or set up a physical space for the focus group that is going to feel welcoming and comfortable to the participants. It should be neutral, private, free from distractions and easily accessible so...

- Arranged the respondents in a circle.
- Informed the respondents where the bathrooms are.
- Provided refreshments and placed respondents away from the circle to avoid distractions.
- The respondents were reminded "They're the Experts"

It is important to convey the respondents that the moderator and assistant moderator value their opinions, that they are the experts, and that the focus group facilitator and other staff have come to learn from them. This empowered the participants, helped them feel a sense of purpose and helped eliminate any barriers that may arise as a result of differences between respondents and focus group staff.

It was planned for four hours from 2.30PM to 6.30PM of 15th November 2014 Parish hall –Vadagarai near Aduthurai (First FGD-Respondents 12 Moderator: Dhivya).On16th November 2014 afternoon session at Immaculate Matriculation School- Thiruvaiyaru (Second FGD-Respondents -11,Moderator:Nandhini).

Orienting the Participants

The Elected SC/Dalit Presidents identified to participate in the focused group discussions was clearly oriented about the objective of the discussion and asked to deliberate freely on simple questions which in turn would be used to stimulate a discussion among the participants. Four primary questions and discussion for topics to facilitate this process were developed.

Caste in Panchayat Raj Institution

Dalits in the process of governance have attained a new strength through the reservation of seats and they expressed their hope that they could try their maximum for the betterment of Dalits even though they represent the whole community. But few things bother them very much;

- Domination of the Panchayat Raj Institution caste representatives and their caste mindedness.
- At times they feel that they are under the control of the traditional dominant caste leaders
- Unnecessary pressure from the caste minded Government officials.
- Along with the above the SC women presidents expressed the domination of their husbands also.

Leadership in Panchayat Raj Institution

In Panchayat Raj Institution majority of them are enjoying in making decisions and very firm in that there is no 'gut feelings' at all when making decisions in PRI. Also never hesitate to consult with others but at the same time stick by their decisions come what may. Also they are trained to be remaining calm when they are making decisions very quickly In PRI .Majority feels in control of things In PRI. Yet their decisions In PRI governed by their ideals regardless of practical difficulties and of course the Indian curse Caste. Also they made a point that they never make decisions without considering all of the implications in PRI. Most of the time they said that they are planning in PRI well ahead. They never prefer to avoid making decisions in PRI if they can. Majority of them are having a very good communication skills and that serves as a spokesperson to air the needs of their community. They are also stated that they delegate work to those who are capable of taking up the tasks assigned.

Participation in Panchayat Raj Institution

Participation in Panchayat Raj Institution as the topic for discussion aroused their interest and they expressed their views enthusiastically and appreciated the introduction of the Panchayat Raj system and making the reservation for them mandatory, since it has provided them an opportunity for participation in the political

space as decision makers. Only with the introduction of Panchayat Raj system and through the reservation of seats for the weaker sections participation in governance to a larger extent is ensured, according to these Presidents. The presidents cited various examples of how they did certain activities with the participation of the people like constructions of mud roads and temple renovation. SHGs most of the time come to the rescue of the SC presidents especially the SC women presidents in performing their activities perfectly. But they feel guilty that the selection of beneficiaries in the Gram Sabha for various schemes has become more eye wash; because they were influenced by the elected members belong to the dominant caste at the block level or by the local politicians. These things should be changed. Only this will make more people participate in the process of governance. People should be ensured the benefit of their participation.

The maintenance of women's sanitary complex and the participation of the people in the total Rural Sanitation Programme have added a new dimension and more women have now come forward. The SC women Panchayat leaders appreciated the schemes of this type and expressed their hope that, in course of time people will participate in all activities if opportunity is provided to them. There is also a mentioning of the role of few traditional and village head and their helping hand to the Panchayat in making the people participate in the village activities. At the same time there is also a mentioning of traditional Panchayat leaders and village heads working against the interests of the Elected SC/Dalit Presidents who have to fight against the domination of the traditional Panchayat leaders and Caste Village heads over the formal Panchayats.

Their Voices are presented in a nutshell in the following as Convergent findings and Divergent findings

- Most of the participants know the process of governing Panchayat Raj Institution
- Most of them in spite of severe discrimination by the caste members/representatives shine well in Panchayat Raj Institution.
- Dalits should be educated in public life and they should be well trained.
- They do not get the needed information from the officials.
- They are not aware of the allocation of funds by the government. They are aware only of the funds allocated to their Panchayat and that too only if it is communicated.
- The presence of SHGs in the villages has created a remarkable change on the part of women and the society's out look towards women has also been changed and the elected SC women Panchayat leadership for a better future for women.
- They acknowledged the role of social workers and voluntary organizations in promoting their effective participation in Panchayat Raj Institutions.
- For their functioning some are seeking the help of their family members and so they are to be given orientation.
- If the elected representatives (members) trust them they can function effectively and in the same way they can perform well.
- The officials do not respect the uneducated Dalit/SC president.
- The SC Presidents from poor economic and social background are not recognized by the government officials.
- There are enormous schemes for SC/Dalit welfare; the government doesn't take proper steps to devolve these schemes to the needy. Most of them are unaware of it.
- If the bureaucracy have faith in them still they will be very good at decision making.
- They are well aware of the issues that are affecting them as Dalits/SC.
- If Dalits are trained properly and opportunities are provide in political and administrative structure, so it will not be a distant dream. It could be achieved by Dalit/SC leaders.
- Most of the participants acknowledged that they are contributing in all the Panchayat Raj Institution meetings.
- Most of them agreed that their empowerment, decision making and leadership levels have increased after having been elected as President of their Panchayat Raj Institution.
- They expressed that they have few physical, social and caste barriers in Participating in the activities of Panchayat Raj Institutions.
- If opportunities are provided for the Dalits in Legislature and Parliament a large number of Dalits can enter into the public space.

Concluding the Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

The participants at times took diversion in the discussion that is different from that of the purpose of focused group was organized for. The Moderator and team often have to take them in the line of points that are to be discussed and then followed-up with a new question to return to the discussion back on the topic. After the focused group discussion was over, The Moderator and team thanked the participants for partaking in this discussion. The Moderator and team also explained the results of the focused group discussion which was documented by the researcher.

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