

Research Proposal

Functioning of Tribal Political Structures: Interaction between Traditional Tribal Self-governance and Statutory Panchayats in Selected Villages of South Gujarat

Introduction

A large amount of research literature on tribal in India deals with tribal ecology, economy, arts and crafts, magic, witchcraft, religion, and culture (narrowly defined to include dress, music, dance, drama, festivals, ceremonies, and so on) (Shah 2010: 21). However, there is very little literature on tribal political life and engagement in the political sphere at the community, local, regional and state level. Only after Surajit Sinha's (1962, 1965 and 1987) explorative works, some enquiries on this dimension, by anthropologists and historians (Kulke 1976, Thusu 1980, Hardiman 1994, Guha 1996, Sundar 1997, Skaria 1999 and Panda 2005) became available. However, most of these studies remain limited to either the central or eastern part of India. So far, in western India, there is very little information about the tribal political structure and understanding of how the traditional system of self-governance interacts with the constitutional system of governance (after the 73rd Amendment Act). In this context, the present study proposes to examine the interaction of the traditional tribal self-governance institutions in relation to constitutional panchayats in selected tribal villages of south Gujarat. It tries to throw light on the structure, process and functioning of these institutions and their socio-political impacts on people in these villages.

Background: Two Forms of Tribal Political Structures

With regards to tribals in western India, there exist two forms - informal and formal, structures for social power and control. The informal way of social control is represented by different methods of tribal self-governance such as tribal councils. Whereas, the formal way is represented by the constitutional body of governance such as gram panchayat (hereafter GP) and State government. The Panchayat Extension in Scheduled Area (PESA) Act, 1996 provides an opportunity for decentralized governance in tribal areas "in

consonance with the customary law, social and religious practices and traditional management practices of community resources”. These provisions are in the direction to protect tribal society, culture and customary law through self-governance and making available the provisions of development programs of a democratic state. Still, in the past twenty-five years, there have been very few efforts by the Gujarat government to achieve the desired goal of tribal self-governance.

There are two ways to look at tribal self-governance. The first view holds that there is a lack of uniformity in the relations of traditional political systems in tribal communities and areas. There has been ongoing erosion of authority and delimitation of power mainly in social and religious matters due to the regulatory and developmental roles of the State (GOI 2006).

The second view is more optimistic. It embraces that tribal social control methods and institutions are very much ingrained with the tribal way of life. Tribal communities regularly sit together to arbitrate disputes, exercise social and religious control and take decisions on agricultural activities. Here, life is not divided into different watertight compartments such as economic, religious, social, administrative and political, as in the formal structure of government. Life is an organic whole. Many of these systems are still alive. No doubt some have just survived and some have even flourished. This is indicative of tribal societies and their resilience to adapt their socio-political institutions to new challenges in a nation-State and in facing modernity. Gujarat is a traditional home for 25 tribal and five primitive tribal groups composing 14.8 percent of state’s population. Around ninety percent of these 89.17 Lakhs tribal people still live mostly in rural areas. In the tribal villages, different tribal communities with different numerical strength coexist. Two levels of governance are observed at the local level. The statutory panchayat has assumed some functions and in several places taken over some tasks of traditional governance system. Still, in these tribal villages tribal council continues to be an integral part their traditional self-governance. In this background the present study is an attempt to understand what are the different forms of actual practices of social control that are prevalent in the existence of dual power systems? Are these systems undermining each other, competing, complementary or duplicated? And finally, how does this dynamics affect the socio-political aspects of the local tribal people.

Literature Review

The study is largely situated in the domain of anthropological study of political system and self-governance among the tribal societies. So, the relevant literature was reviewed regarding three themes-anthropology of political structure, the concept of self-governance, and empirical research on self-governances among tribes of India.

Anthropology of political structure in general

The second half of the last century has seen the rise of the phenomenon of the study of political structure among the tribes from anthropological perspective. With the publication of African Political System (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940) and African Systems of Kinship and Marriage (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950), the focus of anthropologists has shifted on study of political organizations. These studies were mainly focused with taxonomic features of tribal social system. Later on, however, structuralists have moved their focus from taxonomic classification to understanding the dynamics of political process (Kurtz 1979). Both approaches have different units of study. Earlier structuralists approach mainly focused on bands, lineages and centralized administration for understanding the function of social structure for maintaining social solidarity in society. However, processual structuralists shifted their focus from administrative structure and rituals to process of policy and actual decision making processes. These scholars tried to differentiate political activity from the administrative activity and then both from government (Panda 2005: 2). According to them, political entity is segmented as political units compete for power and thus resolve one way or the other by fission, compromise or liquidation. So to understand this political activity one has to look for empirical data. Here processual structuralists dissect the mechanism through the action of persons and groups in manipulating the resource to increase their power. This involves in altering power relations, in gaining favour, in resolving conflicts and in maintaining the power already achieved. Their concern is more dynamic and they focus more on the process of becoming rather than being. They deal with two basic concepts, viz., political field and political arena.

Political field denotes both participating individuals and groups, and the values meaning, symbols and resources they use to carry political activity. This includes the village elders, councils, decision making bodies and rules, customary laws and institutions etc. Whereas political arena refers to the socio-cultural space around the political field which involves the

participants in the event but they do not themselves participate in the event (Panda 2005). This includes the village, cooperative societies, local and government agencies etc. Bailey along with Barth (1959) attempt to bring closer these two approaches of structuralists and processualists. Bailey goes further from static definition of structuralists and says that it is not a static network of interpersonal relationship but attempt to see in term of rules which govern the behaviour of the individual in an activity. His model refers to understanding the ways in which normative and pragmatic rules over the activity of individuals in political structure and influence their competition for resources by which they might achieve their goals (Bailey 1977). According to him politics has its public face (normative rules) and the private wisdom (pragmatic rules) (1977: 5). The political activity can change from the normative to the pragmatic since pragmatics are normatively neutral (ibid). Again he says that there occurs a critical point in the ratio of normative to pragmatic rules and in due course of time the normative rules can no longer be sustained (ibid 15). Further, political activity is not about a person and often includes a group or several groups. Hence when several groups interact there has to be several socio-cultural issues dominant over the existing local resources. Regarding the process of leading of dominance, Panda (2005: 4) says that the process of leading to dominance of one group over the other is significantly related to the control of economic resources and their allocations. The process also leads to development of political leadership and that of social and cultural change in a society. The resources may be differing in different cases. For example, land among the agricultural communities, is considered to be a major resource and often has great relevance to the political structure. The ownership of land defines the relations of domination and subordination (ibid).

Traditional Political Structure of Tribals in India

The studies on political structure and tribal societies have attracted only some attention of Indian scholars. Overall, anthropological and sociological study on political structures suffered neglect in studies of tribal societies (Jain 1979: 946). Surajit Sinha in his landmark paper, 'State Formation and Rajput myth in Tribal Central India' has described how the equalitarian primitive clan based organisation has adjusted itself to the centralized hierarchy territorially oriented political development, the nature of social class formation and integration of primitive symbols of the tribal with the symbols of adopted by state (1962: 35-80).

According to Sinha, during this political process, tribes got stratified into different social classes, mainly in terms of land holding and territorial extent of dominance (Sinha 1962: 36). Later on, several scholars worked on similar themes such as Thusu 1980, Kulke (1976) Kulke 1985, Sinha 1987, Hardiman 1994, Guha 1996, Kulke 1997, Saha (1996), Sundar 1997 and Panda 2005. All these studies refer to tribal chieftains operating as part of some larger kingdom, sometimes an imperial one. Most of them claimed to be Rajput and Kshatriyas by elaborating genealogies and myths (Shah 2010). However, earlier historical probing misses some of the important aspects. Firstly, they never tell us how exactly the local chieftains were related to the imperial kingdom. They do narrate certain symbolic practices, such as the tribal chieftain applying on the kings' forehead at the coronation a *tilak* of blood taken out of his finger, signifying a symbiotic relationship. But they rarely enlighten us on the more substantive matters. The concepts discussed above may be useful in an incipient way to understand the present question of interaction of two types of self-governances in tribal areas. Here, the current study is willing to gauge both political field and political arena and to look for the dynamic interaction between the two institutional setups, people involved in these institutions, rules and their outcome.

Self-governance

The idea that 'a people should govern itself' is the basic revolutionary idea, from mid eighteenth century, that places the base of representative institution (Przeworski 2009: 71). The premise of the original conception of self-governance was that everyone has the same preferences about the social control methods under which each and all want to live. However self-governance is more or less becoming a myth in the societies, especially tribal societies. In tribal societies, mostly self-governance is done by collective way of customary methods. In these societies, the social control method collectively governs as the customary laws are implemented on the behalf of preferences for societal memberships. However, as societies become more heterogeneous, these preferences collapse in the presence of conflicts over values, interests, or norms over unequal distribution of existing resources.

In modern democracies, state with sizeable tribal population, has been pressured from both within and without to develop long term strategies for recognition and support of tribal right to self-determination. There has been an increase in quantity and viability of state managed

frameworks for self-governance, and locally managed administrations by tribal polities. The basic four conditions that are looking to implement in these area are (Przeworski 2009: 72): (a) everyone must have equal influence over collective decisions, (b) everyone must have some effective influence over collective decisions, (c) collective decisions must be implemented by those selected to implement them, and (d) the legal order must enable secure cooperation without undue interference.

How these two forms of self-governance are different at conceptual and practical level is an interesting question to approach from political field and political arena in south Gujarat tribals.

Empirical Research of Self-governances among the Different Tribes of India

Little literature, mostly action oriented, is available from empirical research on tribal self-governance in India. Participatory Education Action Research & Learn (2001) studied self-governance among Munda, Oraon, Ho and Santhals of Jharkhand. It found that the traditional political structure has been a product of a system developed by the tribals which evolved and modified in a natural evolution process. Further, the system generally combines political affairs with social, religious and economic affairs concerning the management and ownership of resources. A survey was carried out by Ramesh Sharan, et.al. (2003) among Munda, Oraon, Ho, Bhumij and Santhal in six districts of Jharkhand about their traditional self-governance systems. They took into consideration the participation of political actors including women, intra-community or inter-community relations with tribal self-governance system. They also tried to explore the linkage of correlation and coordination between tribal self-governance and statutory Panchayats and their effectiveness in dispute settlements.

At National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Singh (2005) carried out a study on structure and functioning of the traditional tribal customary mode of dispute resolution among the tribal communities of three states, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. They highlighted some common patterns of social control methods among these tribal societies regarding dispute resolution. Most of the disputes revolved around material imbalance, adultery, rape, cultivated land, trees, fishing and hunting rights, thefts, etc. which refer to traditional governances. While crimes like murder are usually referred to police stations. The tribal councils have a quite well laid out manner of conducting the procedure in dispute resolution and

implementing their judgments. The basic philosophy of social control method is integral to tribal socio-cultural system. The final judgment on the case is not meant to punish or convict but to incorporate the deviants into the life of the community. Only in extreme cases these councils resort to excommunication. In most of the cases, it is always a negotiation of justice between the contending parties through the medium of traditional councils. The philosophy and approach of the entire procedure is directed towards the maintenance of harmony, integration and tranquility of the tribal community. So, if left to themselves, they have enough potential to manage their affairs effectively and economically, instead of forcing modern institutions of justice on to them. The councils are still the most powerful instruments of justice. However, the study also reported that certain villages situated close to the urban centres and those with heterogeneous population, manifest weakening of the traditional council.

Research Design

Filling the research gaps

The literature review in the anthropology of political structure and tribal self-governance shows some research gaps:

1. A fair amount of literature exists on tribal self-governance in India. However, most of the literature more or less focused on one side of the traditional self-governance without reference to the constitutional form of governance. Currently, every corner of the tribal area comes under the umbrella of the constitutional governance system.
2. Most of the studies on tribal governance restricted their focus on dispute settlement function. Fewer studies focused on the decision-making system, an important ingredient of governance, such as management of community resources, negotiation with the State and state politics.
3. Very few studies have been done on different kinds of governances practiced in tribal areas and their socio-political impact on local people.

Therefore, at this juncture, it is pertinent to study the local status of tribal self-governance institutions and their interaction with the new constitutional governance institution and their implementation.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the structure, processes and functions of tribal self-governance system.
2. To ascertain the areas of cooperation, coalition, overlaps, conflicts etc. between the two governance systems.
3. To examine the specific socio-political impact of these two governance systems on the local people, clan or lineages, etc.

More precisely, the study addresses two sets of questions: (i) what is the role, composition and functions of tribal self-governance system in traditional tribal political system? What is the role self-governance system of constitutional panchayats? (ii) What is the nature of interface between these two governance systems on the local tribal people in these villages?

Methodology

Selection of study area

The selection of the study region, south Gujarat, was made on the basis of having largest population of scheduled tribes when compared to other regions viz., central, northern or Kutch and Saurashtra.

After reviewing and mapping different areas in south Gujarat, the study will map villages, which have tribal population with the history of traditional political systems. We will purposefully select villages with homogenous and heterogeneous populations. There are villages with different characteristics such as presence of habitation's of tribal populations in the region, size of villages and type of household habitations in the villages. This study will purposively choose a few village for intensive field research.

Overall, the study will include the villages with the following characteristics:

1. Three villages- one village with single tribe, one village with two or more than two tribes (multi-tribes), and one with tribe and caste-groups.
2. The selection of the three villages will include the sample representatives of small, medium and large size villages and dispersed and nucleated type of villages

3. The selection of three village will also take into account the variation in terms of the villages where PESA has been attempted (if any) and where one can see the mixed governance of PESA and GP.
4. The selected villages will be largely from the talukas of Narmada, Tapi and Navsari Districts, which forms the core of south Gujarat region with respect to the presence of tribal population and governance pattern (PESA or/and GP).
5. After doing a micro study of respective villages, an attempt will be made to compare and contrast different aspects of interface of the two village level governance institutions in both homogenous and heterogeneous villages.

Methods of Data Collection

Data from both primary and secondary sources will be collected and examined. The study will use mainly qualitative methods as well as case studies, to gain deeper insights into the structure, processes and functioning of tribal governance institutions. The research team, comprising of two sociologists and one anthropologist, will use the intensive case study method to gain detailed insights into the nature and dynamics of self-governance systems. The selection of cases, in the selected village councils and GPs, will be purposive. The relevant cases will be culled from the contextual analysis of each village. This empirical exploration will adopt participatory methods such as key informant interviews, the preparation of the clan, lineage and family genealogies, focus group discussions and informal discussions on trajectories of two governance institutions and networks of linkages of their members.

Since the study will be an empirical exploration of tribal governance systems, for research tools it will adopt participatory methods such as observation, focus group discussions, key informants interviews, and informal discussions for qualitative data collection from the field. Besides, the checklists will be prepared and used for collecting information from functionaries of traditional self-governance system and constitutional governance systems. A separate checklist will be also used for getting insights from people's perspective of the two governance institutions centering their social, cultural and political sphere. Relevant secondary data will be also gathered on various attributes of the study.

Why is it an Innovative Approach?

Using the above mentioned methodology to study the tribal governance is an innovative approach in several respects.

Firstly, the selection of cases, in the selected village councils and GPs, will be deliberately purposive and consist of interesting cases culled from contextual analysis of each village in the south Gujarat.

Secondly, each case study will thoroughly be conducted by the research team working together as a multidisciplinary team (sociologist and anthropologist) which will meet on-site and work intensively to gather data over several hours to conduct the case study.

Thirdly, the study will use several qualitative methods in combination: semi-structured and key informant interviews in different villages; the preparation of the clan, lineage and family genealogies; trajectories of two governance institutions and networks of linkages of their members.

Fourthly, in addition to this, the study will gather thorough ethnographic details.

The Relevance of the Study

The relevance of this study is manifold.

First, it will be an ethnographic account of the tribes in the village and area.

Second, it will try to compare and contrast different aspects of two governance systems in tribal villages.

Third, it will try to analyse the various socio-political impacts of these two governance systems on the local community to define their internal stratification.

Finally, it will also provide linkages among the less dominant and dominant groups through the socio-economic and political aspects of life in two types, homogenous and heterogeneous tribal villages in south Gujarat.

Research Team

The study involves mainly three persons; one principal investigator and two co- principal investigator. The research personnel knows Gujarati and Hindi. They have been working on fieldwork-based studies on tribal Gujarat for several years. They will also take the help of

local investigators, knowing local tribal dialects, for the collection of data whenever necessary.

Dr. Dhananjay Kumar has worked with Prof. Lancy Lobo and Late Prof. A. M. Shah on issues of tribals, including the social structure of tribes in Gujarat. Drs. Kanchan Bharati and James C. Dabhi have also experience in research on various social aspects of the people of Gujarat and have published works.

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TIME LINE

Tribal Self-Governance in Gujarat – A Research Project

Activities	April 2022 to March 2023											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Literature Review	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Secondary Data Collection		X	X									
Preparation of Schedule			X									
Pilot Study			X									
Evaluation – Peer Group Review			X	X								
Primary Data Collection				X	X	X						
Data Entry						X	X					
Data Processing							X	X				
Data Analysis								X	X			
Evaluation – Peer Group Review									X			
Report Writing									X	X		
Draft Report										X	X	
Workshops & Feedback processes											X	X
Submission of Report												X

ANNEXURE I – Budget
COST ESTIMATION FOR SELF GOVERNANCE PROJECT

S.no.	Details					Amount Required (In Rs)
	Personal Requirement					
i	Positions	No. of Persons	Remuneration	Duration (In Months)	Amount (In Rs.)	3,52,500
	Principal Investigator (PI)	01	15,000	10	150,000	
	Co-PI	01	12,000	10	1,20,000	
	Field Investigators	05	700	15 days*	52,500	
	Data Entry Operators	02	Lump Sum**		30,000	
ii	Travel and Field Work ***					1,00,375
iii	Data Processing					36,000
iv	Stationery, Books, Journals, references, equipment (including Internet Charges Rs. 5,000)					30,000
v	Consultations, Peer Reviews and language editing					54,000
vi	Seminar/Workshop (Regional/local)					70,000
vii	Handouts, reports, posters, translations					20,000
viii	Contingency Expenses					18,944
	Sub Total					6,81,819
	Overhead Charges (10 percent of the cost)					68,181
	TOTAL					7,50,000
	CCD's Contribution(7% of total cost) ****					52,500
	TOTAL PROJECT COST					8,02,500
	Financial support requested from Azim Premji (for 12 months)					7,50,000

*Fifteen days in selected villages (Total 15 Days)

**Two Data Entry Operator with remuneration Rs. 7,500 p/m for two months. $15000 \times 2 = 30,000$.

***Details of Field work Cost Annexure II

****CCD Contribution (i)

CCD's Contribution for Personal Requirements					
i	Positions	No. Of Persons	Remuneration	Duration (In Months)	Amount (In Rs.)
	Principal Investigator (PI)	01	2,000	10	20,000
	Co-PI	01	2,000	10	20,000
	Field Investigators	05	110	15 days *	8250
	Lump Sum Two Data Entry Operators remuneration $2125 \times 2 = 8500$				4,250
	CCD's contribution (7% of total cost)				52,500

Annexure II – Budget- Tribal Self-governance

Table Showing Details of Travels and Field Work

(Part of Cost Estimation of Annexure I)

Places of Visit	No. Of persons	Kilometres from CCD to villages	Average Kilometres per Day	Nos. Days fieldwork	Total KM	Total Km	Amount Per KM	Total TA (Actual)	DA per Day	Total Days	Total DA	Total (TA+DA)
Secondary Data Collection*(A)												
Villages and Panchayats and to sources of secondary data*	01	250-350	100	15	100	1500	18.00	27,000	250	15	3750	30,750
	01								200	15	3000	03,000
Total												33,750
TOTAL (A)												33,750
Primary Data Collection (B)												
Villages under 4	01	250-350	20	45	20	900	18.00	16200	225	45	10,125	41,625
	01			45					200	45	09,000	
	05			45					100	45	22,500	
Total												41,625
TOTAL (B)												41,625
Field investigators training (C)												25,000
TOTAL (C)												25,000
GRAND TOTAL(A+B+C)												1,00,375

*Visit to Government Offices, Taluka Offices, Gram Panchayat Office, District Election office. State election Office, Archives, Libraries, Research Institutes and Universities in the study area

Note for number of persons: In section (A): 01 PI and 01 Co-PI

In section (B):01 PI, 01 Co-PI and 05 Field Investigators

In section(C): Field investigators training and travelling cost.