



JOURNAL ON COMMUNICATIONS

ISSN:1000-436X

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Recent Trends in Participation of Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes in Politics: An Event-Data Analysis of Remuna and Udala Constituencies of Odisha

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Abstract

Political participation is the backbone of democracy. It is not only the right but also the duty of the citizen. Participation is a process through which people express their opinion on various issues and also influence government and governmental policies. This article examines tribal political participation in the Remuna and Udala assembly constituencies of Odisha, India, utilizing an event data analysis approach. By focusing on Remuna, which is reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) constituencies, and Udala, reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs) constituencies, the research provides a comparative lens to understand the level of political participation of SC and ST of Remuna and Udala Assembly constituencies, using Milbrath's theory of political participation.

Keywords: *Democracy, Political Participation, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Governmental Policies*

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Introduction

Democracy is the form of government which is based on active participation of the people in the political process. Participation is considered one of the most important devices of democracy. If people are not participating in politics or are not involved in the political process, then democracy loses its meaning and importance. Participation is the backbone of a democratic society. It is not only the right but also the duty of the citizens. Participation offers a platform through which people could express their opinions on several important issues and also influence government and governmental policies. People learn about politics and society from mass participation in the decision-making process. In other words, political participation is a powerful psychological motivator that boosts the political sense and value of individuals. Therefore, a political event, whether big or small, there is a need for all to participate (Thakur, 2004).

In a democracy, legitimate power comes from the consent and participation of the people. The source of the power is people in this form of government. As India is a democratic country, since its independence, it provides an open platform for the citizen to participate in their political system. The constitution of India was written by the constitution maker on the behalf of Indian people so, the people have sovereign power. Indian politics continued through the active participation of politics but after the 78th year of independence, there are so many people who are still not interested in politics and some do not participate in politics because of poverty, illiteracy, social and cultural backwardness, etc. There is no end to the exploitation, hardships, and sufferings of more than 200 million people belonging to officially named “Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes” (SCs and STs) under the canopy of Indian democracy. Democracy remains undeciphered for them. Freedom in such a democracy has no meaning for them. There has been little change in the lifestyle of the lower strata of the indigenous people, even after seven decades of planned development and development administration. This research paper has explored the political participation of SCs and STs from Remuna and Udala Assembly Constituencies from Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts respectively.

Objectives and Methodology

The paper attempts to understand the level of political participation among the SCs and STs from Remuna and Udala assembly constituencies of Odisha. This research is based on a historical, descriptive, analytical, and comparative analysis of data collected from a field study. It primarily aims to understand the level of political participation of SCs and STs in Remuna and Udala Constituencies using Milbrath’s categories of political participation i.e. gladiatorial, transitional, and spectator.

This study examines activities such as campaigning for a political party or candidate, contesting in elections, and influencing decisions at PRI meetings for gladiatorial activities. For transitional activities, it focuses on participation in Palisabha meetings, approaching MLAs or MPs about local issues, and maintaining relations with political leaders. On the other hand, voting and encouraging friends or others to participate in the electoral process are considered spectator activities.

This research is based on two assembly constituencies for field study: Remuna Assembly Constituency in Balasore district for Scheduled Castes respondents, and Udala Assembly Constituency in Mayurbhanj district for Scheduled Tribes respondents. Remuna is the second-largest constituency of SC voters in Odisha, comprising 28.37% of the total voters. It is a reserved seat for Scheduled Castes. Udala Assembly Constituency is reserved for Scheduled Tribes, with 59.84% ST voters in Mayurbhanj, making it the fifth-largest ST constituency.

This study makes a comparative analysis of the SCs in Remuna constituency of Balasore district and the STs in Udala constituency of Mayurbhanj district. For the SC respondents, the focus is on Remuna (SC) assembly constituency, notable for being the second-largest SC constituency in Odisha with 28.37% of voters, while for the ST respondents, the focus is on Udala (ST) constituency in Mayurbhanj, which has the largest tribal population in the district and 59.84% ST voters district.

The source of data collection is Primary and Secondary. For the source of primary data collection, the research followed interview method, questionnaire, and pilot study. Secondary data was collected from libraries and statistical departments. It was collected from census reports, district census

handbook, district gazetteer, journals, books and other reports to throw more light on the subject under study.

Meaning of Political Participation

Political participation is a means through which people engage in the political process and present their opinions in a political system. It plays a significant role in shaping democratic societies, as it allows for diverse perspectives, ensures accountability of elected officials, and enables citizens to actively participate in politics. Political participation includes voluntary actions through which individuals express their interests and participate in the process of selecting leaders. This includes activities such as voting, obtaining information, engaging in discussions, attending meetings, providing financial support, communicating with representatives, joining political parties, canvassing, registering voters, and working on campaigns.

Political Participation is “the involvement of individuals and groups at various levels in the political system. Involvement expresses itself in various kinds of overt or manifest political activities” (Rush and Althoff, 1972). Verba and Nie state that political participation is “those legal activities by private citizens that more or less aims at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (Nie and Verba, 1978).

Nelson and Huntington describe political participation as “simply an activity by private citizens designed to influence governmental decision-making” (Huntington and Nelson, 1976). Political participation means “several voluntary activities, which have significant influence upon the political system regarding issues like the selection of rulers and the formation of public policy. More precisely, these activities may be (i) voting at the polls, (ii) supporting pressure groups by being a member of them, (iii) personally communicating directly with the legislators, (iv) participating in political party activity and thus acquiring a claim on the legislators and (v) engaging in habitual dissemination of political opinions through voice communications with other citizens” (Ashraf and Sharma, 1983). Robert Dahl defines “political participation is an essential part of contemporary democracies as it enables citizens to hold government accountable” (Dahl, 1971). According to Dalton (2017), through participatory engagement, individuals acquire knowledge and develop civic competencies, enhancing their sense of political efficacy and belonging.

Thus, the concept of political participation is not new nor has not recently developed. This concept can be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle in ancient times; every citizen participates in politics, especially in Greece and Athens. Aristotle father of Political Science said that “the best state is one where people broadly participate in state affairs”. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, Locke and Rousseau, in their political philosophy, developed the idea of political participation, which is known as the ‘Social Contract’ theory and was an example of political participation in ancient times.

Constitutional Status of SCs and STs

In India, the “scheduled castes and scheduled tribes” are officially designated groups of people who basically belong to the socially disadvantaged groups in society. During British rule in India, this group was known as the “Depressed Classes”, who faced multiple deprivations for their low position in the social hierarchy of the Hindu caste system. The SCs are referred to as Dalit, which means “broken” or “dispersed”. The term was mostly popularized by the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, father of the Indian constitution, who himself was a Dalit. Whereas Gandhi used the term Harijan for this group of people, which means “person of Hari/Vishnu” or man of God (Roychowdhury 2018).

The Simon Commission came up with the term “scheduled castes” and the Government of India Act of 1935 put it into law. In the 1931 census of India, castes were listed in a systematic way. However, after the Government of India Act of 1935 that for the first time the term “scheduled caste” was used to describe these castes. Before that, they were called “Untouchables”, which meant “low classes” (Karade, 2009). Then, under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1936, a list of

Scheduled Castes was published. The Indian Constitution is where the idea of a “scheduled tribe” first appeared. Article 366 (25) of the Indian Constitution defines a scheduled tribe as “those tribes or tribal communities, or parts of or groups within those tribes or tribal communities, that Article 342 says are scheduled tribes for the constitution.” Article 342 describes the steps that will be taken to name a tribe a “scheduled tribe”.

Article 343 (1&2) says that most Indian tribes are Scheduled Tribes, and Part 10 of The Scheduled and Tribal Areas says that they have the right to decide for themselves. Article 244 talks about how to run the scheduled area and the tribal area. Any state can use the rules in the Fifth Schedule to run and control Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes (other than the states of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, and Meghalaya). The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India deals with how the tribal areas in the states of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, and Meghalaya should run.

The 5th and 6th Schedules of the Indian Constitution defend the rights of tribes, especially their right to self-government and land. Article 224(1) Scheduled Areas are listed in the 5th Schedule, while Article 224(1) Tribal Areas are listed in the 6th Schedule. This law gives autonomous regions and districts a lot of freedom when it comes to making laws and running the government. In the Indian constitution, Article 46 says that the scheduled castes are socially and economically backward, so the constitution of India provides extra protection to them. It is the duty of the state to provide special care and economic and educational opportunities to weaker sections, i.e. scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. According to the 2011 census, there are about 20,13,78,086 SCs population and 10,42,83,334 STs population in India. This is about 16.6% and 8.62% of the country’s total population, respectively (Census, 2011).

Results and Discussion

The weaker parts of Indian society are called “Scheduled Castes” and “Scheduled Tribes” under the fifth and sixth Schedules of the Indian constitution. The scheduled castes and tribes have been oppressed, because of an unfair and rigid social order, this has been going on for centuries. Their improvement requires a planned, multi-step process of social and economic change. A general policy of “protective discrimination” has been used to try to reach this goal. This policy is made up of legislative and administrative measures that are meant to help the weaker sections of Indian society in terms of education, employment, financial assistance, political representation, and protection against exploitation. This will help them grow in Indian society as a whole (Nelapudi and Mani, 2022).

After 78 years of independence, many commissions and committees have been set up to look into the lives of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. These committees have come up with several ways to improve the lives of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. There are several initiatives that have been taken by the government for the development of the political participation of the SC and ST communities. This research paper discussed the political participation of SCs and STs of Remuna and Udala Assembly Constituencies, respectively, and especially at which level they participate in political affairs, like gladiatorial, transitional, and spectator levels.

A sample of 383 respondents was selected from the SCs and STs Communities of Remuna and Udala Assembly Constituencies respectively. From scheduled caste communities of Remuna constituency 138 respondents and 245 respondents from scheduled tribe communities of Udala constituency are selected. All respondents are further classified into age, gender, and educational qualification, these are treated as variables of this study as their presence affects participation.

In addition to the aforementioned indicators of political participation, this study examines specific aspects such as the level of interest in the political process among individuals from various socio-economic and political backgrounds, interest in voting, sources of political information, political

electoral awareness, and strategies employed to mobilise the population. This information is collected through the administration of a questionnaire to the respondents.

- **Political Interest of SCs and STs.**

Table-1
Political Interest of SCs and STs

Response of respondents	Remuna (SC)	Percentage %	Udala (ST)	Percentage %
No	30	21.7	80	32.7
Yes	97	70.3	156	63.7
DK/NR	11	8.0	9	3.6
Total	138	100.0	245	100.0

Source: Field Study

**DK indicates Don't Know; NR indicates Not Reply*

Table-1 indicates the interest of the individual in politics. It is observed that 70.3% of scheduled caste respondents from the Remuna constituency are interested in politics, while 21.7% of respondents are not interested in politics. But in the Udala Assembly constituency, 63.7% of scheduled tribe respondents expressed interest in politics, and only 32.7% were not interested. From the Remuna constituency, 8.0% of scheduled caste respondents and 3.6% of scheduled tribe respondents from the Udala constituency did not reply.

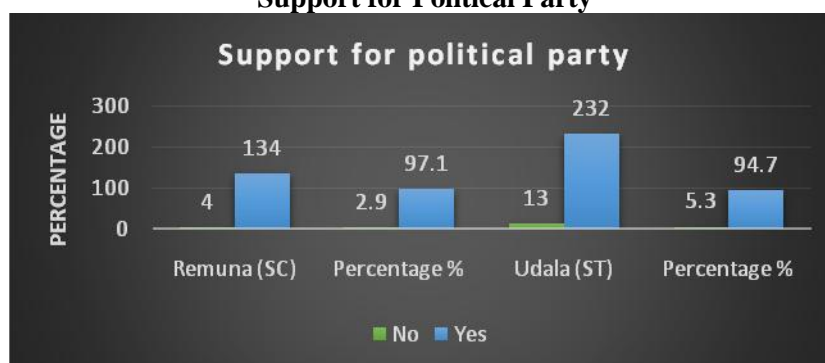
However, 30 out of 138 total scheduled caste respondents from Remuna and 80 out of 245 ST respondents from Udala were not interested in politics, which is called political apathy. Respondents think that they cannot get any reward from politics, cannot change the outcome of society because their knowledge is limited, which is not effective in politics, and also believe that the outcome will be relatively satisfactory to them without their involvement. There are also other causes for which the respondents of the Remuna and Udala constituency are not interested in politics because political involvement may threaten their family, social status, and profession, or maybe politics alienates them from their friends and relatives. Some of the respondents think that they cannot influence the political decision-making process so, they only cast their vote during election time. Whereas a few numbers of the SC and ST respondents of Remuna and Udala constituencies respectively, believe that politics is a dirty business and politicians are not trustworthy. Politicians feel that individuals are the teddy bear of their hands, and they also do not put emphasis on the demands and interests of the individuals.

Meanwhile, 97 numbers of scheduled caste and 156 numbers of scheduled tribe respondents of the Remuna and Udala constituencies, respectively, are interested in politics; they believe that it is a platform through which they can fulfil their needs, and politics also provides an opportunity to achieve their interests. While comparing the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes of the Remuna and Udala constituencies, respectively, a larger portion of scheduled caste respondents from Remuna are more interested in politics than scheduled tribe respondents of the Udala constituency.

- **Support for Political Party**

Political parties are essential institutions of democracy. By competing in elections parties offer citizens a choice in governance, and while in opposition they can hold governments accountable. When citizens join political parties, volunteer their time, donate money and vote for their leaders, they are exercising their basic democratic rights. Participation of citizens in political parties offers unique benefits, including opportunities to influence policy choices, choose and engage political leaders, and run for office. Political party is the 'life line of election' it is playing a signified role in indirect democracy or representative democracy.

Figure-1
Support for Political Party



Source: Field Study

Figure-1 shows how many respondents in the study area supports any political party. This research finds that 97.1% of scheduled caste respondents in the Remuna Assembly constituency support a political party, and only 2.9% of respondents do not support any political party. Whereas 94.7% of scheduled tribe respondents from the Udala constituency supported a political party, 5.3% of tribal respondents do not support any political party.

- Involvement of SCs and STs in Activities of Political Parties.**

Table-2
Involvement of SCs and STs in Activities of Political Parties.

Types of involvement	Remuna (SC)	Percentage %	Udala (ST)	Percentage %
Active	38	27.5	29	11.8
Passive	83	60.1	179	73.1
DK/NR	17	12.4	37	15.1
Total	138	100.0	245	100.0

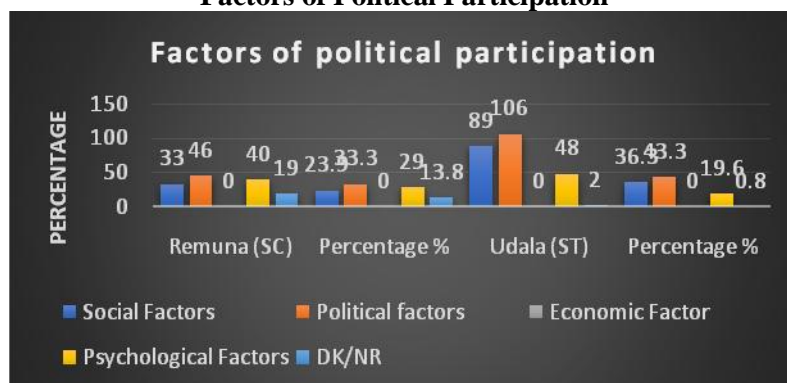
Source: Field Study

Table-2 shows in which form the respondents in the study area participate in the activities of the political parties. It is observed that, in the Remuna assembly constituency, 27.5% of scheduled caste respondents actively participate in several programs of the political parties, like party meetings, campaigning for elections, and other political party activities. while only 11.8% of scheduled tribe respondents in the Udala assembly constituency are actively involved in the activities of the political parties. In the Remuna and Udala constituencies, 60.1% and 73.1% of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe respondents, respectively, very passively participate in political party activities. They have not been involved in political party activities, they only participate during election time by casting the vote and participating in other election-related activities; after the election, they are not involved in politics or party activities. In contrast, 12.4% of scheduled caste respondents from the Remuna constituency and 15.1% of scheduled tribe respondents from the Udala constituency did not respond to this question.

When SC respondents from the Remuna constituency and ST respondents from the Udala constituency are compared, a large number of SC and ST respondents take part in the activities of political parties in a passive way, while a small number of respondents take part in the programs and activities of political parties in an active way. However, compared to the tribes in the Udala assembly constituency, the SC respondents in Remuna were more involved in politics.

- **Factors of Political Participation**

Figure-2
Factors of Political Participation



Source: Field Study

Figure-2 discusses about several factors which help citizens to get involved in the political environment. The SCs of the Remuna Assembly Constituency and the Scheduled Tribes respondents of the Udala assembly constituency are involved in politics due to social, political, and psychological factors. 23.9% of Scheduled Castes respondents participated in politics due to social reasons whereas, 33.3% and 29% of respondents of Remuna constituency joined in politics because of political and psychological causes respectively. But in the Udala constituency, 36.3%, 43.3%, and 19.6% of Scheduled Tribe respondents participated in politics because of social, political, and psychological factors respectively.

Due to a number of social factors, including education, occupation, income, gender, age, social position, caste, place of residence, media, and others, 33 Scheduled Caste respondents out of 138 in the Remuna assembly constituency and 89 Scheduled Tribes respondents out of 245 in the Udala constituency are active in politics. At that time, 46 SC respondents of Remuna and 106 ST respondents in the Udala constituency joined in politics influenced by the political environment. They are affected by the nature and form of the political system of Odisha as well as the Remuna and Udala constituencies. Because of political parties, respondents of SC and ST actively participate in several political programs in the study area. People get involved in politics for achieving their psychological needs. In the Remuna and Udala assembly constituency, 40 SC respondents and 48 ST respondents out of the total respondents are interested and they participate in the political activities due to psychological needs e.g. power, loneliness, etc.

Gladiatorial Activities

Gladiatorial activity is that type of activity in which a small number of people participate in politics or are directly involved in party activities like contesting elections, holding public and party office, funding the party, attending the strategy meetings of the political party, and joining the party campaigns (Baral and Baral, 2001). This study deals with campaigning for a political party or candidate, contesting in elections, and influencing the decision of the PRI meeting for gladiatorial activities.

- **Campaigning for the Candidate during Election Time.**

Figure-3 shows how many people in the study area campaigned for a candidate during the election to the House of People or legislative assembly. This study found that 62.3% of scheduled caste respondents in the Remuna assembly constituency campaigned for the candidates during the election, but only 27.8% of scheduled tribe respondents in the Udala assembly constituency did the same. 37.7% of respondents from the scheduled caste in the Remuna constituency and 72.2% of respondents from the scheduled tribe in the Udala constituency did not want to campaign for any candidate during election time. They think that politics is a dirty business and politicians are not trustworthy, so they are not involved in campaigning. Whereas, 86 SC respondents and 68 ST respondents from Remuna

and Udala constituencies respectively are very actively involved in various political programs related to elections.

Figure-3
Campaigning for the Candidate during Election Time



Source: Field Study

Comparing SC respondents from the Remuna constituency to ST respondents from the Udala constituency, a large number of ST respondents from the Udala constituency did not want to campaign for any political candidates during the election to the House of People or legislative assembly or Panchayat election, while a small number of SC respondents from the Remuna constituency did. In the Remuna constituency, SCs respondents are more like to campaign for candidates than ST respondents of the Udala constituency.

- Performance in Palisabha and Panchayati Raj Body Meetings.**

Table-3
Performance in Palisabha and Panchayati Raj Body Meetings

Response of respondents	Remuna (SC)	Percentage %	Udala(ST)	Percentage %
No	100	72.5	192	78.4
Yes	38	27.5	53	21.6
Total	138	100.0	245	100.0

Source: Field Study

Table-3 indicates how well the respondents are aware of and present their problems in the Palisabha and Panchayati Raj body meetings. This study finds that in the Remuna Assembly constituency, 27.5% of scheduled caste respondents present their local problems in the Palisabha and Panchayati Raj body meetings, and 21.6% of scheduled tribe respondents from the Udala constituency present their problems. In the Remuna and Udala Assembly constituencies, 72.5% of scheduled caste and 78.4% of scheduled tribe respondents do not present their problems or any local issues in Palisabha or Panchayati meetings. Respondents, when asked why they do not present their local problems in the meetings of the Palisabha or Panchayati Raj body, some of them replied that their opinion or demand was not accepted, and a few numbers of the respondents from Remuna and Udala constituencies said that they were not interested in attending the meetings so that they could not present any local problems in the meetings.

- Contest in Elections**

The election is a means through which people participated in democratic government. So, it is called the backbone of democracy. Table-4 shows the number of respondents who contested for an election

in the study area. According to the report, 82.6% of respondents from the scheduled caste in the Remuna Assembly constituency never ran for office, whereas only 17.4% of respondents did. The former is essentially politically active, while the latter is not actively engaged in political matters. Women and respondents from low-income backgrounds have not run for office and are not particularly interested in politics.

Table-4
Contest in Elections

Response of respondents	Remuna (SC)	Percentage %	Udala (ST)	Percentage %
No	114	82.6	215	87.7
Yes	24	17.4	30	12.3
Total	138	100.0	245	100.0

Source: Field Study

Out of the scheduled tribe respondents in the Udala assembly constituency, 87.7% have said that they have never contested for an election. While only 12.3% of those surveyed participated in the election. The majority of the tribal respondents expressed minimal interest in politics and no involvement in political matters. Due to restrictions placed on them by their tribe, indigenous women have not taken part in the elections that have been held.

This study also reveals that, the respondents who contested in the election basically contested in grass root democratic institution posts like, Sarpanch, P.S. member, Ward member. According to this study, the majority of SC and ST respondents from the Remuna and Udala Assembly constituencies did not contest for an election, while a smaller percentage of respondents participated in elections as a candidate who is both politically and financially viable.

• **Women as Contestants in Elections**

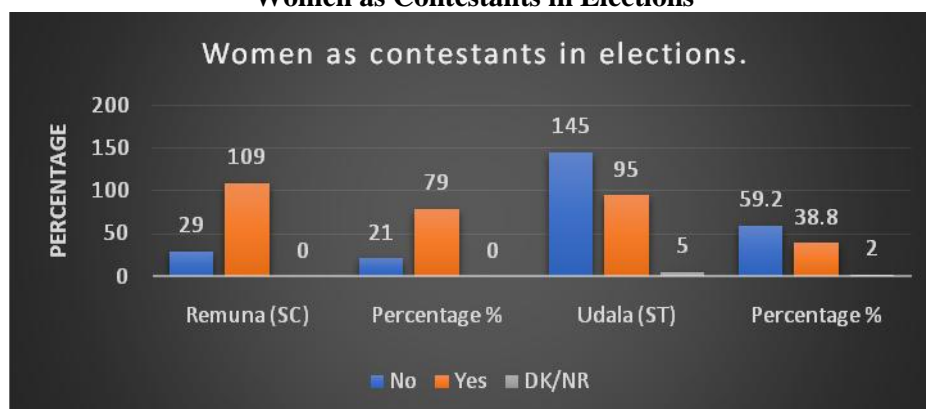
Political representation is a fundamental component of political participation in a democratic government. According to this perspective, the parameters of women's inclusion and the degree to which the game's rules enable or permit their representation determine whether or not they can exercise political engagement. Reservation is an affirmative action designed to promote female leadership and political engagement. Countries all across the world have implemented quotas or reservations for women as a way to combat ingrained socio-political institutions that supported male dominance of politics. Within the broader context of women's participation in politics, understanding the enablers and impediments to women's leadership and the use of political chances is a crucial problem (Sharma, 2019).

In this context, Figure-4 shows that the respondents prefer the participation of women as candidates in the election. In the Remuna assembly constituency, 79% of respondents from scheduled castes preferred the participation of women as candidates in elections, but 21% of respondents were not allowed to nominate women as candidates in any elections. Whereas, in the Udala Assembly constituency, 38.8% of scheduled tribe respondents allowed women to participate in elections as candidates, and 59.2% of tribal respondents did not prefer the participation of women in elections as contestants.

Another observation of this study is that the respondents did not allow women to contest for an election as candidates because they think that women are inferior to men and they are not able to take any decisions. The most important reason is that they think the role of the female is limited within the four walls. When comparing SC respondents from the Remuna constituency with ST respondents

from the Udala constituency, a large number of SC respondents preferred the participation of women in elections as contestants in comparison to ST respondents from the Udala constituency (figure 04).

Figure-4
Women as Contestants in Elections



Source: Field Study

Transitional Activities

Transitional activities are undertaken by the well-wishers of political parties. The next level of political participation after gladiatorial is transitional participation. In this level people often take part in political activities that primarily serve as a staging area for gladiatorial contestants, perhaps in the hopes of receiving political appointments when their candidates are successful. At the level of transitional involvement, the main things that people do are set up and attend meetings, communicate, lobby, run campaigns, and talk to the current power. This study focuses on participation in Palisabha meetings, approach to MLA/MP for local issues, and relations with political leaders are for transitional activities.

• Relation with MLA/MP/Any Political Leaders

Table-5 indicates that, in the Remuna assembly constituency, 47.1% of SC respondents approached to MLA or MP or any others political leaders in their locality and lobby for getting benefits for their community members. While, from Udala constituency only 39.2% of tribal respondents did same but 52.9% of SC and 60.8% of ST respondents from Remuna and Udala constituency respectively, did not approach to any political leaders for the benefit of their locality or community members. In this study when respondents were asked why they have not approached to any political leaders for their local or community development, they replied politicians do not listen to them and they often ignore them and their issues. When a comparison of SC of Remuna with the STs of Udala constituency was done, a good number of SC respondents of Remuna constituency approach to political leaders for their development than ST of Udala constituency.

Table-5
Relation with MLA/MP/Any Political Leaders

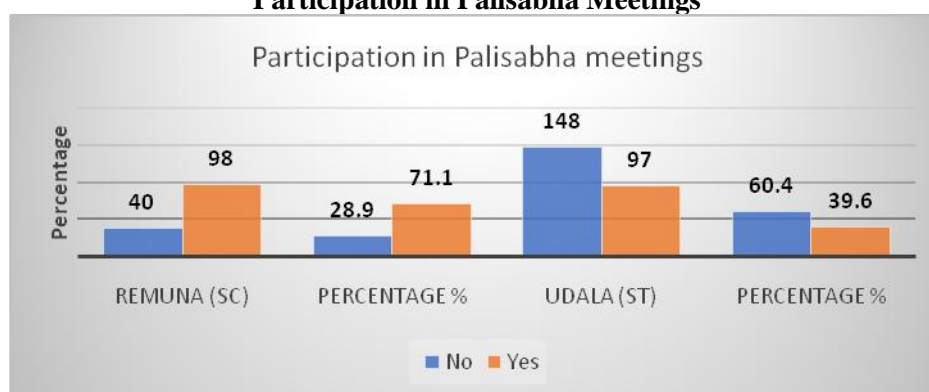
Response of respondents	Remuna (SC)	Percentage %	Udala (ST)	Percentage %
No	73	52.9	149	60.8
Yes	65	47.1	96	39.2
Total	138	100.0	245	100.0

Source: Field Study

• Participation in Palisabha Meetings

Figure-5 shows that in the Remuna assembly constituency, 71.1% of SC respondents regularly attend the Palisabha meeting, while 39.6% of scheduled tribe respondents in the Udala assembly constituency regularly attend Palisabha meetings. 28.9% of scheduled caste respondents from Remuna and 60.4% of the scheduled tribes in the Udala constituency are not interested in attending Palisabha meetings regularly. Due to lack of time, many ST respondents from the Udala constituency did not join the Palisabha meeting, and some did not attend at all, stating they had no time. A few respondents mentioned that, because of ignorance and the belief that their opinions are not accepted by others, they had not participated in the Palisabha meeting.

Figure-5
Participation in Palisabha Meetings



Source: Field Study

When we look at the responses from scheduled caste voters in the Remuna constituency in comparison to scheduled tribe voters in the Udala constituency, a large portion of the ST of Udala did not regularly attend the Palisabha meeting. While SC respondents from the Remuna constituency are more interested in attending Palisabha meetings on a regular basis than, ST respondents from the Udala constituency (Figure-5).

Spectator Activities

Spectator political participation is the lowest level of participation in politics. At this level people take part in activities like voting, pestering the party symbols, attending campaign rallies, joining a political discussion and try to influencing the friends and others to vote in a particular way. These activities demand the least cost in terms of time, energy, resources, and risk. In this study casting votes and motivating friends or others to be involved in electoral process as a voter are spectator activities.

• Casting vote in the Recent Panchayat Election of 2022

“Remember for your progress, for your welfare, your happiness; never fail to cast your vote in election” (Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam). Voting is a process whereby a group, such as an electorate or gathering, comes together to make a choice or express an opinion, typically after discussions, debates, or election campaigns. Voting is how democracies choose their leaders for high office.

This study intended to know how many respondents participated in the most recent panchayat election, which is shown in Table-6. The grassroots democratic institution in India is called Panchayati Raj. The Panchayati Raj system is a three-tiered administration for rural development in India. The development of local self-governments in districts, zones, and villages is the goal of the Panchayati Raj. It is a Panchayati Raj institution that allows people to take part in democracy in real-

time. Out of the 138 scheduled caste respondents in the Remuna Assembly constituency, this survey found that 77.5% had voted in the most recent panchayat election, while 22.5% had expressed no interest in taking part in the election and had not done so in the previous one. In contrast, in the most recent panchayat election, 84.1% of scheduled tribe respondents from the Udala Assembly constituency voted, while 15.9% of tribal respondents did not.

Table-6
Casting Vote in the Recent Panchayat Election of 2022

Response of respondents	Remuna (SC)	Percentage %	Udala (ST)	Percentage %
Yes	107	77.5	206	84.1
No	31	22.5	39	15.9
Total	138	100.0	245	100.0

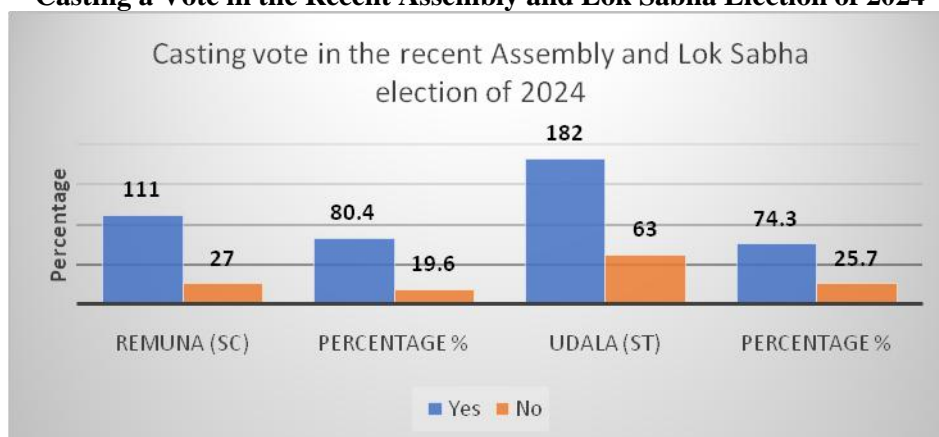
Source: Field Study

India is recognized as a nation of villages, where the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI), or local self-government, plays a key role in rural development. The table shows a sample of the respondents in the study area who did not vote in the most recent panchayat election. These respondents are migrated to another state for work and some of them believed that the election would not change the political system as it was, so they did not vote or participate in the election (Table-6).

- **Casting a Vote in the Recent Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections of 2024**

Figure-6 illustrates how many respondents actually cast ballots in the most recent Assembly and Lok Sabha election (2024) in the area under study. According to the survey, 80.4% of scheduled caste respondents from the Remuna Assembly constituency and 74.3% of scheduled tribe respondents from the Udala Assembly constituency voted in the most recent Assembly and Lok Sabha elections of 2024. They voted in the most recent Assembly election because they believe that voting is a political right for every person and that it is also their civic duty. In contrast, 19.6% of SC respondents and 25.7% of ST respondents from the Remuna and Udala Assembly constituencies did not vote in the most recent Assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

Figure-6
Casting a Vote in the Recent Assembly and Lok Sabha Election of 2024



Source: Field Study

Figure 6 compares the ST and SC communities in the respective Remuna and Udala Assembly constituencies. Out of the total respondents in Remuna (138) and Udala (245) who were asked if they had voted in the most recent assembly and Lok Sabha election (2024), 27 numbers of SC respondents and 63 numbers of ST respondents, respectively, said they did not cast a vote. Most of them were

migratory workers, and few respondents thought politicians were corrupt; thus, they did not vote. A greater proportion of ST respondents from Udala constituency did not cast votes than SC respondents from Remuna constituency, and SC respondents performed better than ST respondents in terms of voting in the most recent Assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

Findings

This study reveals that 46 SC respondents, representing 33% of the total SC population (138) in the Remuna Assembly Constituency, have engaged in politics for political reasons. Among these respondents, 16 have completed their education up to the high school level, while 8, constituting 6% of the total SC respondents, possess a higher level of education. However, it is noteworthy that 17 SC respondents are illiterate. Compared to the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Udala Assembly Constituency, 106 ST respondents, which make up 43% of the total respondents (245), engage in politics for political reasons. Among these ST respondents, a significant majority are illiterate, specifically 57 individuals, accounting for 23% of the total ST respondents. Out of all the respondents, 12% of those in upper primary, 6% of those in high school, and only 2% of ST respondents who are highly educated tribal individuals have entered politics due to political reasons.

Meanwhile, 29% (40) of Scheduled Castes (SCs) from Remuna and 20% (48) of Scheduled Tribes (STs) from Udala Assembly Constituency are involved in politics due to psychological factors. Among these, 9 (22%), 12 (3%), and 4 (10%) of SC respondents have completed their upper primary, high school, and college education, respectively. However, 15 (37%) of SC respondents from Remuna are illiterate. In the Udala Assembly Constituency, 35 illiterate tribal respondents, accounting for 72% of the total, have become involved in politics as a result of psychological factors. 6 respondents, accounting for 12% of the total, completed their upper primary education, while 4 respondents, representing 8%, completed high school. Additionally, 3 respondents, making up 6%, achieved college-level education. These individuals joined politics as a result of psychological considerations.

Another finding from this research is that young people make up the majority of political participation among SCs and STs. The majority of SC and ST citizens support political parties when talking about them. While 44% of SCs and 42% of STs support national parties like the BJP, Congress, and others. They believe that these parties have taken numerous initiatives for the development of the state and their communities. In contrast, 56% of SC and 58% of ST people prefer the state-based political party, which is the BJD in Odisha. They believe that a state party (BJD) is better at improving the status of their communities compared to other parties. Only 27% of SCs and only 13% of STs actively participate in various party activities whenever there is a discussion regarding the involvement of party activities.

• Gladiatorial Activities

This study found that SC respondents in comparison to ST respondents are very active in politics. Nearly 60% of SC people campaign for the candidates during the election period, while only 27% of ST people do the same. But when comparing the SC and ST communities from an age standpoint, it was discovered that more middle-aged SC respondents from the Remuna constituency campaigned for the candidates during election time in comparison to other age-group SC people. Young ST voters, aged between 18-30 years campaigned for the contested candidate in the election in comparison to middle-aged and older voters.

The survey revealed that out of the respondents from the Remuna Assembly Constituency, 38 respondents, which is 27% of the total SC respondents (138) belonging to the SC category, expressed their local issues or difficulties during Pali Sabha or Panchayat meetings. Among these respondents, 28.9% had received education beyond the 12th class, 44.7% had completed education up to high school (8-10 classes), and 5.3% were illiterate. While, in the Udala assembly constituency, out of the 245 respondents belonging to the ST category, 53 (22%) individuals raised their local concerns during

the Pali Sabha meeting. Among these, 40% had completed their education up to high school (classes 8-10), while 28% had completed their education up to the upper primary level (classes 1-7). A mere 21% of individuals with a high level of education (above +2) and only 11% of those who are illiterate reported experiencing difficulty throughout the meeting.

This study also reflects that most of the SC and ST people in the study area are not interested in contesting an election as candidates. 18% of SCs and only 12% of STs contested the election, and most of them contested the election due to seat reservations. Women and people of low-income backgrounds do not contest any elections and are not interested in participating in the electoral process. Therefore, it is concluded that in the Remuna and Udala Assembly Constituencies, the SCs and STs, respectively, have a very low level of participation in gladiatorial activities.

- **Transitional Activities**

This study reveals that 42% of SC respondents from the Remuna Assembly Constituency meet and approach the MLA for their local issues, while only 31% of ST respondents from the Udala Assembly Constituency are in contact with their MLA for any issues or demands. But when talking about MP, a very poor number of respondents approach their MP for any local issues or any demands of their community, which is only 9% SCs and 3% STs from Remuna and Udala Assembly Constituencies, respectively.

From the data collection, this study concludes that a larger number of ST people are not aware of the Gram Shaba compared to SC people. Only 39% of ST people attend the Pali Shaba meeting, while 72% of SC people attend this meeting, but due to a lack of political knowledge, a greater number of people do not participate in the discussion or present their local issues or demands in the meeting. The major hindrance to the ways people attend the Gram Shaba is that a larger portion of ST people depend on their traditional leader to resolve their issues. They would rather talk to traditional political and institutional leaders than the sarpanch about their issues. While the SC people do not attend this meeting because of a lack of time, they think that their presence does not affect any decision that is taken during the meeting.

- **Spectator Activities**

Another finding of this research is that politically aware and educated SC and ST people are motivated to take part in the various government sponsored programmes for economic development. In the research area, 64% of SC people encourage others to participate in developmental initiatives, while just 40% of ST people do the same.

According to the data, the majority of SC and ST voters participated in the most recent Assembly and Panchayat elections. The maximum voting percentages for SC and ST were 80% and 74%, respectively. Among those who did not vote, the majority moved to another state to work as daily labourers, and few people believed that the election did not have any impact on the political system. This study also shows that when ST and SC communities from Remuna and Udala constituencies are compared, more SC voters choose a candidate based on party affiliation, while the tribal voters choose a candidate based on competence and honesty.

Conclusion

Political participation is one of the most important elements of a democratic system of government. A democracy succeeds when a large number of people participate in the political process. This study examined the political participation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Odisha since 2000. Odisha has the 11th largest SC population and the 2nd largest ST population in India (Census, 2011). The SC and ST people are basically backward from mainstream society, and they are also not involved in politics, especially in the decision-making process. So, the government introduced several

policies and programmes for their development. This study focused on the level of political participation of SCs and STs in Odisha, especially in Remuna and Udala Assembly Constituencies, respectively.

The SC and ST communities, who had previously been reluctant to participate in politics and administration, have now been gradually integrated into the processes of local self-governing institutions, as well as the state and national political systems. This is only possible when the government introduces several developmental and awareness programs, constitutional provisions, reservation policies, and other measures. The SC and ST communities still retain a conservative attitude towards the participation of women in politics.

This study found a lack of political awareness among the SC and ST communities. The traditional leaders are gradually losing their authority with the introduction of the PRIs, but due to the lack of political knowledge and inefficiency of the SC and ST PRIs members, the SC and ST communities still depend on the traditional leaders to solve their problems, especially tribal people, who are more dependent on traditional leaders than SC people.

During the field study, it was also learned that the SC and ST communities from Remuna and Udala Assembly Constituencies, respectively, are not active in politics. In comparison to the SC and ST communities, the SC community from Remuna Constituency is more active in politics than the ST community from Udala Constituency. A larger portion of SC and ST people participate in politics during election time as voters. However, regarding other times, the percentage of participation of SCs and STs in politics is very low.

In this study, political participation has been broadly divided into two levels: non-institutional and institutional or power-sharing. Activities that have indirect relations to decision-making in grassroots political institutions and are generally unorganised are included in the first level, i.e. non-institutional political participation. Such activities that are taken for this study include discussing politics, organisational activities (like joining political parties and participating in political party activities), association with any political leader, and taking an active part in the campaign. Activities that have a direct link with formal institutions and their decision-making processes fall under institutional activities. The specific cases that have been included in this dimension are attending PRIs meetings, participating in the decision-making process, and participating in the implementation of the policies emerging out of the PRIs meetings.

This study also reveals that not an effective number of SCs and STs people are campaigning for the candidates during the election time, but when compared to SCs and STs communities, the SCs people are more engaged in campaigning and election meetings than the STs people in Udala constituency. Age and education are two important factors for active participation in politics. Traditionally, the SCs and STs communities were isolated from mainstream society, especially tribal people, and they basically belong to an illiterate group. But gradually, tribal people became more politically involved when the educated and young masses came into contact with non-SCs and STs people. This research shows the educated and young (18-30 years old) people belonging to SCs and STs are more active in politics compared to the old and illiterate groups.

This study also concludes that the women belonging to the SCs and STs communities, respectively, have significantly less participation in politics compared to the men in their communities. The study also found that the women are not active in politics and does not take part in the decision-making process. They have joined politics only for the reservation policy, but in reality, the male person is exercising power and women are only in the chair.

Acknowledgements

We are very much thankful to the Sarpanch, Samiti Member, Zilla Parishad, and ward members under the Udala assembly and Remuna constituency of Odisha, for their kind support during my field survey. We would like to thank all the SC & ST respondents who have devoted their valuable time to answering all the questions patiently. The authors are responsible for all the errors and omissions thereof.

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