Research proposal

On

**PUBLIC DELIBERATIONS IN PALLI SABHAS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ
INSTITUTIONS: A STUDY OF ODISHA**

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INTRODUCTION

The complexities of modern world demand that democracy cannot simply be a matter of procedures. There is a need to invoke the old idea of 'civic virtue' in modern democracies. This assumes more significance in India where there is huge gap between rich and poor and absence of the poor in the decision making process. The large number of marginalized and

excluded groups compels us to think about deliberative pattern of democracy. Deliberative democracy argues for public deliberation and civic engagement. Indian democracy as it has been practiced so far raises many questions with regard to the exclusion of many groups from the decision making process. It is true that the formal procedural aggregative model of democracy has failed to evolve an inclusive policy which could ensure the inclusion of the historically socially and culturally excluded groups in the decision making process. Dalits, tribals and women are mostly excluded from the mainstream Indian political system. Can deliberative model provide them the space they deserve in a political system? PRIs reflect a decentralized pattern of democracy. The proposed research would like to examine to what extent PRIs can be a model of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy makes a case for serious engagement of citizens in the decision making process. PRIs effectively present a model of democracy where there is ample scope for people's participation. But in present India, poverty & illiteracy and hunger & malnutrition- along with the manifesto of apathy and indifference- It is in this context that the present study assumes significance. The present study intends to probe the deliberative understanding of democracy in Indian context. It takes PRIs as the subject of investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Joshua Cohen (1996) in his article *'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy'* most clearly outlined five main features of deliberative democracy which include,(i)an ongoing independent association with expected continuation (ii)the citizens in the democratic structure, their institutions such that deliberation is the deciding factor in the creation of the institutions and the institutions allow deliberation to continue (iii) a commitment to the respect of a pluralism of values and aims within the polity (iv)the citizens consider deliberative procedure as the source of legitimacy and prefer the casual history of legitimation for each law to be transparent and easily traceable to the deliberative process (v)each member recognizes and respects other members deliberative capacity. Cohen presents deliberative democracy as more than a theory of legitimacy and forms a body of substantive rights around it based on achieving "ideal deliberation". According to him deliberation is free in two ways (i)the participants consider themselves bound solely by the results and pre-conditions of the deliberation. They are free from any authority of prior norms or requirements,(ii)the participants suppose that they can act on the decision made, the deliberative process is a sufficient reason to comply with the decision reached. He says that participants are equal in two ways i.e. formal and substantive. The notion of deliberative

democracy according o Joshua Cohen, is rooted in the intuitive ideal of democratic association in which the justification of the terms and conditions of the association proceeds through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (2004) in their book '*why Deliberative Democracy'* put maximum emphasis on basic liberty and fair opportunity. These principles, they argue, are extended to persons not solely for the sake of democratic deliberation but also for the sake of reciprocity and mutual respect and fairness. According to Gutmann and Thompson the first and most important characteristic of deliberative democracy is its reason giving requirement. The reasons are neither merely procedural not purely substantive. The reasons should be accepted by free and equal persons seeking fair terms of cooperation. They describe that persons should be treated not merely as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled, but as autonomous agents who take part in the governance of their own society directly. The reasons are meant both to produce a justifiable decision and to express the value of mutual respect.

The second characteristic of deliberative democracy is that the reasons given in the deliberative process should be accessible to all the citizens to whom they are addressed. They put emphasis that reciprocation is an important part of deliberative democracy. Deliberation must take place in public not merely in the private of one's mind.

The third characteristic is that its process aims of producing a decision that is binding for some period of time.

The fourth characteristic is dynamic and they describe that combining these four characteristics, we can define deliberative democracy as a form of government in which free and equal citizens justify decisions in a process in which they gave one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future.

Irish Marion Young (1996), while conceptualizing communicative democracy, argues that the deliberative ideal tends to assume that when we eliminate the influence of economic and political power, people's speaking and understanding will be the same, but this will be true only if we also eliminate their cultural differences and different social positions. Individuals in the polity have varying preferences about what they want government institutions to de. They know that other individuals also have preferences, which may or may

not match their own. Democracy is a competitive process in which political parties and candidates offer their platforms and attempt to satisfy the largest number of people's preferences. Citizens with similar preferences often organize interest groups in order to try to influence the actions of parties and policy makers once they are elected. Individuals, interest groups and public officials each may behave strategically, adjusting the orientations of their pressure tactics or coalition building according to their perception of the activities of competing preferences.

Habermas, the philosophical father of deliberative democracy regards discourse politics as required to overcome and prevent crisis of legitimation. Public sphere is one in which public opinion can be formed. All citizens can participate in public sphere to give opinion without their personal and professional interests. Citizens act as a public when it is a matter of general interest without being subject to any coercion.

Colin Farrelly (2004) in his book *'Introduction to Contemporary Political Theory'* describes about the merits and demerits of deliberative democracy and argues that aggregative model of democracy is problematic for a number of reasons. The aggregative model conceives of voting as the primary political activity because it maintains that policy formation should be based on the preferences of the majority. This contrasts with the notion of deliberative democracy which places much more emphasis on the opportunities for effective participation and gaining enlightened understanding. Again he states that deliberation may have a destructive effect and deliberative democracy is utopian.

The state, argues **Susheela Kaushik** (1998), state can empower village panchayats and endow them with such authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government. Keeping the intersections of caste, class and gender, **Shirin M Rai** (2007) argues that a deliberative framework would make the self governing bodies more accountable ensuring that participants in its process can do so with confidence, thereby redistributing some identity based power relations as well as delivering outcomes that enhance the welfare of the marginalized communities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

No subject has been more discussed in political theory in the last two decades then deliberative democracy. Before understanding the meaning of deliberative democracy we

should know the meaning of deliberation. Deliberation is an approach to decision making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about the options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions and understandings. Thus deliberative democracy strengthens citizen voice in governance by including people of all races, castes, classes, ages, gender in deliberations that directly affect public decisions. An ideal deliberation procedure requires free, reasoned and open deliberation among equals, which leads to rationally motivated consensus. PRIs in India reflect the same understanding as the deliberative democracy stands for. The working method of PRIs and their functioning is an important case study for the deliberative democracy to look into. There are several questions which remain to be answered in this research. For example to what extent PRIs can be called as models of deliberative democracy, whether the entire process of deliberation is inclusive in the context of structural inequalities like caste, class and gender. These are some of the important questions that the research tends to probe.

CENTRAL QUESTION

☐ Whether PRIs in India really reflect a deliberative understanding despite the structural inequalities deeply rooted in Indian society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the proposed research work is:

- To study the theoretical understanding of deliberative democracy
- To contextualize deliberative democracy in Indian context
- To study PRIs as the subject of investigation for deliberative democracy
- To study whether the central objective of deliberative democracy i.e. inclusion of all citizens in the decision making process is full filled in the PRIs.
- To study whether PRIs have been effective in promoting social justice

HYPOTHESES

1. PRIs are useful mechanisms of deliberative democracy in India.
2. PRIs have the potential to address the dilemmas of deliberative democracy in the Indian context.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study will look at both primary and secondary sources for collection of data. For collection of primary data I will rely on both interview and questionnaire methods. Apart from that I will consult secondary sources like legal documents, government publications and other related literature.

TENTATIVE CHAPTERISATION

The proposed study will have five chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. First chapter would focus on the theoretical aspects of deliberative democracy and aggregative model of democracy. Second chapter would probe the aspects of public deliberation in Panchayati Raj institutions democracy in Indian context. Third and fourth chapter would take Palli Sabha as the subject of investigation. Fifth chapter would focus on the comparative analysis of fourth and fifth chapter.

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