Most of the studies on the sixty seven millions of the Indians who are constitutionally categorised as members of the “Scheduled Tribes” (to the general people only “Tribes” or “Adivasis”) are however found anthropological and sociological in perspectives. The present paper proposes to understand the excruciating problems of these so-called ‘tribes’ of India. Indian democracy, like all other democracies of the Western World, believes in sharing of power that necessitates the popular participation of these poor, illiterate and culturally deprived communities of the Country. As most of the people in this Country live in villages, so democracy in India can be successful with the progressive involvement of these ‘adibasis’ in the institutions at grass-roots level (Panchayati Raj Institutions). This noble goal can only be achieved with the emergence of the development-oriented institutional leadership from among these communities who make the rural people conscious of participating in developmental activities in villages. Accordingly, it is the aim of this study to know the attitude of the elected tribal leaders (of Panchayati Raj Institutions), their level of political awareness, the factors of motivation for their political participation and to perceive how these leaders participate in various political activities especially relating to the rural self-governing institutions.

The central theme of the present study - Political Participation of Elected Tribal Leaders in Orissa: A Case Study of Mayurbhanj District has been investigated both at the macro and the micro empirical levels. At the former level, the problem has been viewed with broader frame yielding to certain trends of general nature. Chapter I and II deal with the issues, which the ‘tribes’ are facing, from historical and socio-economic perspectives. At the sametime, section IV inspects the framework of the Panchayati Raj in Orissa which starts the tribal people’s involvement for their uplift. The micro-level analysis follows a conceptual framework and its application to test some proposed hypotheses, i.e., higher educated, middle aged, female, Santal tribal leaders and leaders with higher family income are more active as participants in various political activities than any other tribal leaders. A conceptual generalization of ‘Political Participation’ is made in Chapter III. The data relating to “Socio-Economic Background” (Chapter - V), “Attitudes and Motivation” (Chapter - VI), “Political Awareness” (Chapter - VII) and “Political Participation” (Chapter - VIII) have been collected on the basis of field-interviews of 300 Ward Members, 17 Sarpanchas and 19 Panchayat Samiti Members of two consecutive elections.

It is an empirical study since it makes a probe into the aspects of tribal political awareness,
a district which was formerly a Princely State. Therefore, this study is substantially significant because it attempts to study two disadvantageous factors combining together in Mayurbhanj district: the Princely India and the Tribal India.

This study was selected for the important reason that these two disadvantageous factors can be readily isolated for statistical analysis. The area of the study constituted a former Princely State which can be identified and spatially distinguished from the area lying in British-ruled territory. Similarly Tribal India has geographical coherence. The district of Mayurbhanj which is the universe of the study constituted also a tribal district because of its largest tribal population (57.87%) in terms of its percentage in the State of Orissa.

The study reveals that most of the sample leaders belong to male sex, Santal tribe, middle aged, primary school educated and lower income groups (monthly family income below Rs.750/-). They sport a negative attitude towards participation of the tribal women in rural politics, towards the question of exploitation of tribal communities by others, towards the establishment of a separate ‘Jharkhand State’ or a ‘Tribal Council’ for their administration and towards the traditional community leaders. They support the continuance of the tribal community Panchayats. The prime motive of these leaders for their participation in politics was the acquisition of social status, prestige and power. In the scale of political awareness the Sarpanchas are found at the top, among the three categories of sample leaders, followed by the Panchayat Samiti Members and Ward Members.

The concluding observations regarding political participation of elected tribal leaders of rural self-governing institutions evince that the Sarpanchas effectively participate in both institutional and non-institutional political activities. The participatory position of the Panchayat Samiti Members is not at all negligible. But the Ward Members are found less close to the political activities because of the lower position held by them in the Panchayati Raj structure. When the five variables such as education, family income, age, sex and tribal community are made applicable to the political participation of the leaders, a differential effect of these variables is found. However, the better educated (those having at least a high school standard), more affluent (those having a monthly family income of more than Rs.1,000/-), middle aged (31-50), male and Santal tribal leaders participate in the implementation of the policies emerging out of the Panchayati Raj Institutions' meetings.

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