

Executive Summary

This study is the second phase of action-research; based on a sample of 33 village panchayats from eight talukas of two districts: Palanpur, Vadagam, Vav and Tharad of Banaskantha and Idar, Bhiloda, Himmatnagar and Prantij in Sabarkantha, which are part of BSC's project area. The first phase focused on the level of awareness of non-postholder Dalits regarding Panchayati Raj, Dalit post holders at village, taluka and district levels regarding the Act and their own functioning and responsibility, and the experiences, achievements, and difficulties of Dalit post holders.

Aims and background of the study:

The aim of the study is to gain an insight into the factors responsible for participation of Dalits in the Panchayati Raj institutions in Gujarat, so as to take action for practical level/ policy level changes required therein.

The main findings of the first phase were:

- ✘ Reservation is important for Dalits to take up posts of leadership since most of them have won from reserved seats. However, for Dalit women the major importance is of seats reserved for women.
- ✘ There is great support for Dalit Sarpanches from within the Dalit community in most of the villages.
- ✘ Dalit leaders are not fully aware of their potential and power due to their limited knowledge of the Panchayati Raj Act, lower social status, and uncooperative behaviour of the government officials at the taluka and district levels.
- ✘ Gram sabhas are held regularly in almost all villages but very few Dalits attend. Dalit leaders of the village also sometimes do not attend, because they feel that their needs are not fulfilled.

The second phase and the concept of Dalit participation:

The results of the first phase indicated both limitations of the Dalit Sarpanch as well as their potential as Dalit leaders. However there was need to look at not only the functioning of the Dalit Sarpanch but the entire Panchayat. Also there was a need to go into greater qualitative documentation of processes rather than a quantitative survey. Therefore in the second phase it was decided that a documentation of the processes in Panchayat decision making, along with a set of Panchayat profiles, would be used.

The aim of this second phase of the study is twofold:

- i. To derive a set of indicators of participation in governance;
- ii. To study the process of decision making in Panchayat meetings and to draw conclusions about the level of participation of Dalits in Panchayati Raj and the reasons in enabling and obstructing effective participation.

Dalit participation in this meeting is understood in two ways: the types and number of Dalit-related issues that are taken up for discussion in Panchayat meetings, as well as the way Dalit Panchayat members take stands on the issues and follow up these issues for the empowerment of the Dalit community.

Methodology:

The methodology in this phase was a mix of quantitative and qualitative, looking at the profile and processes within panchayats with the aim of correlating the two in the study. There were 4 types of documentation of processes:

- Profile of the panchayats
- Processes of decision making in the Panchayat meetings
- Issues arising in the village between Panchayat meetings and the method of tackling these issues.
- Studying cases of two villages closely to look at the time line of processes taking place; to understand the inter-caste and intra-caste dynamics as well as their impact on Dalit participation.

Sample:

Four villages were selected from each of the talukas, three with Dalit Sarpanch and one with a non-Dalit Sarpanch. It was assumed that Dalit participation would be higher where the number of Dalits was quite high. Therefore population of the village (1991 Census) was decided to be at least 1500 persons, with a Dalit population of 18% or more. This proportion was decided on the basis of Dalit population in Gujarat state, which is close to 14%, so that villages with Dalit population greater than average were selected.

The salient findings are as follows:

1. *Profile of sample in two districts*

- ***Total population and proportion of dalits in the village*** – according to the method of selecting the sample, nowhere the proportion of Dalits in the population is less than 18% of the total population. The maximum population of Dalits in a village among those selected is about 120 families. In a single village, there are more than 1 Dalit communities – Vankars and Chamars form the majority.
- ***Proportion of Dalits in Panchayat*** - The proportion of Dalit members in the village panchayats (including Sarpanch) of the selected villages ranges from 12% to 60%, which is indicative of a wide variation in Dalit representation in various panchayats. Dalits in Sabarkantha are in a much smaller minority in the panchayats and proportion of non-Dalits is higher (their proportion is much smaller) as compared to Banaskantha.
- ***Proportion of Dalits in Committees*** – There are maximum number of Dalits seen in the Social Justice Committee, because it is compulsory that the Social Justice Committee should be constituted entirely of Dalit members. Apart from this committee, Dalit presence is seen in Executive Committee, followed by Construction/ building Committee and Water Committee, where such committees have been constituted. Dalits do not have any representation at all in the health committees of the selected villages in either of the two districts.
- ***Finance related*** – The major source of funds of the panchayats remains the external funds and grants in aid. Internal generation of funds is negligible. However, within these internal sources of funds, there is not much difference in the sources of finance in the two districts. The major sources of funds are the electricity tax, house tax and water levy, which are not enough for the development of the village.

➤ **Attributes of Sarpanch**

This study relates the characteristics of the Sarpanch with the level of participation of Dalit members in the Panchayat. Therefore, we list here the profile of the Sarpanches in the sample villages.

- **Sex** – of the total sample, there are 25 male Sarpanches and 8 female Sarpanches. The proportion of male and female Sarpanches is about the same in Sabarkantha and Banaskantha. As against the 33% reservation of women in panchayats, the proportion of women Sarpanches is only 24%.
 - **Caste** – the sample has been deliberately selected with a larger proportion of Dalit than non-Dalit Sarpanches. There are in all 25 Dalit Sarpanches and 8 non-Dalit Sarpanches, one in each taluka (therefore 4 in each of the districts).
 - **Age** – The average age of the Sarpanches is around 48 years. There is not much difference between the average ages in Banaskantha and Sabarkantha.
 - **Education** - There is a vast difference between the level of education of Sarpanches in Banaskantha and Sabarkantha. Sarpanches in Sabarkantha are much more educated than in Banaskantha. There are 13 Sarpanches in Sabarkantha educated upto high school or more, while in Banaskantha there are only 5 Sarpanches with such level of education.
 - **Occupation** - The majority of non-Dalit Sarpanches consists of agriculturists, who have their own land. However, this is not the case for Dalit Sarpanches. There is a greater variety in the occupations of Dalit Sarpanches. They are equally divided between cultivation on their own land, housework and casual labour. We have observed that Dalits who have become Sarpanches hail from a variety of economic classes.
- **Reservation and its importance** - No Dalit Sarpanch from the sample villages has won his/ her present position from an open seat.
- **Dalit women Sarpanches are:**
- Housewives, and therefore lacking necessary exposure for being politically active (there are seven Dalit women in both the districts together, and five of them are housewives);
 - Elected to the post simply because the seat is reserved for Dalit women; therefore simply used for other men (Dalit and/or non-Dalit) to come to power.
 - It appears that women in the position of Sarpanch are at a double disadvantage, and their participation in Panchayat processes may be a difficult achievement.

2. **Types of issues taken up in gram panchayats**

- It appears that Dalits across villages and districts face similar issues, and also that issues related to the entire village are generally similar in all villages and both the districts.
- Three-fourths of the issues are related to the entire village and only one-fourth is specifically related to Dalits. In general, we can say that Dalit related issues raised are proportional to the Dalit population.
- The variety of issues related to the village in general is much more than that of Dalit related issues. There are a total of 22 Dalit related issues and 45 village related issues.

3. **Issues and their impact on Dalit community**

- Issues have been divided into transformative and non-transformative according to their impact on the Dalit community and those issues that have the potential to create a long-term impact on the level of living of the Dalit community of the village have been defined as

transformative. The others (those that have no impact or those that have individual impact) are considered to be non-transformative.

- The classification of these issues shows that most of them are not likely to be of a transformative nature for Dalits.
- On the other hand, most of the issues that are related to the Dalit community specifically are more of a transformative than of a non-transformative nature. They relate to infrastructural facilities for Dalits, water supply, as well as a number of controversial issues like untouchability, etc. However, Dalits are also influenced by issues that relate to the entire village. Examples of such issues are - BPL list/ BPL benefits, Ration cards/ fair price shop, deepening of village pond etc. It means that panchayats focus mainly on issues that do have a long-term impact on the empowerment of the Dalit community.

4. *Dalit participation*

- Participation of Dalits in any issues, whether they are Dalit related, or all-village related, is higher in panchayats with a higher proportion of Dalits. **Dalit participation is directly related to the proportion of Dalits in the Panchayat.**
- Apart from the proportion of Dalits in the panchayat, **Dalit participation is not dependent on any characteristics of the Panchayat members, such as age, education, etc.** We may attribute it to village-specific dynamics or personal characteristics of Panchayat members/ Sarpanch. This is borne out by the two cases, where we can see that the relations between the various communities and the political dynamics operating between the various castes in the village have a strong bearing on how Dalit issues are dealt with.
- Specifically **Dalit related issues are taken up only when there is a relatively high proportion of Dalits in the Panchayat.** When there are more Dalits in a Panchayat, they feel more comfortable in taking up Dalit-related issues. Therefore, if we have to increase the number of Dalit related issues taken up at the Gram Panchayat level, higher representation of Dalits is a must.
- Secondly, **Dalit related issues are taken up in larger number when the Sarpanch is a non-Dalit rather than when the Sarpanch is a Dalit.** When the Sarpanch is Dalit, other Dalit members are not so active. This may indicate either more trust on the Dalit Sarpanch, or a desire not to make things difficult for their own Sarpanch by raising tricky issues.
- Thirdly, when the Sarpanch is a Dalit, more **Dalit related issues are raised** by the Dalit members when the Sarpanch is educated rather than when he/she is not educated. **Thus educated Dalits can act as a source of motivation to take up Dalit-related issues.**
- **Non-Dalits do not participate in Dalit related issues in general.** Dalit issues are generally related to land and/ or government schemes. Land specifically allocated to Dalits is reduced from the possible land available to other communities, so non-Dalits are opposed to this. Grants allocated specifically to Dalits means smaller amount of funds available to other communities. This may be a reflection on why non-Dalits generally participate less in Dalit related issues.

5. *Follow up of issues*

- There are many cases when **issues are simply mentioned once and then allowed to lapse.** Not even resolutions passed. This may reflect internal controversy between the Panchayat.
- **In most of the non-transformative issues, only resolutions have been passed** in the Panchayat (in seven cases) but only in 4 cases, the relevant authorities have been approached. But in only 2 cases, the issue has come for repeated discussion. This means that the issues are kept alive in very few cases.

- In villages with Dalit Sarpanch, most of the transformative issues are followed up quite well. Most clearly, in 13 out of the 32 transformative issues (40%), the Sarpanch and/ or other Panchayat members have approached the relevant authorities for the purpose of resolving the issue. In the case of villages with non-Dalit Sarpanch, of the 12 transformative issues taken up, 4 (33%) are followed up by approaching the authorities. This proportion is slightly smaller than that in the villages with Dalit Sarpanch.
- Though there is some difference in the way Dalit and non-Dalit Sarpanches deal with issues, the difference is not a major one.

6. *Dalit participation and village-specific characteristics – findings from cases*

- Traditional stereotypes of ‘Dalit Sarpanch’ and ‘woman Sarpanch’ are not completely applicable: Dalit Sarpanches – men and women – have shown the capacity for handling opposition and obstacles, and have gained the support of Dalits and worked for Dalit empowerment.
- The importance of village dynamics in Dalit participation is extremely high, as is borne out from the cases studied in the two districts. Internal relations and factions among the Dalits, Dalit-non-Dalit relations, and political alliances, all play a crucial role in determining how much Dalit Sarpanches and Panchayat members can achieve for the empowerment of Dalits.
- Dalit unity is an important factor in determining what the Dalit Sarpanch can achieve. The greater the number of Dalit communities and factions, the lower the support to a single efficient Dalit Sarpanch, and the greater the chance of non-Dalit communities making use of the factions to achieve their own interests.
- The level of awareness/exposure/ education as well as the political-economic position of the Sarpanch is also a crucial factor in determining her/his effectiveness.
- The attitude of the Talati, as well as the Sarpanch’s own knowledge of the duties and powers of the Talati, are crucial factors in the effectiveness of the Sarpanch, and ultimately empowerment of Dalits through Panchayati Raj.

7. **Differences between Banaskantha and Sabarkantha at a glance**

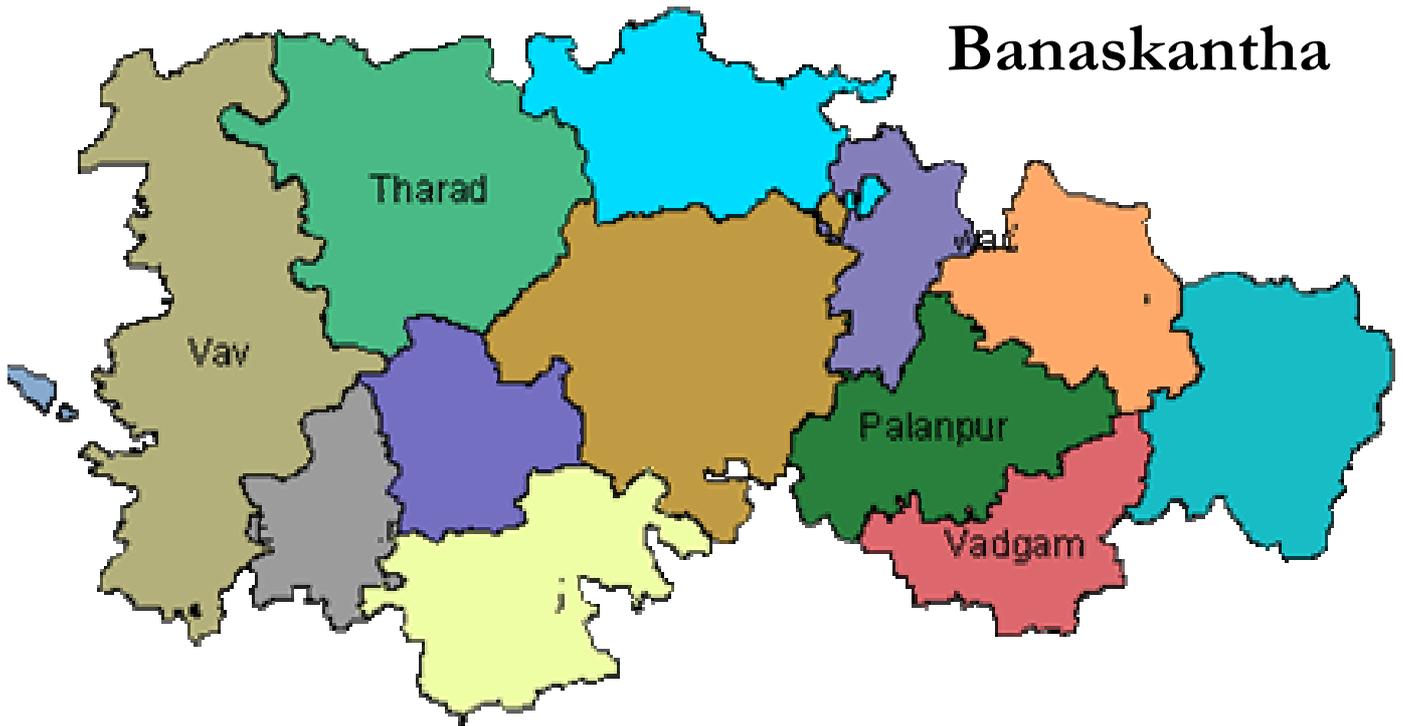
Characteristic	Sabarkantha	Banaskantha
<i>Proportion of Dalits and non-Dalits</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proportion of Dalits in the panchayats ranges between 12.5% and 37.5%. ▪ Non-Dalit members in all the villages of the sample together are 2.7 times the number of Dalit members. ▪ Sabarkantha panchayats have a relatively small representation of Dalits (27%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proportion of Dalit members in some of the selected panchayats is as high as 50-60%. ▪ Non-Dalit members are 1.7 times as many as Dalit members. ▪ Somewhat high representation of Dalits (37%).
<i>Dalit membership in committees</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Major representation in Social Justice Committee and water committee. ▪ There are no Dalit members in the education committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Major representation in Social Justice Committee and water committee. ▪ Very negligible proportion in other committees.
<i>Attributes of Sarpanch: Age:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relatively larger proportion of young Sarpanches. ▪ The proportion of Sarpanches less than 40 years of age is around 35%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ About a fourth (25%) of Sarpanches are under 40 years of age.
<i>Education:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only 5% Sarpanches are illiterate. The majority (46%) of the have primary or high school level education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More than a third of the Sarpanches are illiterate.

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Characteristic	Sabarkantha	Banaskantha
<i>Women Sarpanches</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are 3 Dalit and 1 non-Dalit woman Sarpanches. ▪ None of the 3 Dalit women has given 'housework' as their occupation; this may indicate slightly more exposure to the outside world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are 4 women Sarpanches and all of them are Dalits. All 4 are occupied in housework. This may indicate that they have no exposure to the outside world and to the political scene.
<i>Education of Dalit and non-Dalit Sarpanches:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dalit Sarpanches in Sabarkantha are more educated than non-Dalit Sarpanches. ▪ Dalit Sarpanches are on an average educated upto secondary school level (more than 10 years). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-Dalit Sarpanches are more educated than Dalit Sarpanches. Dalit Sarpanches have in general reached only primary level of education (less than seven years).
<i>Types of issues taken up</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tendency to follow up an issue as far as possible to its resolution. ▪ Panchayats deal more with issues that have the potential of influencing the life and empowerment of the Dalit community. ▪ In villages with Dalit and non-Dalit Sarpanches, most transformative issues are followed up well and most non-transformative issues are left without being followed up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of issues taken up in panchayats much larger than Sabarkantha. ▪ Most of the issues taken up are welfare oriented. ▪ Pay more attention to issues that provide temporary help or (in case of cemetery land) deal with the status of Dalits in the village rather than with their living standards. ▪ Majority of issues taken up are related to the entire village rather than to the Dalit community. ▪ Issues are brought out but rarely resolved or followed up. This applies to transformative and non-transformative issues and to panchayats with Dalit and non-Dalit Sarpanches equally.
<i>Factors determining Dalit participation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No clear relation between the education of the Sarpanch and the number of issues taken up. ▪ Political contacts that make it possible for an educated Sarpanch to take up Dalit issues are seen less in the sample villages. ▪ Follow up of issues in Sabarkantha depends on the personal attributes of the Sarpanch. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When the Sarpanch is a Dalit, and he/she is educated, Dalit members take up more Dalit-related issues for discussion. ▪ There are some villages in Banaskantha where Dalits have good political connections. This may perhaps be the reason for educated Dalits to be a source of leadership in Banaskantha villages.

Banaskantha



Sabarkantha

