CHAPTER-3
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the course of conducting any research, survey and review of literature already generated on the present problem, is of paramount significance. Surveying of researches conducted related to the one to be undertaken, helps the investigator in understanding the problem from different perspectives in defining the problem in researchable form. Besides, survey of the studies conducted by the other investigators in the field related to the problem in hand also helps the researcher in framing the objectives and the corresponding hypotheses of the study. It also helps the investigator in delimiting the problem that ultimately directs the study in the desired direction rather than moving in an indiscriminate manner. However, perhaps the most significant contribution of such surveys is that they help the investigator in interpretation of the results of the study that the researcher investigates.

With the above objectives in view, the investigator also conducted the survey of the literature related to the present one and the same is presented in this chapter. However, woefully, not many researchers have concentrated their attention on the rural local bodies and in that also the number of studies on women participation in these bodies is still scanty. Some of the studies relating to the participation of woman in rural local bodies are reviewed in this chapter.

According to Narain et. al. (2005)¹ there still exists a wide gap between the enunciated goals and situational reality of status of women in India. The need

for strengthening the legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of
discrimination has been emphasized time and again. The first five Five-Year plans viewed the issue of women and their development from the welfare point of view. The later Plans took this issue with a strategy for their empowerment. Yet, in spite of a broad framework and perspective for women's empowerment, it is imperative that these initiatives and strategies are translated into social, political, economic, educational and cultural empowerment of women.

The strain of lamentation about insufficient representation of women in our legislatures continues to agitate the conscience of our leaders even after 50 years of the functioning of our Parliament. It found articulation on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Parliament when the Chairman of Rajya Sabha Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat while addressing the International Parliamentary Conference expressed concern that many deprived and neglected sections of society, particularly women, do not have enough space in political life. Taking note of the fact that share of women in representative bodies in the world has not gone beyond 14 percent, he recalled the profound statement made by Mahatma Gandhi in 1925 that “As long as women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country.” Stating that the “Indian experience in this regard could be relevant” he referred to the provision in our Constitution under which 33 percent of the seats at the grassroots representative bodies like panchayats and municipalities have been reserved for the women. Mentioning that such steps have enabled about a million women to occupy seats in such bodies, he drew attention to the Bill pending before the Parliament for providing 33 percent
reservation for women at the national and state levels. Possibly affirmative action at the grassroots level democratic institutions constitute exemplary action for women's empowerment which can be replicated at the national level. Movements launched by women themselves for greater access to public life and decision-making bodies are distinguishing features of the larger trend for deepening democracy and regenerating our inclusive society and polity. Attempts to reserve 33 percent of the seats for women in the legislative bodies at the national and state levels and the wider acceptability of this idea by people generate hope for their empowerment.

Chauhan (2005) is of the view that rural women in India as well as in other countries have been a neglected lot. They have not been actively involved in the mainstream of development even though they represent the bulk of population and labour force. Primarily women are the means of survival of their families, but are generally unrecognized and undervalued being placed at the bottom of the pile. Ideologically as well as in practice women are considered inferior to males. Many areas of employment are completely shut for women. Socially she is kept in a state of utter subjugation, suppressed and oppressed.

The rural workforce in India constitutes a sizeable section of rural women such as housewives, artisans, agricultural labourers, cultivators etc. analysis of various studies on rural women reveals that they occupy a low position on all fronts in the society while effecting the development of the nation. They have lesser access to asset resources, technology and credit.
The inequalities prevalent in our traditional social fabric, based on caste, community and class, have a significant impact on the low status of women in different spheres. Therefore, the main issue which is till being discussed is the kind of strategy to be devised for improving the status and extent of their participation in the process of development. For the rural women, the primary concern requires their economic upliftment, improving educational standard, self-awareness and political participation. Many efforts have been made by the government since independence, towards changing the village as the most important unit of our social and economic life. Attempts have also been made to rationalize the status of women through the execution of various plans and programmes, and enactment of statutory laws.

In the present paper, the author has made an attempt to study the degree of awareness, participation in democratic processes, and socio-economic conditions etc. of women in a remote and backward panchayat – Tharchadhar in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. On the basis of the study, it has been concluded that political empowerment of women through the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act appears to be more a myth than a reality. To this end, it is not merely sufficient to provide reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions rather serious efforts are simultaneously required at the social and economic fronts. It is imperative to bring a dynamic change in the attitude of the rural life, particularly of the male segment, regarding the role of the women. Further, their economic empowerment will also boost their status and make them financial dependent and

thus capable of discharging all their responsibilities independently. Moreover, the evil of *purdah* needs to be curbed in the absence of which political empowerment of women would remain only a distant dream.

Surat/Singh (2005)\(^3\) tried to find out the position of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions of Haryana in the decision making process. The study has been conducted in two districts (Jind and Kurukshetra) in Haryana. Besides the two Zila Parishads, four Panchayat Samitis and sixteen Gram Panchayats have been included in the study. All the 92 women representatives in the selected PRIs were administered a schedule during the course of the study. The author studied the decision-making by the women representatives in the context of PRIs and the extraneous considerations influencing the process. On the basis of the analysis of data, the author drew the following conclusions:

1. More than one-third women respondents alleged that their husbands interfere in their decision-making.

2. Even less than one-tenth of the respondents complained that elected male members push through their decisions in the meetings.

3. One-fifth of the respondents claimed the ability to resolve conflicts in Gram Sabha but more than one-fourth stated that they are able to do so in the panchayat meetings.

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4. While one-third claimed capacity of getting work done from their staff, more than two-fifth felt that they have the ability of conducting meetings as per the laid down procedure.

5. One-fourth of the respondents said that they have the ability to take disciplinary action. But very few claimed to have taken crucial decisions.

6. While about two-fifth claimed to have mobilized funds as per plans, very few claimed having raised additional income through taxes.

7. Three-fifth of the respondents consider powers adequate in taking effective decision.

8. Information and literacy are perceived as two more important contributory factors in decision-making by them.

9. A few of the respondents reported instances when resolutions were passed against their decisions.

On the basis of the responses gathered from the respondents, the author concluded that elite women have been able to get some say in the decision-making in the PRIs. However, the progress in this direction remains inadequate because of their low levels of education and awareness, on the one hand, and the unfavourable social and cultural milieu, on the other. Therefore, there is an urgent need for making serious efforts for their capacity building by imparting them training and by launching a vigorous campaign for creating awareness in them. According to the author, it is also important to educate them with the help of the National Literacy Mission which can play a significant role in this context.
Malik (2005) has highlighted some of the problems which persist in the process of women empowerment. It has been reported from various studies conducted in Haryana regarding empowerment of women in rural local bodies that involvement of women in decision-making process is in the transitional phase. The elections have been held twice (in 1994 and in 2000) in the state after constitutionalisation of the PRIs. A large number of women came out to contest elections and they captured various posts as members and chairpersons of these institutions as per the provision. In some cases, they contested successfully on general seats also, but these women representatives belonged to the families of male panchayat leaders who compelled them to contest the elections and also canvassed for them. The studies also reveal that most of the women leaders at village level do not attend the meetings and they are being represented proxy by their male family members i.e., husbands or son. Their signatures/thumb impressions are taken on the proceedings of the meetings, later on. It also applies in case of women Sarpanches where the wards of these chairpersons perform actual functioning because they are illiterate and ignorant about the political activities. The non-attendance of the meetings by women at village level is mainly attributed to the traditions of the orthodox rural society. Almost all the women leaders are escorted by their family members to the meeting place outside their villages. They are not independent in taking decisions about their family and panchayat by now. It indicates that women are not considered competent leaders and they are merely representing the family by contesting the elections of a

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particular panchayat. Thus, women representatives at village level have failed to influence the process of decision-making as well as social system.

Sharma (2005)\(^5\) in her study has focused her attention *inter alia* on the status of the women in the villages of Nagaland. The village council is the apex body of most of Naga villages. The Naga women even in the rural areas feel differently today because they have realized that their rights are being denied. The Naga mothers strongly feel that the time has come when women must exercise their rights to make their voices heard, and this is possible only when adequate representation is made in both the village council as well as the village development board, which is the lifeline of villages. There is also a need for more representation of women not only in the village council but also in the most important machinery, the village judiciary. Till today, the village judiciary has no women representation in any Naga village. Therefore, women are always at a disadvantage. The Naga Mothers Association strongly supported the suggestion made in certain villages by women groups, about the need for including at least two women representatives in this judiciary whose ‘sanctity’ and integrity has always been considered unquestionable. Democracy is for all, not for a select gender and so true democracy must also include women, without the hindrance of traditional prejudices. This is all the more essential because of the changing social paradigms. Today, the man is not the only breadwinner. A good share of the family income is earned by women. Therefore, women have every right to play a

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more prominent role in the formulation of policies for the upliftment of villages and in their implementation, and get their rightful share.

Village councils can seriously think of inclusion of particularly Article 243, as it will bring a great change for the women group. Clause 2 of this article states that not less than one-third of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes. Clause 3 of the same Article promulgates that not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women, and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat. Clause 4 further states that the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of chairpersons in the panchayat at such level shall be reserved for women. By incorporating such important issues into the village working system Nagaland perhaps will allow women to enter the strong fortress of the men dominated village councils and work for the benefit of the society as a whole.

Prasad (2005) in his study has concluded that the Dalit women leadership has not acquired the quality of leader as it was envisaged i.e., as a decision-maker, originator and recipient of messages, performer, builder of power etc. The burden of patriarchal ideology and structural constraints has not made them join the mainstream politics. They are learning to have initial exposure of politics and by virtue of carrying out their ascriptive role i.e., looking after the house, domestic chores, and rearing of the child hardly allows her leisure time for their assertive
role as leaders in panchayat. Their formal induction as the important functionary of panchayat has broken their slumber and the so-called veiled women of Haryana is beginning to realize the importance of their new role. It has certainly given them a platform to get together and deliberate upon the ways and means to break free from the dead weight of traditional bondage. Needless to mention for Dalit women to acquire the confidence she has to fight at many levels. First, at the level of gender based inequality, and second at the level of tyrannical caste based inequality which make them vulnerable to many disabilities and that probably could be the reason why they allow their male counterparts to act as leaders on their behalf. Third, their illiteracy makes them to depend on the officials at the block level. Fourth, the members from within their won caste have not formed a united front to act as a pressure group in the village. Thus, the traditional mindset against the women coupled with their Dalit identity substantially reduces their effective functioning at the panchayat level.

According to Jha (2004),7 despite reservation for women, effective participation in Panchayati Raj institutions has failed due to misuse and manipulation by local power brokers. Ignorance of woman about their rights and procedures and about their potential and responsibilities have kept them far behind men in the local bodies. It is doubtful that mere increase in number of reserved seats for women in local bodies is likely to increase their participation. Unless structural changes are brought about, a sincere effort is made to educate

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women and the power structures existing in rural areas are neutralized, no worthwhile development in the direction of women empowerment is expected. The picture becomes gloomier when we focus our attention on women in the hills.

The women in the Himalayan region are governed by traditional patriarchal norms and exhibit all the characteristics of underprivileged women in other regions of the country and other developing nations. The characteristics typical of these women are low literacy, lower chances of survival, malnourishment, total neglect in their formative years, less-valued as decision makers and have practically no rights to property of ownership of land, are paid lower wages for equal work and are displaced due to mechanization.

Women in Himalayan regions, like in other parts of the country, constitute a major labour force for unaccounted agriculture and livestock care. They provide the supportive roles of production. As girls they provide the helping hand in the household chores. They slog as assistants for agricultural and livestock tasks; and that is not all, they are married off while they are too young to become mothers. Their early marriages ensure a progeny of at least four to six live children. It would not be wrong to place these women at the tail end of the developmental process. Despite reservation of seats for women in local self-government there is no representation of these women in the Panchayati Raj system.

Women representatives often run into barriers and are hindered from participating effectively. They feel inhibited to speak especially when they are in large male dominated assemblies. Those who muster up enough courage and strength to speak receive very little respect or attention. It has been observed that
women are invited to attend panchayat meetings only to complete the quorum. Further, the officials also pay heed to the needs of upper class women in preference to the needs of peasant women. The rights of women thus get systematically nullified by the local bureaucracy. Their representation is merely a token and not at all effective. In some regions of the country, women have become aware of their problems and needs but alas not of their rights. In Karnataka it was observed that women were concerned with their responsibilities to a greater extent than men who were more concerned with the exercise of power.

The author, therefore, feels that there is need to empower women to enhance their quality of participating. This can be achieved through training besides of course the literacy educational programmes. Mahila Mandal could be activated for this purpose where women could learn skills and acquire confidence. To have a meaningful exercise in this direction special attention needs to be paid to the grass-root women workers who have hitherto been side tracked by the bureaucracy. Links have to be strengthened between the village and the bureaucracy at lower level.

It would be worthwhile experimenting with an all women Panchayat considering the fact that our cultural system does not allow women to be vocal in the presence of menfolk. Either the strength of women should be sufficient or alternately a parallel all women panchayat for specific purpose should be encouraged. Special programmes on role of women in Panchayati Raj system, on rights of women and procedures should be prepared and highlighted through the
mass media so as to make women aware and improve the quality of their participation in socio-political system.

At the time of formulation of Eighth Five Year Plan a streak of optimism for Indian women is visible. With the formation of statutory national commission on women there is likelihood of acceleration in the social movements for a just social order if the country's planning process explicitly commits itself to uphold the dignity of women. The commitment to political empowerment must be supplemented by a new conceptualization of women's role in the economy of India. At this juncture the country's planners must strive to end the paradox of participation in a setting of powerlessness.

According to Singh (2004), women constitute the pivot around whom the family, society, rather the whole humanity moves. Their role in directing the shaping the destiny of the nation is crucial. With the advancement in science and technology the world has moved fast. Women have to assume a dynamic role in the changing context. For their participation in national life, it is necessary that women should occupy positions at the decision-making and planning levels. The development of women cannot be achieved in isolation. It needs holistic approach.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1993 constitute a watershed for the advancement of Indian women since they ensure that at least one-third of the total elected seats and positions of chairpersons in rural and urban local bodies shall be reserved for women. About one million

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women are estimated to emerge as leaders at the grassroots level in the rural areas alone. Of these, 75,000 are to be chairpersons. As Professor C.E.M. Joad justified, we find that getting employment, as the sheet anchor of economic justice for women is extremely difficult. They beg at the door for employment. Will it not be in the fitness of things to establish exclusive Employment Exchanges for them, the more so as 30 percent reservation in legislatures for them is on the cards? If this is done, the battle is more than half won. This will draw the attention of all concerned.

Dhal (2004) conducted an empirical study on the impact of the 73rd Amendment on the rural socio-political environment, and the processes that it has generated in the two sample districts of Jajpur (progressive) and Keonjhar (backward) in the state of Orissa which, being a poor and a backward state is at the threshold of transition. With the institution of the Palli Sabha working well Orissa has been a pioneering state in the field of democratic decentralization. The state has also taken concrete steps to ensure gender justice. Orissa is one of the few states, which implemented the proposed one-third reservation of seats for women in panchayat bodies as early as in 1992, when other states were still considering the issue. Following are the main findings of the study:

1. Earlier (prior to 1993), women were not interested in politics but now after two terms, their participation in the political process has enhanced their political consciousness, awareness and empowerment. As a result they are ready to contest again. All this goes to reveal that the elected women
members of the panchayats value their new knowledge and their new sense of freedom and their new political status as representatives of the people which has relatively improved their social status both at home and outside.

2. A startling revelation of the study is that the panchayati raj system functioned efficiently in the backward district of Keonjhar when compared with the progressive district of Jajpur. The manner in which the developmental activities have been undertaken indicates a relatively success story of panchayati raj in Keonjhar district. According to the block officials in this district, involving women in the grassroots development process has already started yielding positive results.

3. The Gram Sabha meetings were more popular and better attended in the sample district of Keonjhar (83 percent) than in the progressive district of Jajpur (28 percent). This indicates that economic backwardness is the true motivator for political participation as demonstrated by the sample district of Keonjhar.

4. The field study also revealed that political participation of women panchayat members was more 'intensive' in voting, attending meetings, and campaigning rather than in organizing party meetings, membership drive etc.

5. The study also revealed that higher caste women hesitate to play an active role in the political process and generally adopt a 'status quoist' approach.

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This can be attributed to the impact of feudal political mechanisms and the prevailing social structure. On the other hand, women with lower socio-political background adopt an 'aggressive/persuasive' approach and this can be traced to factors like mobility, greater public exposure and enthusiasm about their new role and eagerness to do justice to the role that has been assigned to them.

6. During the course of the study it was found that many women respondents faced many difficulties during their tenure as panchayat members. Their constraints can be divided under the following heads:
   - Socio-economic constraints: caste, gender, poverty;
   - Institutional constraints: lack of power, information, and misuse of funds; and
   - Constraints at the Gram Panchayat Level: non-cooperation from the male colleagues, the language of the manuals being English etc.

7. The study establishes that there are essentially five basic factors that are responsible for better performance by the elected women representatives of the PRIs:
   - Personal strength/character,
   - Mobility,
   - Minimum educational background,
   - Training, and

• Support network system (family, rural youth, officials, male colleagues).

Panda and Pattnaik (2003)\(^{10}\) studied the emerging women leadership at the Zila Parishad level in Orissa by making a case study of the Keonjhar Zila Parishad by conducting interviews of the elected women leaders with the help of a questionnaire of 26 questions. Questions have been asked on the socio-economic and political background of the leaders, leaders' perception of the Panchayati Raj System and their role perception. Most of the questions are close-ended questions with possible responses included in the questionnaire. Data was collected in the year 2000. the Zila Parishad in Keonjhar district is composed of 37 members, out of them 13 are women. The post of Vice-President in the Parishad is reserved for women. The chief findings of the study include:

1. Women leaders are exposed to the agencies of mass media partially or totally, they all attend public meetings, most of them have links with political parties and the other members of the family of majority of leaders have also links with political parties. All of them have exposure to the political process of the country.

2. All of the women members have been elected to the Zila Parishad for the first time. The study also reveals that their families have played the most

important role to motivate the women leaders to contest election. This
confirms the fact that if the family is favourable a woman can become a
leader.

3. There has been male domination in the Panchayati Raj System. However,
it has been reported that the women related problems are not neglected by
the system. All the women respondents have stated that they have been
benefited by the provision of reservation of seats for women in the PRIs.

4. The women representatives have been of the view that if more money will
be provided to the PRIs, they can work more efficiently.

Besides, the study also reveals that the rural leadership is no longer monopolized
by the upper caste, economically forward and politically advanced male members
of the society. The women have come forward to share decision-making power at
the grassroots level. They have asserted their claim over the political system of
the rural area. More number of educated women have taken the lead to act as
women representatives. Even if their initial performance is not up to mark, it is a
right step in the right direction to involve the largest minority group, the women,
in the political process of the country. Given an opportunity the women will be
fully able and willing to serve the people.

According to Sharma (2003), participation at local level can be viewed
from quantitative and qualitative angles. Quantitative aspects refer to the strength
of participation and trend of participation in general and that of different groups

11 Sharma, Manjusha. "Women’s Participation in Gram Panchayats: A Study in Harvana" in
Singh, Shiv Raj et. al. (eds.), Public Administration in the New Millennium: Challenges and
like men, women, backward classes etc. As far as qualitative aspects is concerned, there are three levels of quality of participation:

1. Passive Participation: Simply attending the meetings of Gram Panchayats without playing any active role therein.

2. Active Participation: Participating actively as members of Gram Panchayats.

3. Decision Participation: Participating in the capacity as leaders like chairperson of Gram Panchayat.

The author has studied the participation of women in Gram Panchayats of Babain and Ladwa blocks of Kurukshetra district in Haryana in this context. In the study an attempt was made to know and to find out the perception of elected representatives about their participation in Gram Panchayats. Following are the major findings of the study:

1. 92.3 percent of the respondents were unaware of the basic knowledge of the Act and the power given to them under this Act. The main reason for this sorry state of affairs is illiteracy as 95 percent of the respondents were found to be illiterate.

2. Both the women chairpersons and the members lack self-confidence and the reason again is their illiteracy. Resultantly, they do not dare to actively participate in the decision-making process.

3. Considerable majority of the respondents (78.57 percent) do not attend the meetings of the Gram Panchayats. Further, 21.42 percent of the respondents go to attend the meetings with their sons or husbands.
4. 92.30 percent of the respondents said that they hesitate in facing the village male people due to cultural taboos.

5. 71 percent of the respondents stated that they do not go outside their villages to discharge their official obligations.

6. As many as 92.85 percent of the respondents failed to observe any change in their status or the attitude of others towards them after getting elected as chairpersons/members to the PRIs.

On the basis of the study, the author has concluded that participation and capacity building are the integral part of empowerment. Without either of these, empowerment will remain a distant dream. Once the women are given a chance to participate in the development activities, the inertia is broken and it will let loose the unimaginable force required for social transformation.

According to Mandal (2003), though women comprise about half of the Indian population they have been subjected to discriminatory social ethos resulting in denial of equality of status and opportunities in social, economic and political spheres. Over the years the realization has drawn to us that women have no less concrete contribution in social and economic progress of the community and the country. Furthermore, in sharp contrast to their urban counterpart the hapless conditions of rural women are more glaring and galloping. Because of various socio-economic constraints, clear absence of acceptance of women's public role, more orthodox social, milieu of agricultural society and utter confinement in subsistence struggle all have practically and comprehensively

strangulated rural women in almost every sense. All the loud claim about development efforts could not conceive women more than as passive beneficiaries and not as active contributors to the process itself. In a word, rural women remained at the periphery of political and developmental processes.

The efforts towards integrating rural women in the development process through panchayats remained for decades elusive, a mere ‘tokenism’ and it could not bring any perceptible impact on women’s direct and effective participation in the process. Women in general could not gain much if at all from the political and development process at the grassroots. If this was the overall pattern since the inception of PR experiment, form the fag end of 1980’s women’s involvement in wider scale sought to be secure in some states like Karnataka and Kerala. From 1993 onwards women have got the meaningful and even chance to occupy one-third seats and posts in all panchayat institutions everywhere. Thus the women’s engagement and participation has begun virtually from a scratch and women’s role therein has to be viewed and grasped from this perspective.

Not surprisingly indeed woman members in panchayat institution have not been as successful and effectual as one may have wished and there are several accounting factors. One should comprehend the underlying causes of woman member’s fumbling before arriving at definite conclusion. At the same time it should be unwarranted if one instantly or habitually belittles the positive aspects of the reservation policy. As more than 70 percent population lives in rural India, rural development is the primary precondition for the development of India. If the socio-economic and all round development is the end it can never be achieved

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without the active engagement of rural womenfolk both from democratic and development standpoints. The representation of the one half of rural population needs articulation through their own representation. Only women can effectively voice their pent-up feelings and requirements. Women can be effective link between women and the development functionaries and will consequently ensure as many benefits as possible for women themselves.

According to Arora (2003), women are an integral part of every society. They play an important role in determining the destiny of a nation. Therefore, due recognition to them in the society and their greater involvement in socio-economic and political affairs becomes all the more important. However, history reveals that women have not been given their due status in the society.

Socially, women are a harassed and ignored lot. They have been and still are the victim of various social taboos particularly in developing countries like India. Though they enjoy equality but this equality is more in legal terms than in reality. It is amazing that in a country like India where the highest object of worship is in the feminine form, crime against women should have assumed such alarming proportions. As per the information released by the Crime Records Bureau of the Home Ministry, there is a crime against the fair sex committed every six minutes. Most of these cases are reported from rural areas where the literacy level is low and the women are unaware of their rights. According to the 1991 Census, Women’s Literacy was reported at 39.62 percent as against men’s at 63.86 percent. Almost 90 percent of the women in employment are marginal
workers and thus outside the purview of progressive labour laws. In the organised sector, of the 26.8 million employed, the number of women is just 3.8 million. Of these 2.4 million or 62 percent are in the public sector and only 1.4 million in the private sector.

Regarding their participation in the political process the situation is no better. Though they constitute almost half of the world's population yet the number of those holding elected offices is very negligible. It is clear from the fact that in 1980 women made up just over 10 percent of the world's parliamentarians and less than 4 percent of national cabinets. In 1993, just 6 nations had women as heads of government. In the case of India, the situation is still worse. Despite the fact that about 70 percent of them are voters, their representation in legislative bodies over the years have been very poor. Data reveal that percentage of woman MPs has never touched the double figure mark in the Lok Sabha. In case of state legislatures the situation is all the more dismal as is clear from the fact that the average women's representation in them is just 4 percent.

In this context, the author has analysed 81st Constitutional (Amendment) Bill was first introduced in the Parliament in 1996 from various angles and concluded that such a Bill would hardly help the cause of women empowerment. What is required is that let the women awake and educate themselves, shed the social taboos, come forward to gain economic independence and organise themselves in a far better way to become a reckoning force to get their due.

Panda (2003) conducted an empirical study in the tribal villages in South Orissa spread over five panchayats. The villages in the study are located in predominantly tribal districts viz. Gajapati and Koraput of the state. The socio-economic base of the villages is fragile, communication facilities are scanty, employment opportunities are meager and illiteracy is appalling. Field survey revealed that eighty-five percent of the tribal are illiterate. Women are almost illiterate except those elected to PRIs majority of whom could write their names with much effort. Very few in the villages possess land. Women do not own land except in cases where they hold joint record of rights. Most of the women work as agricultural labourers.

After preliminary investigation the sample was selected comprising twenty-three ward members, five sarpanches, four naib-sarpanches (all women), one women member of panchayat samiti, one woman chairperson of zila parishad, twenty male members including four sarpanches, five ex-sarpanches and fifteen persons not holding any panchayat office. Responses were obtained through a pre-tested interview schedule but personal observation and interaction with village level functionaries provided more inputs to assess their nature of participation as related to their social background. The main observations of the study are:

1. In all the Panchayats covered in the study there is no monolithic power structure as there are at least three power centres each being influential in its own way in the village. Socio economic reasons and constraints of community life compel the people to be aligned with anyone of these

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14 Panda, Snehalata. "Political Empowerment of Tribal Women: An Empirical Perspective" in Mishra et. al. (eds.), Public Governance and Decentralization (Essays in Honour of T.N.)
groups or try to maintain a balance. The traditional community power centres have decisive voice in selection of candidates as well as their success or failure in the elections. In case of women they are more powerful as women hardly disobeyed them.

2. With the introduction of monetary rewards for attending meeting there has been increase in the attendance of the members both male and female, but personal observation revealed that the attendance of the female members has not significantly altered the nature of participation in the discussions, in framing development plans and distribution of financial allocations for development work.

3. The traditional deficiencies in the rural Orissa society are not just economic but social and men and women are deemed to be unequal in the over all hierarchical social structure. No sudden transformation of centuries old beliefs and traditions could be brought about at this stage because even if some of the socio-political structures have been democratized, a perception to match the structure is yet to evolve in the functional sphere of our democracy and the circulation of elites is restricted to few rich and feudal elements whose power is threatened by women's representation.

4. Women's representation could hardly alter the performance of the institutions as most of the members are drawn from traditional existing structure, which is ultimately shaped to sub serve the vested interests. The opportunity provided to women to represent the PRIs far from being an
instrument for achieving an egalitarian socio-political structure in the tribal infested rural society has benefited the traditional power holders.

Women's secondary position in the household is reflected in the attitude of the society in accepting them in a different role which is not usually the proper role. Their marginalization in the GPs is an outcome of their familial and social position and, their own perception as secondary human beings in the family and the community. This perceptional deficiency is hardly overcome while discharging their duty in the local level democratic institutions.

Reservation has disparaged women as they undergo psychological discomfort for their public responsibility which is hardly accepted by the community, family members including the females and their male counterparts in GPs. They act as mere puppets in the power play of men and vested interests as the actual power is exercised by men.

The study revealed that the quality of participation depends on the quantity though it is defined through the individuals involved, specific institutions, process, ideological and cultural factors. It is the form of social structure, familial position, community position which is reflected in the GPs because of their numerical strength, superior familial and social position, comparatively better knowledge gained through exposure and interaction, even though they were uneducated.
Analyzing the socio-economic and political efforts towards empowering the women, Dhaliwal (2003)\textsuperscript{15} has concluded that if local government is to meet the needs of both men and women, it must build on the experiences of both men and women through, an equal representation at all levels and in all fields of decision-making, covering the wide range of responsibilities of local governments. From the data gathered by the author, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. There is no proper orientation about laws and the Acts and civic administration.
2. No experience about dealing with civic issues and its complexities.
3. Lack of knowledge about technical inputs related to civic service delivery system.
4. Lack of support from senior male/female colleagues in the party/civic body.
5. Less cooperation from the officials.
6. Less understanding about various facets of budgeting, allocation of budget etc.
7. Lack of party support at local level.
8. Lack of confidence in public speaking.
9. Local political atmosphere.
10. Lack of resources to cultivate own base at local level.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women and women in the informal sector has rightly mentioned that although at the planning level, there is

\textsuperscript{15} Dhaliwal, S.S. "Empowerment of Women" in Singh, Shiv Raj et. al. (eds). \textit{Public Administration in the New Millennium: Challenges and Prospects}, Anamika Publishers and
consciousness about women’s low status and the need to focus on women’s needs in development, but at the implementation level, this awareness percolates very slowly. The delivery system is based on a stereotyped concept of women’s development where women are objects of pity or welfare and are given some benefits in a sporadic and haphazard manner. If the political leadership decides that women’s problems have to be tackled on a priority basis, the entire planning process, implementing mechanisms and monitoring system will be geared in no time.

Singh (2003)\textsuperscript{16} highlighted the need of training for capacity building as a measure towards empowerment of women in the PRIs. According to the author, training is an important tool, which enables those who are engaged in the developmental process to shoulder their responsibilities effectively. It helps in getting work done better, putting meaning into work; facilitating optimum utilization of abilities; developing new skills, knowledge and concepts; fostering ones’ understanding of goals of the department and contribution to work improvement; preparing the income bent for more responsible work; reducing unnecessary conflicts and tensions; overcoming complacency and foster excellence; increasing quality of supervision, monitoring and evaluation; improving image among masses; and enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in development. Thus, expert training can effect qualitative improvements in the performance. Not only this it also aids individuals in making better and quicker

decisions. In this background, the author has identified and suggested separate training modules for Gram Sabha Members; for women sarpanches, up-sarpanches and members of the gram panchayats; for block women chairpersons and members of zila Parishads and panchayat samitis; and for women chairpersons of zila Parishads according to the needs and requirements of each of them and roles expected to be performed by them.

Besides, the author has also suggested that the services of those institutions as are fully equipped with the modern training infrastructure should be used for imparting training. Every possible effort should be made to make use of participatory method of training and the language used should be simple, specific and easily understandable. Sufficient time during the course of training should be devoted to clarify the doubts and misunderstandings of the trainees. The services of experts available in the field of panchayati raj and rural development should be used. It would be better if the female experts give the training to women representatives of PRIs. The resource persons and the trainers should be asked to focus on practical aspects of the topics to be covered. Latest and up to date knowledge and information should be disseminated. Training should be made mandatory for all the newly elected women representatives of PRIs. The trainers should make training interesting by citing examples from the field. In view of the fast changes taking place, training at regular intervals should be arranged so as to build confidence of trainees. There has to be close interaction of training institutes with the reputed NGOs to assign training programmes to them. It would be better if sufficient funds were made available to the training institutes to meet the
growing demand of training. There is also a need of monitoring and evaluation of training imparted from time to time. This work may be assigned to the universities having good reputation. Proper follow up actions should be taken for making training relevant and meaningful. It has been observed that the training institutions generally get bureaucratized whereas the need would be to be innovative and flexible.

Singh (2003)\textsuperscript{17} in her work has suggested an action plan for empowerment of women in panchayati raj. The Action Plan aiming at empowering women representatives will have to concentrate on the following points:

1. Women representatives should persuade through panchayats elimination of all types of gender discrimination practices prevalent in their own family, village and society.

2. Women representatives should be prepared to impress upon panchayats for elimination of any sort of discrimination with girl-child, whosoever tries to discriminate in any manner, may be brought under law for sufficient punishment.

3. Awareness camps and campaigns should be organised to bring a change in attitude towards gender discrimination and that there is no difference between son and daughter.

4. Legal literacy classes for women may be run through panchayats, urban local bodies and NGOs.

5. Steps should be taken to put a check on sex exploitation, molestation etc., of women representatives working away from their home village.

6. Women gram pards should ensure inevitable registration of birth and death of girl child.

7. Every effort should be made to stop child marriage.

8. Gram pards should make it a point to get enrolled every girl child in school. Parents should also be contacted for it.

9. Panchayats should arrange facilities of health, drinking water, environment etc.

10. People to give property rights to women and make them economically stable.

11. All types of government schemes should be brought the notice of women by enlisting cooperation of gram pards, particularly women, government official etc., by arranging special camps.

12. Special camps may be held for developing leadership qualities and feeling of self-confidence among women panchayat representatives.

13. The policy for women should be made known to the public in general.

14. Women may be persuaded to work independently and their husbands and other male members should abstain from unnecessary interference in their work. Women panchayat representatives should be made to take their own decisions. For this purpose special training and camps may be organised.

According to the author, these steps would push women ahead towards empowerment. Gender discrimination would come to an end and social attitude
would change towards betterment of women. Birth of a girl child will not be treated as curse. Women would have their own entity as women. Men and women would go further ahead shoulder to shoulder with common goal and joint participation. Energy of about fifty percent of population constituting women would be gainfully utilized.

According to Chauhan (2003), the very first step towards political empowerment women has been initiated by constitutionally providing for reservation of one-third seats in the local bodies under the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act, 1992. In the panchayat elections held in December 1996 in the wake of the new enactment five women members were elected to the Thachadhar village panchayat, one member was elected unanimously to the Seraj Block Samiti. Post of Panchayat Pardhan was reserved for women. In these elections rural women voters took keen interest. Women population of this village panchayat was very happy with the provisions of 73rd Constitutional Amendment. They opined that earlier male population did not want to share political power with females. Women of this village panchayat revealed that now their husbands or parents did not object to contest the election rather encouraged them to contest the same and provided full financial as well as moral support. Only elderly section of women population was against women participation in political activities. From the election results of various women candidates it was revealed that rural population has chosen such candidates who were comparatively better qualified. All seven women elected to different positions in different bodies were found
above matric. The above discussion reveals that women in village panchayat Thachadhar are not encouraged to participate in various development programmes by the male dominated society. Literacy rate among women was found to be quite low and majority of the women were found performing traditional types of job. Their level of earning was also found to be quite low. Level of awakening was found at a very low level but there is gradual improvement in level of awareness among sample rural women in certain fields. Now women want to have small family size, adult education has become popular among them and have actively participated in Panchayati Raj Institutions. This participation could be possible due to reservation of seats under the provisions of 73rd Constitutional Amendment. But still in economic, educational, health and political fields, their participation is very negligible.

Thus, for the overall development of women it is essential to encourage their active participation in various development programmes. Their participation in various democratic institutions needs to be encouraged. For this purpose spread of education is must among said sections of the society. Women need to be educated about merits of small family norms and abuses of large family size. Further more employment opportunities must be created for rural women so that their level of earning could be improved and they could be made self-dependent only then they can show their presence felt in the decision-making processes at different levels on different issues. Through workshops the state governments should enlighten women regarding various protective legislation and varieties of

18 Chauhan S.S., “Awareness Among Rural Women and Their Development” in Singh, Shiv Raj et. al. (eds.), Public Administration in the New Millennium: Challenges and Prospects, Anamika
developmental programmes which have been provided by the government especially for the women. Only then atrocities against women can be minimized and active participation of the women in development can be increased and social, economic and political status of such a large section of population can be improved.

According to Singh (2003), women's empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women's rights is at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The empowerment of women by their increased participation in all aspects of political, social and economic life has become one of the major goals of democratic and participatory movements, as well as women's organisations. Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life.

Empowerment is a process and is not, therefore, something that can be given to the people. The process of empowerment is both individual and collective, since it is through involvement in groups that people must often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organize to take action and bring about change. When we talk of women's status, it is important for us to recognize that interventions at all levels namely, social, cultural, political, economic are required and are possible only if changes take place in the existing system and social structure, which are not at all favourable to the women today.
We must remember that the World Conference on Women could be taken as the culmination point for the process of empowerment. It has provided a broad-based activity schedule to the national, regional and global agencies in which participation of women has been highlighted. By this method, participation of women in the decision making process could be enhanced many fold and the progress attained in a much shorter-time span. The process of empowerment is helping in identifying areas to be targeted, planning strategies for acting and in analysis of actions and outcomes. Empowerment is not a process which is horizontal or vertical. It is a process which goes round in a circle. Here the beginning ends in a change and the change leads to another beginning. No one magic formula can lead to empowerment. It has to be tailor made to suit the client.

Kaushal (2003) is of the view that the role women play in society and the image we have of them have developed not simply from exigencies of biology and social situations; these are deep-rooted in the myths and legend and the religion of culture. Citing Rabindra Nath Tagore, the says, "Woman is the builder and moulder of nation's destiny. Though delicate and soft as a lily she has a heart far stronger and bolder than man – she is the supreme inspiration for man's onward march, an embodiment of love, pity and compassion." But all through the ages, she has been walking on the flames of atrocities pleasing the society which is deaf, dumb and cruel. Her exultations and feelings are trampled underfoot just

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as a terrible storm scatters the petals of a beautiful flower. Women seem to be a burden on society which survives because of women only.

Post-colonial period in a backward capitalist country like India has generated contradictory currents. On the one hand growth of economy and socio-political movements resulted in generating a liberal attitude towards access to education and employment for middle-class women. These currents further led to social awareness against inhuman anti-woman social practices like sati, female foeticide, prohibition of widow remarriage etc. While on the other hand, new problems have been created such as dowry deaths, increasing sexual atrocities against women, marginalisation of women workers, religious revivalism, caste and communal riots leading to devaluation of women.

In this background, the author has highlighted and analysed the various policies and programmes that have been undertaken by the government from time-to-time. These include the various constitutional provisions for the women, the programmes and schemes launched for women development under the various Five Year Plans, the different legislations pertaining to the upliftment, welfare and development of the women, the various commissions and committees set up for suggesting measures to uplift the status of the women, the setting up of the National Commission for Women, the different poverty and unemployment programmes for the women, etc.

However, since despite all these efforts, there has been no appreciable improvement in the position and status of the women in India. Therefore, the author has suggested some suggestions for this purpose:
1. Education must be imparted to inculcate such values in our children as would make them consider men and women as equal in every sense of the term.

2. It should be understood clearly that women’s development is not only women’s responsibility but men have equal share and responsibility.

3. Women development should be taken as a national movement irrespective of political ideology.

4. Women should not remain passive spectators, they should struggle, they should demand and they should fight for the just cause.

On the basis of the examination of some of the field studies undertaken in the field of women empowerment, Kaushik and Hooda (2003)\textsuperscript{21} have offered certain suggestions that can prove helpful in understanding ‘empowerment’ in right perspective. These include:

1. There must be a time to participate and potential benefits of participation should be greater than the costs. For example members cannot spend so much time participating that they ignore their work. Emancipation requires women’s freedom from the drudgery of existence in rural areas.

2. The participants must be mutually able to communicate in order to be able to exchange ideas. They should be given proper training in the working of the politico-administrative institutions. There is a need for the dissemination of information at a convenient place and by the media that

is accessible. It is also suggested that PRIs prepare publicity material in local languages and arrange for its distribution.

3. The national and regional political parties can play an important role in making them aware about the process, values and working of democratic institutions.

4. Empowerment process requires social change by organizing and mobilizing the women's group for struggle. The Mahila Mandals should be formed in all the villages and the existing one's need to be strengthened.

5. Necessary steps should be taken in the form of training male members in their attitude building.

6. Audio-visual and print media can contribute significantly by dissemination of information on women related issues which in the long run may result in society's recognition of women's equality with men.

7. Any assessment of the role and problems of women in Indian economy is largely based in agriculture with its characteristic feature of labour utilization and the social position of women in rural areas.

Mehta (2002) conducted an empirical study based on secondary data and information collected among a sample of 93 women headed village Panchayats selected from two Block Panchayats from each of the district Saharanpur in Western region and district Gorakhpur representing to eastern region of Uttar Pradesh and the primary data obtained among a sample of 497 women.

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22 Mehta, G.S., Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj System, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2002
representative of village Panchayats comprising 268 women from former district and 229 women from latter. The study examined certain issues related to the implementation pattern of reservation policy and its awareness among rural women, socio-economic and political background and the personal characteristics of elected PRI's representatives, nature and extent of participation in the different activities of Panchayats and the implementation of development programmes and welfare schemes, changes and improvements experienced in the socio-economic status and empowerment by them after being elected as pradhans and the members of PRI's, perceptions of local people and PRI's representatives about the kinds of additional measures to be initiated for improving socio-economic status and empowerment of women and various related aspects. The major findings of the study are:

1. Since a majority of the women were either motivated or forced to contest the election of village panchayats by their male members, the participation of women was found at a very low level in canvassing for favour of their own candidature.

2. Women with socio-economically and political sound family background had mainly received the advantages of reservation policy. Most elected women pardinhs and members in various village panchayats were relatives and family members of the representatives of previous Gram Sabhas and Nyay Panchayats and had sound economic background.

3. A large number of women pardinhs of all the village panchayats in both the districts had always been accompanied by their male family members

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in visiting the office of block panchayats both for the purpose of attending meetings and performing different official work. Consequently, irregularity in the participation of meetings of women pardhans was highly visualized.

4. Significant levels of differences were persisting in the pattern and frequencies of holdings of meeting for different purposes among the sample village panchayats of both the districts. However, the village panchayats of Gorakhpur were more punctual in holding the meetings regularly for different purposes than the village panchayats of Saharnpur.

5. The domination of male family members of women pardhans was highly visualized in the different activities of panchayats including the matters related to making decisions for identification of beneficiaries for covering under different development programmes and the discussions in the meetings of panchayats in both districts.

6. There was lack of coordination and cooperation among the pardhans and members in matters related to carrying out different activities of panchayats, deciding for implementation of certain development, and for covering beneficiaries among different castes and religions under these programmes, development programmes and welfare schemes was significantly reflecting in various village panchayats of both the districts.

7. The lack of awareness and information about the procedure and methodology to be adopted for applying in favour of different development schemes from different funding agencies and department and
lack of mobility outside villages were found to be factors restricting the participation of women PRIs in approaching for and initiating efforts to get the allotment of certain development schemes from different agencies.

8. On the whole the level of educational attainment among women was positively influencing their nature of participation and the performance in different stages of implementation of various development programmes.

9. No significant changes in performing the routine household work such as looking after the children, old family members and animals, cooking food and washing clothes were revealed in the cases of a overwhelming majority of women representatives of PRIs after representing village panchayats.

10. Over half of the women representatives of different village panchayats had experienced at least some degree of changes as occurred in their social status, mainly through participating at local level social and cultural programmes and among the women, though such category of women were significantly higher among pardhans than the members in both the districts.

According to Pashricha (2001), the constitutional amendment providing for one-third representation to the women in local elected bodies as well as reserving one-third of the office of chairpersons for them will have far-reaching consequences in Indian social and political life. This indeed is a welcome gesture, though belated. Democracy to be meaningful requires full involvement of the women,
constitutional provision is but a necessary step and it has to be followed by effective implementation. In the given socio-economic conditions ensuring women’s participation in politics is all the more difficult.

Despite reservation for women the real power is wielded by men in panchayats. the elected women, in most of the cases, leave politics to their husbands, fathers-in-law or their sons. Often they degenerate into mere spokespersons and hardly voice their own opinion on the floor of the House. Most of them remain silent spectators to the proceedings and rarely participate in the work. Led by men, political parties have shown lack of seriousness in fielding women candidates. They often resort to the practice of putting up 'dummy' woman candidates just for the sake of statistics in constituencies where opposition candidates are almost sure to win. In ‘safe’ constituencies men rather than women are normally fielded. This discourages woman aspirants.

Those who oppose reservation of seats for women in panchayats and to the legislative assemblies brandish four main reasons in support of their contention. First, women who are so elected may disturb the harmony at home and in the society. Even those men who tolerate women working in offices for fixed hours do not take kindly to them when their roles change to one of community leadership. This is because women then have to attend to people’s problems as leaders. This means irregular working hours and a twenty-four hour demand on their time. In that event, who will look after the children and household chores, the menfolk asks? Second, women will become target of attack by anti-social

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elements whenever they move out of their homes or go out to attend meetings and so on. Third, they mention that whenever women hold elected offices, their husbands/fathers/brothers sons or even the fellow male officers are the ones who ‘dictate’ what is or is not to be done. They take control of the entire situation and women elected representatives become hapless victims of such machination.

Not denying the fact that at this stage many of the women panches or sarpanches may be dummy, with the passage of the time, it is hoped everything will be alright. The situation is similar to the one in the early days of independence when many S.C./S.T. candidates in the panchayats were put as dummy power in their behalf. But with the passage of time the then dummies have now become the real power centres.

Evidently, these and many other problems are the product of a particular mindset and culture of male dominance. A social transformation aimed at the women’s changing role could be achieved by the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The task, of course is beset with enormous difficulties especially in the initial phase. But the future is not as gloomy as it looks today. The things are destined to change for the better.

Kotvi (2001) is of the view that women’s empowerment remain a fundamental issue as it is linked to the broader question of the status of women in society. The real issue worrying women today is the growing decline in the male-female ratio in certain states of the country. It relates to the marriage and succession laws of both the Hindus and the Muslims that provide women no space
for their individuality. The inequality that stems from the lack of educational opportunities and economic dependence is also a major concern. To achieve the desired status in society women will have to win their own battle. First of all, they will have to strive to change the male chauvinistic mindset nurtured over ages.

There are people who question the decision-making and competitive capabilities of women during elections. The fact, however, is that these arguments are used as a ploy by political parties and the men controlling them to keep women away from politics. The “winnability” criterion falls to pieces when we find that percentage of winning woman candidates in the Lok Sabha elections from 1957 to 1998 have been higher as compared to men.

Today, the need to bring in more women members into the legislatures is felt more strongly as on the whole women are found to be less corrupt and more responsible. As women are natural managers, they can manage society and government as good as they manage the families. Because women manage the family well, they need not be confined to it, rather for this very reason they should be inducted into politics so that society and governance are better managed. Even otherwise, why leave politics to being the hunting ground for men alone, leaving about half of the populace out of it. The question which is more pertinent is as to why should men alone go on taking decisions on issues relating to women’s problems?

A beginning has to be made at some stage. The year 2001 was declared women’s empowerment year. It was expected that all parties would come together

in both the Houses of Parliament and pass the 85th Constitutional (Amendment) Bill. Unfortunately, it could not happen due to lack of consensus. But seeking of consensus on this issue should not be the end in itself nor should its lack be used as an alibi to postpone or dump it. The latter seems to be the strategy of the then Vajpayee government to hide its own contradictions. If the government was really sincere, it could have convened a joint session of Parliament as it did in the case of the ‘Prevention of Terrorism Act’ (POTA) and if the joint session could be convened to pass the POTA why not for the ‘Women’s Reservation Bill.’ In fact, the all-important question is whether the political elite of this country really wants to pass such legislation. Do they really have the political will to do so?

Verma (2001) 25 is of the view that the emancipation movement, in essence, is one of the myriad efforts focused at assertion of the women’s claim to participate as equals in the multifarious processes of political, social and economic developments. These legitimate aspirations as a natural consequence came across and continue to be bedeviled with conflict and confrontation with the forces of conservatism and reaction. In spite of contradictions within and uneven regional growth, the issues on which women, right from the beginning, articulated their opposition range from those which are gender-specific to those which impinge upon social transformation. Their main concerns, as it emerged, were for the first time officially laid bare in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (1974), which incidentally, manifested instances of policy failure to live up to the constitutional mandate. In its wake followed a systematic and critical analysis and examination and the end-result is the formulation of the National
Plan for Women (1988-2000). Among numerous other thrust areas, the Perspective Plan has focused on the participation of the women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which were considered to be the most effective instruments for realizing the goals of economic betterment and social justice. As a step towards ensuring equality, reservation of seats for women in the PRIs was the recommended solution.

Highlighting the significance of the reservation of women in the PRIs, the author notes that the reservation for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, as is common knowledge is not a permanent feature of the Constitution. Transitory in nature, it shall cease to operate by the end of January 2006 when the period specified in Article 334 (as last amended) comes to an end. In panchayats too it would cease simultaneously but not women neither in the membership nor in the offices of chairpersons. It is a very notable improvement in the general concept of reservation. No longer an act of compassion, it is acknowledgement of due right.

Palanithurai (2001)⁵⁶ feels that one-third reservation of seats for women in local bodies through the constitutional amendments has opened a channel in the power structure for women from different strata of the society both vertically and horizontally, to occupy the legitimate space. The new entrants are large in number and they have definite roles, however, insignificant in terms of their capacity, to play in the given structure. The inherent impediments and hurdles associated with the women in Indian society, particularly in the political and economic structure,

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are common to the elected women leaders too. Yet they occupy these positions and perform their role and faithfully discharge their responsibilities.

Women have come to positions in the local bodies as provision has been made in the Constitution. The outlook of the society towards the women has started changing. But there are hurdles in the process of empowering women. Steps are being taken by the women on their own to overcome the hurdles. It is a long-drawn process. A structure that had been created over centuries to work against the interest of women cannot be altered overnight. To fight against the existing structure, an organised movement involving masses is imperative. In order to make the women achieve results in their positions a number of interventions are necessary.

They need orientation, sensitization, capacity building, information and counseling continuously through organisations. The ongoing experiments and experiences suggest that periodical training, orientation and sensitization can help the women leaders to perform the assigned role in a better way. When the women leaders are responding to the socio-political challenges in this society, they are to be supported by the organisations and institutions which are working for empowerment of women. Wherever such interventions are available, potential and achievements of the women leaders are substantial and impressive. Government will respond to the needs of these women leaders only when they are supported by social organisations and groups.

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Conceding Indian patriarchal value system’s negative role, Singh (2000) asserts that neither male domination nor State has been really opposed to democratic rights of women as is the case even in the developed world. To him, India’s record has been both laudable and favourable for women. Indisputably, India is committed to the cause of empowerment of women. However, the journey towards progress is long and arduous. In a world of challenge and competition, both the State and the society have to constantly attune themselves to the changing needs. It is recognized that the development of the country is not possible if women, comprising half of the human resource, as labour force and citizens, stay away from the national development process. Women’s participation in the political process of development is of crucial importance from the consideration of both equity and development.

India has witnessed great changes in the last two decades. Age-old prejudices and gender-based biases are giving way to gender equality and harmonious development. Women of today are no longer content to remain peripheral actors, and want to play their rightful role in all spheres of life. Political emancipation and social empowerment will act as main catalytic in achieving the empowerment of women to a large extent. However, in the present circumstances, empowerment of women is possible more effectively through economic empowerment rather than through reservation of some seats in Parliament or state legislature.

At the broad societal level, both sexes share a common humanity, which is the basis for the notion of equal human rights and freedom if any section of society – men, women, children, caste or class – is denied dignity and respect than this must be restored to them. India has heralded the new millennium by pronouncing the year 2001 as Women’s Empowerment Year. In terms of political empowerment, nearly seven lakh women occupy positions as members and chairpersons of grassroots democratic institutions in India following reservation of one-third seats at village and municipal level for women. In fact, right from the days of freedom struggle the Indian women have been consistently encouraged to take part in active politics. But due to the vitiated political milieu, resulting from increasing politicization and criminalisation of politics, the level of political participation of women has been adversely affected despite the fact that there has been a marked increase in the level of literacy and political awareness of women.

Different groups and political parties inside and out of Parliament have been opposing the proposed bill on reservations for women in Parliament and State legislatures. The article analyses reasons and rationale behind the opposition to the proposed legislation. The author28 (2001) traces the history of demand for women’s reservation before and after independence and evaluates the prospects of its success in face of the organised opposition from certain quarters. She suggests a change in the social mind set which happens to be most prominent stumbling block in this case.

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Development efforts, through successive Five Year Plans, have attributed a great deal towards commendable improvements in the women’s status. Even the community development programmes accorded an important role to the organisation of women, who constitute nearly half of our population, so that their participation in various rural development activities could be effectively ensured. The author\(^{29}\) (2002) considers that the provision of reservation for women in rural local institutes through the passage of 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment Act is a revolutionary step in this direction.

The author\(^{30}\) feels that with the statutory reservation provision, more than one million rural women have now assumed panchayat seats as members and one-third of them as chairpersons in almost all states and union territories. The induction of women in panchayat institutions is in sharp contrast to their representation in other political strata as well as in earlier institutions. But the very integration of women has evoked conflicting waves – elation, euphoria particularly in print and public pronouncements and apprehensions and even enmity in social and political parlance.

This empirical study assesses the social and political background of women members in one district West Bengal, evaluates various facets of their participation and role performance in panchayat institutions, ascertains the nature of their social acceptability and informs both the positive and negative aspects of reservation policy for women. The study has brought forth few exclusive and


absorbing features. Women members are not dummy or docile, their participation both at formal panchayat process and informal levels is no less exalting.

According to Rajeshwari (1996), Involvement of people at the grass root level has been considered as the most effective means through which economic development can meet aspirations of the people to ensure that the benefit really percolate down to the lowest strata of the society. Since the bulk of our population lives in villages, the main vocations of the people relate to the rural economy.

With the introduction of Panchayati Raj a new era in rural development is being transferred from the bureaucratic administration to the elected representatives of the people.

The government officials have to work along with and often under the direct control of the elected officials and at the same time provided them the necessary education and training. It has always been the feeling that Panchayati Raj Institutions are the most suitable agency for democratic decentralization which could be equipped with adequate powers and responsibilities so that they could formulate and implement programmes of economic development. Recognizing the importance of democratic institution at grass root level Panchayats at village level were established in 1961.

Women are considered an extremely pivotal point in the process of changes in rural areas. Women's participation in the decision making process. Women's participation proved to be the most effective instrument in bringing about a change in their way of life in terms of economics well being and adoption

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of new technology. Women's participation in grassroots democracy has widely been recognized.

However, the prevailing male-dominated power structure in villages is not ready to accept women as the chairperson of the Panchayats. This problem can be solved by persuading women to come forward to assume responsibilities. This requires special orientation camps for the rural elite. Further, women hailing from SC and ST categories may find it difficult to mix with representatives of general categories. To cope with the problem it is necessary to inculcate confidence among them and to bring attitudinal changes through training in the members of upper classes. Stern action should be taken against such persons who create communal feelings. Some female members feel awkward to sit with the other leaders and participate in the discussion though they had grasp of the subject under discussions.

While enlisting suggestions, the author feels that there is need for attitudinal changes among the male members in the families because it is they who can give their women a chance to take part in political activities. All women members of Panchayats and other executive bodies must be trained and empowered to exercise their authority. Particular attention must be paid to the development of inter-personal communication skills among the community leaders.

Efforts are required to elicit participation of women through establishing links between the elected representative and the development functionaries. Programmes meant for women's development should be linked with Panchayat
for more effective participation of women. The programmes of free univer-
education up to the age of 14 should be vigorously implemented. The course
studies should inculcate clues of gender equality, self-respect, coura-
and independence etc. which would help develop the personalities of women. It
necessary to spread legal literacy among elected representatives.

Emphasizing the need of policy of reservation for removing the gen-
discrimination in the present context, the author\(^{32}\) (1996) considers the passage
73\(^{rd}\) Amendment Act as a step in right direction. The authors ends with a note
optimism stating that if the participation of women at present is not encouragi-
it does not mean that the situation will not improve; in the next few years
things will change and we should not be discouraged by the present domination
male members in their official discharge of duties.

Krishnamurti (1996)\(^{33}\) considers the passage of 73\(^{rd}\) and 7
Constitutional Amendment Act of great historical importance. According to hi
three epoch making events of great historical and political significance took pit
in the twentieth century in India: the 1942 Quit India Movement under
leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the revolt against the Emergency in 1977 led
Jaya prakash Narain and the passing of the Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalika A
in 1992. The recent 73\(^{rd}\) and 74\(^{th}\) Constitutional Amendment Acts have be
welcomed as steps focusing the nation’s attention on the political structures at
the process of democratizing rural India and their significance for the vulneral

\(^{32}\) Guha, Sampa. Political Participation of Women in a Changing Society. Inter India. New De
1996.

\(^{33}\) Guha Sampa. Political Participation of Women in a Changing Society. Inter India. New De/
sections of the rural society. Women along with scheduled castes and scheduled tribes come under this classification. The role of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions is attracting a lot of serious attention in the present context.

Global power relations, national defence strategies or fiscal policies matter little to the average citizen. People in general and women in particular are more concerned with schooling, whether the village school teacher holds classes regularly, whether the primary health centres' nurses and doctors come regularly and medicines are available, adequate and accessible drinking water supply, proper sewage disposal, sanitation, mosquito control and other matters like land records which have a direct bearing on their everyday life.

Real and true devolution of power, giving power to the people, ensuring that power goes where it belongs, is the only way to pull the illiterate toiling masses out of the mire of abject poverty, sickness and superstition. Empowerment of women is nothing but harnessing the hitherto untapped Stri Sakthi that is waiting readily to shoulder the burden along with men in ushering local self-government. Given equal opportunity, women of this country will rise to the occasion, as they have shown their courage time and again, whether it be the Chipko or Apiko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, prohibition is Andhra Pradesh, women have proved they will deliver the goods. Society as a whole and men in particular will benefit if they are intelligent enough to share the responsibilities of good local self-government with the women of this land.

Commenting on the empowerment of women through the 73rd (Amendment) Act passed by the Indian Parliament in 1993, the author suggests that we have to go a long way before the actual benefits of the policy makers come true. This is because the social mindset of the people will have to be changed and it is a social revolution that will not occur overnight rather will take several years.

Subha (1994) argues that the National liberation movement and the effort of Mahatma Gandhi led to the emancipation of Indian women in the 20th century. India’s Independence and the adoption of the Constitution paved the way for the concretization of the ideals set forward by Mahatma Gandhi. The preamble of the constitution assures all citizens the equality of status and of opportunity to usher in justice – social, economic and political. The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy further strengthened this. Equality in the political set-up is guaranteed through the institution of adult franchise and Article 15 which prohibits any kind of discrimination. The starting of Social Welfare Boards in the Centre as well as in the states gave an impetus to women’s involvement in the task of restructuring our society.

It has been our contention in this study that equality in all spheres is inseparable from active political and integral to the whole problem in the progress of women. Without active and continuous participation of women at all levels of government and in grass – roots organizations including local party structures, equality in true sense will continue to remain deceptive. In addition, national

development will be more effective if every citizen, irrespective of being a man or
woman, has an active share in the entire nation. This is true at the grassroots level
as it is the most approachable unit for the common people.