

INTRODUCTION

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“As long as women in India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country, As long as women do not come to public life & purify it. We are not likely to attain Sawraj.”
- Mahatma Gandhi

Women represent half of the world. They have equal rights as men. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of the country, directly or through the freely chosen representatives. A proper representation of women in political affairs will ensure their views and needs reflected in public policies that affect their lives most.

Although, in India, there is a vast difference between ethics idealized concept of women and the real life situation in which all of them find themselves. In both the industrially advanced and less advanced countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of the many social, cultural and economic discriminatory practices and many a time women are taken for granted as though they were part of the immutable scheme of things established by nature.

A woman's biological and social reality has created several distinct roles for her in society that of wife, mother, daughter, homemaker worker, citizen etc. These multiple roles of women make several diverse demands on her time and energy. A majority of women especially those living in rural areas do not have a distinct identity and personality to call their own even in this day and age. This discrimination and oppression of Indian women is perpetuated in spite of the spread of education among women and their growing participation in social, economical and political life of the country. Biological psychology regards gender identity and role as arising from biological processes. Gender differences are seen as resulting from sex differences.

Today women in the Indian society have a degraded status because of the prevalence of multiple factors such as illiteracy, exploitation, unemployment, female infanticide, child marriage, dowry, prostitution, rape, widowhood, devadasi system, wife beating, purdah system etc all of which have prevented the Indian women from attaining greater heights. It must be remembered that women's status is not a just a matter of cultural and social history of traditions but it is basically rooted in the political and economic structure of our society which needs to be changed. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. (Report of National Resource Center for Women, 2006).

In India, discriminatory attitudes towards women have existed for generations and affects women over their lives. Although constitution of India has granted women equal rights but gender disparities remains. There are limited opportunities for women to access resources such as education, health care services and job opportunities to women as they decide the future of India. Women are disadvantaged at work, and are often underestimated for their capabilities. This has prevented Indian women from achieving a higher standard of living. Women are regarded as the “better half” of the society and at par with the men. But in reality, our society is still male dominated and women are not treated as equal partners both inside and outside the four walls of the house. In fact they are treated as weak and dependent on men. As such Indian women enjoy an unfavorable status in society.

Schedule tribe women in India

In general usage, the word 'tribe' is taken to denote a primary aggregate of people living in a primitive or barbarous condition under a headman or chief. The unnecessary moralistic overtones that this usage implies can be provided or minimized by the use of the expression 'tribal society', which is to be preferred to such synonyms as 'primitive society' or 'preliterate society'. At the same time, the word 'tribe' need not be discarded. Indeed it has become a technical term denoting a territorially defined political unit, a usage that recalls the original use of the word for the political division or patrician orders of the Roman State.

Tribals or adivasis, as they are popularly known as a symbol of self-assertion, comprise of around 8.2 percent of the national population (Buman 2012). The tribals are concentrated mostly in the central belt of India. They are for instance, depict as a preserve of culture and social life.

The general picture of female literacy in India is not encouraging at all but the still lower rates for Scheduled Tribal women are alarming. While the general female literacy increased from 24.8 percent in 1981 to 53.67 percent in 2001 (Rani, 2010), the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes is around 29.60 percent (1991), as against the national average of 52 percent. More than three-quarters of Scheduled Tribes women are illiterate. In year 2001 female literacy rate is 53.67 & tribal women consisted of 34.76 percent (Ministry of Tribal Affairs). One reason for such a paradox is that tribal women of the region for that matter of any other region are not a homogenous group although they are known by the general category 'tribal women'. It is important to remember that 'tribal women' are diverse ethnically, linguistically, geographically and also historically. Often progress made by middle class tribal

women is taken as an indication of their high position. But the ground reality is that the majority of them are found in rural areas where they are disadvantaged in terms of education, occupation etc. One may also note that women in tribal societies could be considered doubly disadvantaged, in the first instance as tribes and in the second, as women. The status of the tribal women usually depends on the economic roles they play. The tribals in the past were usually forest dwellers and their livelihood to a great extent depended on the food-gathering economy. More than the men, the women walked long distances to fetch wood and fodder. Besides, they also collected fruits, roots and tubers, lac, gums and leaves for self-consumption and sale. The men also complemented them by collecting timber and logs. They climbed the trees to shake down the fruits that were gathered on the ground by women. As there has been large scale deforestation, women have to slog harder to retain the gathering economy.

Tribal community have significant portion of their geographical area is under forest and uncultivable land leaving a small percentage for cultivation. Physioclimatic conditions have led to poor economic and social infra structural facilities. Lack of infra structural facilities hinder the growth of productive sectors. They have covered a long journey from subsistence economy to a competitive economy, from isolation to involvement in the local mainstream and from lawlessness to a law-abiding community. The traditional animistic religious beliefs of the tribal have been largely influenced and modified by the impact of Hindu sects (Bhasin, 2005).

The concept of women empowerment

The concept of empowerment has evolved from the crux of being underprivileged, deprived, neglected and vulnerable. Empower means “to invest with

legal power". Empowerment can be defined as a process or a mechanism by which people, organizations and community gain expertise over their efforts and involve themselves in the democratic processes of their community and employing institutions.

Empowerment is a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power within people to make their own choices without being influenced (by others as individual, group, community, external environment, etc). It is a result of participation in decision-making as well. Empowerment itself reflects substantial and mass violation of rights of women. However, women empowerment is a process, which enables women to realize their identity and power in all aspects of life. Over the past few years, all over the world efforts have been made to empower women through literacy, education and training, entrepreneurship development for economic freedom.

Empowerment as a multi level process of various dimensions and which includes individual involvement, organizational development and community change. Individual involvement refers to participation of a person in decision making. Community change refers to the interface between individual, community, resources and external factors that facilitates collective action, ultimately leading to community change. Thus, women's empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition at par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It involves the building up of a society where in women can breathe without the fear of

oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Empowerment is process, which helps people to gain control of their lives through raising awareness, taking action and working in order to exercise greater control. The common understanding of empowerment is context-sensitive. The people become aware about the structural forces that have relegated them into the more or less powerless position. It is not restricted to groups – individuals can be empowered as well but normally a group approach is formulated as, for example, the empowerment of the poor of women and so on. Raising awareness initiates process of empowerment. It restructures power relations at all levels – political, economical and social.

The Global conference on women's empowerment highlighted empowerment as the surest way of making women as "partners in development" and bringing them in the mainstream of development not only as mere "beneficiaries" but also as a "contributors". All over the world efforts are being made to empower women through education and training, health support and entrepreneurship development. At the fourth world conference on women in 1995, president of World Bank, James Walfenshon said "all the evidence tells us that not to empower women is a tragically missed opportunity not only to create a more just, but also a more prosperous society. Empowering women by the same token means ensuring their full participation in every aspect of development."

In India also empowerment strategy is today emerging as a unique response to the challenge of equality and development. Considering the importance of women's development the ninth plan has includes empowerment of women as one of its

objectives. Year 2001 has been declared as a “Women Empowerment Year” by UNO. The government has planned to create enabling environment for women to exercise their rights both within and outside home as equal partners along with men.

There may be different parameters of empowerment. The National Policy on Education has suggested certain strategies to empower women. Accordingly “women become empowered through collective reflections and decision making”. The parameters of empowerment are positive self image, thinking, group cohesion, decision making and economic development.

The empowerment of women occurs in reality. When women achieve increased control and participation in decision making that leads to their better access to resources and therefore, improved socio-economic status. The male domination of society and government are often seen engaged in the purpose of serving male interests and the continuous subordination of women. The experts also informed that there are five leaves of the women's empowerment framework, namely welfare, access, conscientisation, mobilization and control.

In nutshell, the present century the terms women empowerment, women welfare, gender justice have come to light in the social, economic and political development perspective of both developed and developing nations. Traditionally women in all most every society have remained a second grade citizen. Hence, neither they are allowed to get themselves educated nor they were given legal rights in the property, government and in administration.

Empowerment of women in all spheres and in particular the political sphere is crucial for their advancement and for the foundation of gender equal society. It is central to the goals

of equality, development and peace. The Indian democracy which is more than half a century old has entered the next century. But a large mass of women are kept out of political arena still. There can be no true democracy, or no true people's participation in governance and development without equal participation of men and women at different levels of decision making. Participation of women in political life is integral to the advancement of women.

Political empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity. Political empowerment denotes a distinct role for women in the formation of policies and influencing decision making process by integrating them into the political system. Participation is an essential ingredient of empowerment.

Empowerment represents sharing of control, the entitlement and the ability to participate, to influence decisions, as on the allocation of resources.

In view of women's participation in PRI, empowerment is the first foremost step. Once women become technically sound, they will be in a better position to play active role in decision making.

Democratic decentralization

"Decentralization of democracy will prevent centralization of power, and the state will be reduced to coordination of the activities of the other autonomous social institutions". So far democracy in India was confined to parliamentary democracy; it was elitist in nature, with muscle power, money power and caste playing a critical role in the elections. The change in the federal polity of the country that has taken place, as a result of the local bodies becoming constitutional entities, has far-reaching

consequences. Decentralization is the felt need everywhere. Gandhian decentralization is a process of limiting the power of the state as well as the creation of people's institution and processes. Decentralized institutions became an end in themselves because they guarantee non-violent participation as well as institutions for self- improvement. Gandhian decentralization means the creation of parallel politics in which people's power is institutionalized to counter the centralizing and alienating forces of the modern state. Decentralization process is supposed to promote local welfare, i.e., the welfare of local citizens. It would provide the training ground for future political leaders of the country, it is a means of transferring political responsibilities to address unresolved conflicts originating from regional and local issues and addressing local needs on the principle of subsidiary. Decentralization is an effective means of involving local people in improving the local delivery system of local public goods. It allows greater representation for various political, religious, ethnic, and tribal groups in decision making that can lead to greater equity in the allocation of government resources and investments.

Decentralization can lead to more flexible, innovative and creative administration. Regional units may have greater opportunities to innovate and to experiment with new policies and programmes in selected areas, without having to justify them for the whole country. If the experiments fail, their impacts are limited to small jurisdictions; if they succeed, they can be replicated in other areas of the country. Decentralization is no doubt a multi-dimensional concept. For a developing country like India, the possibility of alternative organizational structures with the incorporation of the peoples' sector into the existing mixed economic system needs to be explored. In this context people's self- governing institutions or the Panchayati Raj

System appear to be suitable.

Democratic decentralization is a "concept based on the recognition of the right of the people to initiate and execute the policy decisions in an autonomous way." It envisages people's participation as the foundation on which the whole edifice of local self government. Only by participation, people can feel the real taste of democracy. Therefore the concept of democratic decentralization is "liberal, democratic, political ideal-the concretized form of which is local self government." The term 'democracy' literally means the rule of the people. It is derived from two Greek words Demos (people) and Cratos (rule). Greek philosopher Cleon defined democracy as power of the people. The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will. In short, democracy implies that ultimate authority of government is vested in the common people so that public policy is made to conform to the will of the people and to serve the interests of the people. In that sense Democracy belongs to the sphere of collective decision making. It embodies that decisions, affecting an association as a whole, should be taken by all its members, and that they should each have equal rights to take part in such decisions. Democracy, in other words, entails popular control over collective decision making and equality of rights in exercising that control. Therefore, free and fair election, open and accountable government, civil and political rights etc are considered as the pre-requisites of democracy.

Democracy aims to treat all people equally. The principle of equality requires not only that people's interest should be attended equally by government policy, but also that their views should count equally. Democratic government is more likely

than other types of government to meet the needs of ordinary people. In modern era, democracy is considered as one of the best forms of government because it ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision making. Participation and control of governance is the essence of participatory democracy. Such participation is possible only when the powers of the state are decentralized to the district, block and village levels where people from all sections of society can sit together, discuss their problems and suggest solutions and execute as well as monitor the implementation of the programmes.

The term 'democratic decentralization' has thus been understood as a mechanism to transfer authority and responsibility from a higher political and administrative entity to the lower level political and administrative entities to ensure wider participation of people in the process of decision making, planning and implementation of programmes. It provides opportunity to people to participate directly in decision making processes. However, decentralization is not an end in itself, but it depends on the circumstances under which democratization occurs. Local self government is regarded as an integral part of democracy.

No democratic foundation will have sound footing without grass root involvement. Local self government is not only a form of administration but also a democratic way of life. Administratively it is accountable for efficient performance both upward and downward and politically it is responsible downward, with the recognition of the right of the local people to have government of their own choice. Panchayati Raj Institutions were conceived by the Constitution of India as bedrock of self governance. Endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be

necessary to enable them to function as institution of self-government and to prepare plans for economic development and social justice and their implementation including those in relation to the matters listed in the 11th schedule.

Thus we see the institution of Panchayati Raj is essentially meant for enriching the processes of democratic decentralization. It expands the scope of social and political participation, which in turn makes the system more accessible to the people. It makes the system more accountable, responsive and transparent. This happens largely by virtue of its location, as it is closest to the people. It enables people to articulate their needs and demand so that they be addressed, at the local level. It gives an opportunity to ordinary citizens to learn how to operate in the public domain and practice the art of collective decision making without resorting to intimidation and violence and functions as a nursery for upcoming leadership, which eventually nurtures and prepares leaders for higher level of institutions.

It is being recognized by both developed and developing countries that local self government is desirable not only for the service it renders to the community, but also for the opportunities it offers to men and women to enjoy an active participation in the governance and, in the process to develop responsibilities at the grass root level.

Concept of Panchayati Raj Institution

The "Panchayati Raj" is the oldest system of local government in the Indian subcontinent. The word "Panchayat" literally means "assembly" (ayat) of five (panch) wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community. However, there are different forms of assemblies. Traditionally, these assemblies settled

disputes between individuals and villages. Modern Indian government has decentralized several administrative functions to the local level, empowering elected Gram Panchayats. Gram Panchayats are not to be confused with the unelected caste Panchayats found in some parts of India.

Panchayati Raj system is a three-tier system in the state with elected bodies at the Village, Panchayat and District levels. India has a chequered history of Panchayati Raj starting from a self-sufficient and self-governing village communities that survived the rise and fall of empires in the past to the modern legalized institutions of governance at the third tier provided with Constitutional support.

Panchayati Raj system was started in India on the recommendation of Balwantrai Mehta committee in 1959. It is a system of decentralization and participation of people in developmental efforts. In Rajasthan it was first introduced on 2nd October, 1959 and then it was followed by other states. The introduction of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan led to the creation of three tier system *i.e.* village level, block level and district level.

At the village level Gram Panchayat is the primary and basic unit of this institutional framework Panchayat being an elected body works on people's support and acts under their control. They are agencies for executing and implementing developmental programmes at the village level. "Sarpanch" is the head of Panchayat and ward panch are the subordinators.

At the block level, Panchayat Samiti constitutes the intermediate tier. It has been considered the focal point of PRI. It generally consists of the Sarpanchas of the Panchayat within the Samiti's jurisdiction. Reservation is provided for women and

scheduled castes. They have been entrusted with the execution of developmental work in their jurisdiction and have been made responsible for the area planning. The chairman of Panchayat Samiti is known as "Pradhan".

Third tier is at district level, known as Zila Parishad. It consists of representatives of the Panchayat samitis and some representatives of the weaker sections. Head of Zila Parishad is designated as "Zila Pramukh".

The importance of Panchayati Raj should be obvious in a country where four, out of every five citizens, live in the village and where the incidence of poverty is much higher than in towns. With the introduction of Panchayati Raj there has been complete transformation of the role of Village Panchayat with which rests the basic responsibility of planning and execution of rural welfare programmes at the village level under the guidance of Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad.

Gram Sabha is one of the basic and important a general body of Panchayati Raj system of all the voters residing in the jurisdiction of Gram Panchayat which extends over one village or group of villages. It has a crucial role in making democratic decentralization complete. In Rajasthan Gram Sabha is a statutory body. Gram Sabha generally meets minimum twice a year. It discusses the budget of the Panchayat, the administrative report and the developmental works to be under taken in its area. The Gram Panchayat is a statutory body covering one or more villages with an average population varying 1000 to 3000. It is an executive body consisting of all the members directly elected by the people of that rural area. The number of members varies from 5 to 31. Reservation for women and for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes is provided.

The elections are held by a secret ballot paper in all states except Jammu and Kashmir. All adult residents of the village above the age of eighteen years and whose names have been enrolled for the election of legislatures are eligible for casting the vote.

The Present Stage of PRI

The present stage in the evolution of the democratic decentralisation has come with the passing of 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment Acts, 1992. It is said to be a landmark in the history of local self-government institutions in India. The Acts wanted the Panchayati Raj bodies to be genuine and effective democratic and decentralized institutions, which provide ample opportunities for a large number of rural people to participate actively in the process of development and democratic decision-making and to infuse in the minds of the rural people a spirit of self-help, self-dependence and self-reliance and to obtain the experience in the art of self-government. It has provided a new dimension to the concept of Panchayat Raj. Now the concept of Panchayati Raj has come to be accepted an extension of democracy down to the remotest villages.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts provides constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions throughout the country. The Acts provide for two types of provisions. *i.e.* mandatory as well as discretionary. The mandatory provisions aim at the establishment of local self-government institutions with a uniform structure for the whole country and the states have no option other than to comply with its provisions as reservation of seats, Gram Sabha, Finance Commission, Election Commission etc. are to be adopted throughout the country. The discretionary provisions were left to the states to be enacted according to their needs and local situation.

Before going deep into the salient features of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, it is necessary to have an idea about the fundamental changes that these acts visualized as regards the local self-governing institutions.

- From mere Directive Principles Panchayati Raj and Nagarapalika institutions have been transformed into indispensable and indivisible units of local self-governance. These acts visualize the establishment of Gram Sabha in which the direct participation voters is ensured.
- Henceforth Panchayat and municipal elections shall be held periodically. In case of dissolution of these bodies under any circumstances, the state governments are bound to conduct elections within a period of six months
- The reservation of one-third of seats and offices of chairperson for women in Panchayati Raj institutions is a path-breaking step in the administrative history of India. From the year of 2009 reservation of women has been extended up to 50 percent.
- Local self-government institutions shall receive the funds allotted by the Finance Commission appointed by the state government.
- The Acts set apart powers on 29 subjects to Panchayats and Municipalities

Major Features of the Constitution (Seventy Third Amendments) Act

Constitution Amendment Act envisages the establishment of Panchayats as units of local self government. Adequate powers and responsibilities would be devolved upon these Panchayats at the appropriate level to enable them to prepare and implement schemes for economic development and social justice.

- The Act provides for a compulsory three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj system in all states except where the population does not exceed 20 Lakhs. These are panchayats at the village, intermediary and district levels. The composition and number of members of these bodies will be determined by a law passed by the state legislature.
- In all states there shall be a Gram Sabha for each village or group of villages comprising of all the adult members registered as voters in the Panchayat area. The Panchayat will be accountable to the Gram Sabha. The powers and functions of the Gram Sabha shall be assigned by a law passed by the state legislatures respectively.
- All the members of the three levels of Panchayats shall be chosen by direct election from territorial constituency's denoted.
- Every Panchayat committee shall have a uniform five-year term and elections to constitute new bodies shall be completed before the expiry of the term. In the event of dissolution, elections will compulsorily be held within six months. The reconstituted Panchayat will serve for the remaining period of the five-year term.
- The direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of all elections in the Panchayats shall be vested with the State Election Commission to be constituted by the state concerned.
- One-third of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women. One -third of the seats reserved for ST and SC will also be reserved for women belonging to the respective category. These seats may be allotted by rotation to different

constituencies in a Panchayat. Similar reservations have been made in respect of offices of chairperson also.

- The government should ensure the appointment of a Finance Commission to review the financial condition of Panchayats and make suitable recommendations regarding the allotment of funds to the local bodies.
- A new schedule called the Eleventh Schedule comprising 29 items has been added to the constitution, which ought to provide an effective role to the Panchayati Raj institutions in the planning and implementation of works of great significance ranging from drinking water, agriculture, land and water conservation to communication, poverty alleviation programmes, family welfare, education, libraries and cultural activities, maintenance of community assets etc.

Panchayati Raj bodies shall prepare plans for economic development, social justice and social welfare in respect of 29 subjects enumerated in the Eleventh Schedule. Thus the evolution of Panchayati Raj in India took more than a century to reach the concept of institutions of local self-government in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts from the idea of 'Local government' of Lord Rippon in the year 1882."

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has given a new dimension to the process of women's empowerment in India. Apart from one-third reservation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution, the act has given constitutional powers and responsibilities for a range of issues including resource management, family planning, education and health.

Functions of Panchayat

The Gram Panchayat has been entrusted with a wide range of activities covering rural development and welfare of villagers. In some places they also look after primary education, maintenance of village records and collection of revenues. The Gram Panchayat also elected representatives to Panchayat Samiti and responsible for implementation of developmental programmes at village level.

Resources of Panchayat

The main resources of Panchayat are as follows:

1. Fees and charges imposed
2. Income from property, investment and remunerative
3. Assistance received from state governments
4. Public contribution
5. Assistance received from developmental departments
6. Taxes that are permitted to be levied in different states by the Village Panchayat like house tax, vehicle tax, etc

Powers of Gram Sabha

Gram Sabha is a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village or a group of villages which elect a Panchayat. A vibrant and enlightened Gram Sabha is central to the success of the Panchayati Raj system.

The Central Act says that while endowing Panchayat in the Scheduled Area with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government, a state legislature shall ensure that the Panchayat at

the appropriate level and the Gram Sabha are endowed specifically with the following,

- Power to enforce prohibition or to regulate the sale and consumption of any intoxicant
- Ownership of minor forest product.
- Prevent alienation of land in the Scheduled Areas and to take appropriate action to restore any unlawfully alienated land of Scheduled Tribes.
- Managing village markets
- Money lending to the Scheduled Tribes
- Exercise control over institution and functionaries in all social sectors
- Control over local plans and resources.

The Extension Act was evolved with the purpose that the Gram Sabha would invariably be given approval and sanctioning powers in all matters pertaining to tribal society and economy and the Panchayats at different levels would merely execute the decisions taken by the Gram Sabha.

Tribal women and Panchayati Raj Institution

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act aimed at transforming the structure and pattern to Panchayati Raj system by inserting a new part (part xi) in the Constitution. The new system has been given a constitutional status and by which it has got permanence in the Indian political system as a third government. It has a three tier structural arrangement; this new system has been vested with the power of taking decisions on twenty nine subjects listed in the 11th schedule. One of the important

aspects of the 73rd Amendment, which is relevant to this study, is reservation of seats for women and tribal community. The Panchayati Raj election has a great significance in Indian political system as it spreads the sense of involvement of people in democratic process at local level. In Panchayati Raj election rural population can participate as voter, campaigner and candidate without having high level of experience. In the earlier Panchayati Raj system women did not have much space. The provision of co-option system recommended in Balawanta Rai Mehta Committee and Ashok Mehta Committee did not leave scope for women to acquire adequate power and authority to perform actively in the PRI. They were utilized as rubber stamp members and could not really participate in decision making process. In 1993 the 73rd Amendment Act was passed and declared 33% reservation of seats for women in PRI. Through the implementation of reservation policy in Panchayats, women have got an opportunity to raise their presence and voice their opinion in PRI. A large number of women and especially tribal women entered in PRI as elected representatives in post 73rd Amendment phase.

At national level, after the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act was implemented about one million women entered in the first elections of Panchayats. About 40% of women got elected and got the opportunity to represent the marginalized sections of our society. In general, elected women are fast making a place in Panchayats all over India. The 73rd Amendment Act 1992 has certainly changed the situation of tribal women and ensured their adequate representation at different levels of Panchayati Raj institutions. Women have shown remarkable maturity which has closely aligned them with the mainstream. The situation can become better over a period of time with men changing their mind set.

The need for building up women power as visualized by Mahatma Gandhi is being more strongly felt today than ever before. Government action for women's equality can be neither effective nor adequate unless women themselves become more aware of their rights and the corresponding responsibilities. Despite their numerical strength women occupy a marginalized position in society and their role in political structure has virtually remained limited. They are still left on the periphery of political system. The participation of women in the Panchayati Raj is considered essential not only for ensuring political participation in the democratic process but also for rising developmental goals for women. The committee on the Panchayati Raj institutions (1978) recommended the reservation of two seats for women in Panchayats or two co-opt women in case they do not come through elections. It was also suggested that a committee of women be set-up within Panchayat to operate specific programmes for women and children.

Impact of participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions

The presence and participation of tribal women in Panchayati raj institutions have brought about a formidable change in their position within the tribal social organization, as well as in the overall hierarchical structure of the Indian society leading towards their empowerment. This has been the result of the enactment of Panchayati Raj Act (1992), which provided for one-third representation to women in Panchayats including those belonging to the Scheduled Tribes.

The history of tribal people suggests their continuous exploitation and marginalization. The tribal people remained at the periphery of the wider political system and kept their women marginal to their own tribal polity. In certain places, especially where the tribal were in a majority, they established their authority and

rule. But women played a limited role in the tribal political institutions. In other regions, where their strength was less and their interaction with the non-tribals greater, they adopted ways and means to improve their status.

Unlike in many other communities, tribal women are considered indispensable, especially for the role they play in the socio-economic life. There is a difference of values related to morality regarding sex and sexuality and much lesser degree of stigma attached among the tribals. A woman's entry into Panchayat is similarly not opposed, at least not for the similar reasons. Among the tribals, besides the difference in value system, there is an additional factor that it brings their family and community a status and respect, of which they were long denied. The men belonging to the higher castes, on the other hand may perceive women's entry by 'allowing' them to keep the seats safe for them.

The tribals on the whole have been usually looked down upon as 'backward' ignorant and illiterate people who should be 'developed' so to make them a part of the 'mainstream'. It is well known by now that the tribals are not only the preservers of natural resources and knowledge base, but are also placed higher on what are regarded as the indicators of development like the sex-ratio and the age at marriage. On the contrary, the inroads made by the process of development have led to their exploitation and harassment. Introduction of alien culture, values and perception not accompanied by awareness, knowledge or education has added.

This control of the situation by the non-tribals over the years, and the constant increase in their numbers has left the tribals ignorant and unaware, except the very few ones. The Panchayati Raj Act and extension Act therefore, could generate a backlash on the one hand, and give opportunity to find a loophole by the outsiders.

With the participation of women in PRI, interpersonal relations within their families have changed for the better and this political process has heightened women's perceptions of their own capabilities. Even much marginalized women have taken participation further to become activists despite constraints like illiteracy, lack of experience, family responsibilities, restrictive social norms, lack of enabling environment and violence. Participation of women in the village based formal and informal organization has thus made significant changes in their social status as well as their position within the family. Furthermore participation of women in these organizations is a clear indication of a change in the traditional norms which restricted free movements of female members in society for social and political activities.

The fact that women do play pivotal role in the development of society and nation has been widely recognized now. Various studies conducted in the country also reveal and support that Indian women, more especially rural women, play multifarious socio-economic roles inside as well as outside the home. Therefore participation of rural women in any developmental programme is must.

The objective of bringing improvement in the socio economic condition of women and tribal women could be successful only by taking suitable initiatives and measures for empowering them. Empowerment of women will not be possible unless they are provided proper representation in the political system. This objective should be achieved at desired level through making the provision of linking and associating maximum number of women in political affairs even at the lowest level of political activity. Panchayati Raj system brings a thought of important approach to maximize women participation at local level and makes improvement among them on various aspects as:

Gram Sabha and women empowerment

Gram Sabha implying the practicability of women empowerment through their participatory roles in Gram Sabha. The significance of this aspect is that it blends the governmental effort on the one side and women's willingness on the other side. The government on its pan provides a structural and legal framework and if the womenfolk on their part are willing enough to make use of this mechanism, their empowerment is a foregone conclusion.

Gram Sabha which is the legitimized body meant for ensuring the direct participation of the people in the process of decision-making at their own door steps. It develops parliamentary skills, social awareness and personality traits through their participation in the meetings of Gram Sabha. Exposure to criticism and the world at large tests the strength of one's character and provides scope for development and enlightenment. By the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the government elevated the institution of Gram Sabha into a constitutional body that provides the entire citizenry vast opportunities for political participation.

Decentralization and women empowerment

Democratic decentralization is a form of governance that expands participation of subordinate groups and is responsive to their interest. It is critical for women as a subordinated group not only because of the proximity of local government to the lives of ordinary women but because the lack of democracy in gender relations excludes them from participation in governance and the consideration of their interest in the business of governmental decision making. Equality of opportunity cannot be achieved as there are obstacles in the social

system. Decentralization with affirmative action was accepted as a means towards gender equity and political empowerment.

Political participation and women empowerment

It is envisaged that despite governmental intervention and encouragement, no section can attain empowerment without conscious effort and willingness on their part too. Empowerment in the true sense should come more from within than from without. Until and unless women are sensitized and made equal partners in the political process, empowerment and gender-equality will remain a far cry. Participation at different levels of political processes sharpens the intellect and enlightens the views and attitudes of women. It awakens the latent powers in them and offers scope for their full expression which will naturally contribute to the upliftment and reformation of entire society of which women constitute half the strength.

When women participate in public life on their own, thoughts and language get polished and sharpened which will improve the quality of their political and social behavior. It is a generally accepted fact that only by participation and involvement in the political institutions that one can obtain first hand information regarding the nature, functioning and utility of such bodies. Civic virtues like tolerance, patience, broadmindedness etc. is born of participation in political life.

Reservation and women empowerment

The idea of reservation empowerment, which provides a royal road to women's enlightenment and enhanced political participation, comes first. The significance of this level of empowerment is that it is initiated from the part of the

state. State wants to uphold the status of women and empower them by offering reservation of seats in representative bodies of administration.

This aspect of empowerment has been assessed only by taking into account the ideal of democracy in the sense of ensuring empowerment and enlightenment to all sections of society especially women who, in spite of their numerical strength have had traditionally little say in the running of the political and administrative establishments of the country.

Weaker sections always need crutches like the handicapped in their march to equality and an egalitarian society. The experience in the Panchayati Raj institutions has given an impetus to the cause of reservation at all levels for women, SC and ST. The effective and ingenious methods of administration adopted by elected women Panchayat members at various levels have proved beyond doubt the correctness of governmental decision to reserve seats for women in local self-government institutions.

The provision of reservations is the part of efforts to bring the women in active politics. The reservations will provide the opportunity for women candidates to understand and solve the local problems. The local self government has to deal with local problems. These problems are related with day to day life of people. The problems of village are supposed to be solved at village level. Thus local self government is an important part of life of people. The women can understand the problems more sensitively. The problems related to the unemployment, drinking water, roads, electricity, schools and health can be solved by women with greater priority. The other problems especially related to women like domestic violence, malnutrition, maternal mortality etc. can be tackled by sincerity by women candidates.

The women can change the face of Indian democracy. The progress of local units will surely accelerated due to responsible women candidate. The positive effects of reservations will change the dynamics of politics.

Decision making and women empowerment

Indian society is male dominated. Generally, male leadership dominates the process of decision making. The women's participation in this decision making process currently is negligible. Reservation will surely provide the platform for women to decide and generate the policies for welfare.

The opportunity to participate and represent is the real gift of this quota system. The reservations are significant in our democracy. When the reservations for women were introduced in 1993, the benefits of reservations are enjoyed by male candidates as women are used as just rubber-stamps. The women also entered politics as a need of their family. But now the situation is changing. The educated women candidate are using the political opportunity to serve society .They are enjoying the pride to be a representative of people in democratic country. The women candidates are more aware of their role in urban area. But in rural areas, women candidates are still dominated by males.

Justification of the study

Women are changing governance in India. They are being elected to local councils in unprecedented numbers as a result of amendments to the constitution, which mandate the reservation of seats for women. Approximately all women have an opportunity be elected as representatives in different levels of PRI in India. In Rajasthan, there are about 39,463 women representatives working in Panchayati Raj

(Khanna 2005). Bringing these women into politics was an act of positive discrimination. It was the pressure of law, combined with the political imperative of winning elections and participation that changed political parties perception of women's limited capacity for public office. But crucially, PRI has helped to change women's perceptions of themselves.

Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73rd Constitutional Amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantage section of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women.

Women in PRI as rural women face certain problems in the discharge of their responsibilities even they are not able to participate in the PRI. Besides the traditional barriers to women's role in public life, there is prejudice and lack of cooperation on the part of male colleagues in the PRI as well as the government machinery, often caste and other form of discrimination act as an added dimension to the problems.

Women have to improve themselves through education, take an interest in public and social affairs and become popular leaders themselves, if they have to perform active role in PRI. It is imperative that they come up by their own merit and not with the help of their male relatives. Only then, they can stand up for the problems of the people in general and of women in particular.

The sheer number of women that PRI has brought into the political system has made a difference. The percentages of women at various levels of political activity have shifted dramatically as a result of the constitutional change, from 4-5 percent before to 25-40 percent after. This difference is also qualitative, because these women

are bringing their experience in the governance of civic society. In this way they are making the state sensitive to the issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. Now there is need to identify these differences in qualitative terms as knowledge gained, level of participation, women's perception and role.

With a view to provide participation in developmental process of democratization, 73rd constitutional amendment came into existence. It advocates for the participation of women in political process of the country, to enhance their empowerment and making them an active partner in the part and parcel of political process. Empowerment and participation both are essential phenomena of the all-round development of women. Panchayati Raj institutions are providing participation and empowerment to the countrywomen. In rural sector, Panchayati Raj institutions are already working towards women's empowerment by reserving not less than one third of total numbers of posts of members and chairpersons at all three levels.

As the panchayat have been functioning actively for the few decades, it is interesting as well useful to know as how the women representatives perceive and perform the role of panchayat related to their function, resources, constitution, and responsibility. With this, it is also necessary to determine the achievements made by the women members, and also to find out the problems faced by them. Thus the present study has been planned on the "Empowerment of Tribal Women through Panchayati Raj Institution".

A constant feedback with respect to implementation of PR act is necessary to strengthen the programme and to provide more benefits to the people. Besides it also helps us in ensuring that system is being executed properly and that the means as employed for its execution are adequate and appropriate. Keeping this in view an

effort was made to find out the status of empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institution of EWR and NEWR. So that the clear picture of the existing status and its functioning will be traced out. The specific objectives of the research study are as follows:

Objectives of the study:

- 1- To study the demographic profile of elected and non-elected tribal women members of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- 2- To measure the knowledge of the elected and non-elected tribal women members about different parameters of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- 3- To study the association between the demographic profile and knowledge of elected and non-elected tribal women members of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- 4- To find out the participation of elected and non-elected tribal women members in decision making process of Gram Sabha.
- 5- To study the role perception and performance of elected women representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- 6- To determine the achievements made by the elected tribal women members for development of their village.
- 7- To study the constraints faced by elected and non-elected tribal women members in village Panchayat.

Hypotheses

Knowledge of elected and non-elected tribal women is independent of their demographic profile.

Implication of the study

The present study will be of some great significance as it is one of the few studies that attempt at linking gender issue with that of local governance. The study gains further importance due to the fact that it is a comparative study of two similar, neighboring Countries and yet encrusted with significant differentials. As far as women at the grassroots are concerned, the study intends to give a new perspective on the prevalent notions of 'women are not interested in politics, women do not have the qualities and capacities to run local governing bodies, that the really marginalized women will not be able to benefit from the new set of arrangements since the upper caste/class women will usurp all the new forms of devolved power, etc. The study will be extremely relevant in the growth of some comprehensive models and encourage further research within academia as well as the voluntary sector. Some of the significant features are noted below:

- To provide suggestions for the effective performance of both men and women as political leaders by understanding the constraints as well conducive factors in the process
- To bring out the needs and requirements of men and women leaders and suggest necessary measures
- To analyze the need of reservation to involve a large number of women in decision making institutions at the local government level
- To focus on the change in attitudes and opinions of the people at large about

women from one of hostility and underestimation to reconciliation and trust.

- This study will enhance and develop fuller understanding of women's perception about the role of Panchayat at grass root level.
- It will be a valuable piece of work for those who is interested in the effective working of democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj institution.
- The study will provide guideline for officials and non-officials both who are working under democratic decentralization set up. This study will also be helpful to those students who are interested in the study of Gram Panchayat as their future research project.

Delimitation of the study

- The study was limited to the EWR and NEWR of Girwa and Kherwada Panchayat Samiti of Udaipur district.
- The study was restricted to those EWR elected under the period of 2005-2010.