Chapter-I

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Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to study the effectiveness of the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In particular, the thesis focuses on the participation of Dalit women of Kalahandi district in Orissa, as they have got reservations to enter into the PRIs through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.

Empowerment of women has been a subject of discussion in the contemporary world. So what does this empowerment mean? Empowerment occurs when someone who did not have power earlier is given power- and this power makes the person who is empowered experience a sense of ownership and control over resources. Empowered individuals must be made to realise that their jobs belong to them. Given a say, the empowered must feel responsible. When they feel responsible, they show more initiative in their work, get more work done, and enjoy the work more. Empowerment is facilitated by a combination of factors, including values, leadership actions, job structures and the rewards system.¹

Thus, women’s empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par-with men, to participate as a partner with human dignity in the development process of the society through the political institutions.² Empowerment of women in the lowest level political institutions

aims at enhancing their ability in the decision-making process. It implies their participation beginning from voting to holding office and thereby sharing power to effectively influence policy formation.3

In all the countries of the world that claim to be democracies, women have enjoyed decades of formal equality, sharing with men the right to vote, to contest in elections and to compete for any political office in the land4. Their participation in voting is now much the same as men. Regardless of the date at which women won their rights (ranging from 1902 in Australia, 1909 in West Germany, 1920 in the USA, 1928 in the UK, to the much delayed 1971 in Switzerland), there has been a marked consistency in the figures for female participation in national and local politics. The figure of women in legislative bodies is something between 2 to 8 per cent (except for Scandinavia).

In India, although some prominent women are in the forefront of Indian politics like Sonia Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee and Mayawati, the participation of women in governance is very small and their presence in the political system is insignificant. This not withstanding the fact that gender equality and political rights are enshrined in the Constitution5. As far as the participation of women in the political arena is concerned, a number of constraints like poverty, illiteracy, economic dependence on men, and the restrictions imposed by socio-religious institutions have severely limited their participation. The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in its landmark report “Towards Equality”

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(1974) had also said, “The review of the disabilities and constraints on women, which stem from the socio-cultural institutions, indicates that the majority of women are still very far from enjoying the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the constitution....”\(^6\) On the whole, the report argued that greater opportunities needed to be given to women to actively promote their participation in the decision-making process and to recognize the social inequalities and disabilities that hamper them. It therefore, recommended the establishment of statutory women’s panchayats at the local level to ensure their greater participation in the political process. Until the reservation of 33 per cent seats for women in local government bodies came into being in 1992, the gender bias pervaded all levels of governance in India.

So far as the reservation of women in the national and state legislatures is concerned, there is no unanimity on that among women’s groups. There is growing consensus that representation in decision-making is fundamental for women’s development but disagreement about the way of doing it. Due to constant pressure from both women in panchayats and women within political parties, the Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996 was tabled by the government to provide 33 percent reservations for women in national and state legislatures. This Women’s Reservation Bill (WRB) has been listed for debate in every session of parliament since its introduction in 1996, but a handful of leaders have stalled it each time. A slightly modified version of the Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1999, was introduced on 23 December 1999, but no discussion was allowed. Although all the major political parties support women’s quotas in their election manifestos, till date this reservation bill is waiting to be

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passed. The most vocal opponents are small but powerful parties like the Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD), Samata Party, Samajwadi Party (SP), and Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP). They argue that elite upper-caste women will monopolize reserved seats because they are better educated. Even the most strident opposition to women’s quotas has come from male politicians who fear that their political careers would be put at risk. Some of them worry that women’s reservations will dilute the lower-caste challenge to upper-caste domination. According to them, women’s quotas are a means to re-establish the monopoly of the upper-castes because they will corner the benefits of quotas.\(^7\)

“However, any system of representation which consistently excludes the voices of the women is not just unfair; it does not begin to count as representation”.\(^8\) To quote V.I Lenin, “But you cannot draw the masses into politics without drawing the women into politics as well. For, the female half of the human race is doubly oppressed under capitalism..... {and} in “household bondage”\(^9\). Therefore, Reservation is necessary to expand equality of opportunity and to make real the formal equality given by the constitution.

In this context, the researcher has tried to study the impact of reservations for women in the PRIs to see their effect on the status of women. A study of this sort can help us to take a position with regard to reservation for women in the national and state legislatures. The Constitutional 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment Act, 1992, assumes special significance for women with the provision of one-third

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\(^7\) Zoya Hasan, op.cit, p. 417.
\(^8\) A. Phillips, op.cit. p. 63.
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representation to women in general category, and even to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) women in the scheduled category.

The role of women in PRIs is the subject of discussion in the contemporary context. The promises and possibilities held out by the reservation of women in these institutions are being reiterated by the bureaucrats, academicians, activists and even the doyens of the women’s movement at various fora all over the country. Many studies have been undertaken on the impact of reservation for women in PRIs. According to a few studies they have been doing a fine job; however, most of these studies have concluded that usually these women are merely proxy candidates with the male members actually wielding the real power.

K Jayalakshmi\(^1\) in her empirical study conducted in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh on all women panchayats, found that the women representatives were able to identify the village needs and assist each other in accomplishing them. To a great extent these women have made efforts to gain the confidence of all sections of the village. They abide by the rules and follow procedures pertaining to the functioning of the panchayat. In another case of Susama Mahajan, Pradhan of Dohab Panchayat, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh, even if her husband offered advice and guided her occasionally, she grew out of the traditional role of being confined, to taking decisions within her household and made the quantum leap to address the developmental needs of her community.\(^11\)

In another case, the achievement of Urmila Yadav, a widow Sarapanch of Kosli, Haryana is noteworthy. Yadav’s accomplishments include getting encroached

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panchayat land vacated. Further she negotiated soft loans and built a market complex that generated additional revenue for panchayat. Another notable achievement of her tenure was the provision of safe drinking water, minimising the incidents of water-borne diseases. Another case is of Bhikhi Devi, Sarapanch of Bait Block of Barmer District, Rajasthan. The quality of work carried out under her leadership set her panchayat apart and was recognised by the Zilla Parishad (ZP) officials. She was awarded by the National Commission of Women on March 8, International Women’s Day. However, many studies like that of Neera Agnimitra (1996), Dilip K. Ghosh (1997), Lokesh K. Prashad (1999), O.P Bohra (1997), A. Rajeswari (1996), etc. have concluded that usually these women are merely proxy candidates and the male members actually exercise the real power.

In this context, when the participation of women in general in panchayats is so low, the participation of Dalit women of Kalahandi, one of the backward districts of Orissa, one of the backward states of the Indian Union is simply unthinkable. Because Kalahandi district is famous for its utter backwardness, poverty and illiteracy. And so far as the Dalits are concerned, they are still economically and socially not independent. To think about the condition of the Dalit women of Kalahandi is therefore important. Therefore, Kalahandi district has been chosen as an area of case study to examine and evaluate the true nature of Dalit women’s empowerment at the Panchayat level.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Panchayati Raj was Gandhiji’s dream for India. Under his influence, establishment of panchayats at the village level as one of the goals was

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incorporated in the Indian Constitution. The constitutional provision states: the State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local self government (Article 40, in Part-IV- Directive Principles of State Policy). So efforts were made to set up panchayats at village level through various legislations in all States and Union Territories in the early years of independence.

Panchayati Raj Institution launched on 2 October 1959 (Rajasthan) was conceived as a vehicle through which people, from all sections of rural society, would be able to work collectively to solve their problems. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime Minister of India, while inaugurating the Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan had said, "Everybody should be considered equal in our panchayats and there should be no discrimination between men/women and high/low". However, these noble thoughts could not be realised. The divide between socio-economically dominant people and weaker sections in rural society continued.

Generally the power structure in Gram Panchayats is in favour of the upper castes and locally dominant castes in the society. The emergence of such type of power structure not only defeats the basic implications of democratic decentralisation but also the aim of rural development with social justice. In this context, reservation provides a scope for women and for the members of SC and ST communities to participate in the panchayats.

The Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957), being aware of the socio-economic disparity in our rural society, had made provisions for co-opting from

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SCs and STs. Following this, most of the states made provisions for co-opting some members from these communities. Despite these provisions, weaker sections could not get adequate representation in PRIs. For the women, the Committee recommended co-option of two female members, at the Panchayat Samiti (P.S) and village Panchayat levels. Maharashtra in 1961 provided the nominations of two women and subsequently Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh gave reservation to women in Panchayats in 1985 and 1986 respectively.

The Co-option as a principle, however, was highly questionable both in theory and practice. Not merely is it undemocratic but also smacks of protectionism as if women are weaker and incapable of fighting the elections. In practice, the co-option or nomination had meant sheer patronage of the dominant political or social group and the women who got nominated had practically no information on panchayats nor any experience in working for women and children; they were not expected to either. The women’s representation became one of tokenism and proxy and ended as a near total failure. Therefore, there was a great demand for reservation for women in panchayats to make the formal equality given by the Indian constitution real.

The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, which came into effect on 24 April 1993, aims at decentralising power and removing gender imbalances and bias in the institutions of local self government. Article 243 (D) makes provision for reservation of SCs and STs in every Panchayat in proportion to their population in that area. Such seats will be filled by direct election and shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies. Not less than one-third of the total

number of seats so reserved shall be reserved for women belonging to SC and ST. Besides, not less than one-third of the total number of seats (including the seats reserved for SC/ST women) to be filled by direct election shall also be reserved for women and allotted by rotation. The office of the chairpersons in the panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for SC, ST categories and women in such manner as the legislature of the state by law may provide.\textsuperscript{16}

In Indian democracy, however, the participation of women, ensured by statutory provisions, is formal or "de jure". A mass of the rural women spends most of their time in meeting the basic requirements of the family. They have little or no time for political activities of any kind. Their low status in the society, low level of literacy and awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities, and ignorance of the purposes and procedures of PRIs, account for their low level of participation. There is no dearth of dynamism or leadership qualities among rural women, nor is it true that they are unaware of their own need for development. Their subordinate status and culturally imposed constraints have made them indifferent and fearful in taking part in public affairs. They have been discouraged by traditional taboos, bullied and used as proxies of men.

Thus, the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment Act is a significant step in the political history of independence India. The Act not only aims at the remedy of the constitutional and legislative weaknesses which had impeded the participation of women in the political process at the grassroots level, but also offers an opportunity to women, especially the weakest of them to make an impact on the

policy, planning and programme administration. The Act is being viewed as a panacea for all the ills facing the Indian womanhood.\(^\text{17}\)

**ORISSA**

Orissa is the first state in the country to reserve thirty three percent of seats for women in Panchayati Raj election.\(^\text{18}\) It has been implemented since the Panchayat election, 1992. However, the pervasive patriarchal culture of Orissa society had restrained the political leaders in inducting women to the PRIs. Rural women in the state operate within the parameters determined by tradition where their economic interdependence or political participation is not entertained. When the amended Gram Panchayat Act, 1992, of the state included reservation of 33 per cent of the total seats for women, considerable speculations were made about the ability of women in discharging their duties or making any meaningful contribution to grassroots policy making. Obviously, illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness and communication skill, family responsibilities, etc. were cited as bottlenecks for women’s participation in the decision-making process. “Perpetuation of male dominance through the women by inducting the kith and kin of the traditional power holders was also cited as an hindrance for achieving the objective of political empowerment of women”.\(^\text{19}\)

In this context, it would be interesting to study whether the Dalit women of Kalahandi, who are in more abject conditions in comparison to the women of other castes, are able to discharge their duties and responsibilities as they have got


\(^{18}\) George Mathew, “Panchayats: Orissa leads the Way”, *Teaching Politics*, vol. XVIII, no. 3-4, 1992, p. 68.

reservation to enter into PRIs, through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on PRIs in India can be discussed under the following heads. There are some studies, which generally focus on the PRIs, some studies simply focus on the case studies of the empowerment of women through PRIs of specific states, and there are also some studies, which specially deal with the empowerment of dalit women in panchayats.

DeSouza\textsuperscript{20} in his article "Decentralization and Local Government: A ‘Second Wind’ of Democracy in India" addresses the questions of the need, normative and material benefits, nature of exercise and experience of decentralization in India, in relation to the latest phase of decentralization, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and after. After discussing about the origin of decentralization and briefly summarizing the history of PRIs, he feels that 73rd Constitutional Amendment can be seen as a response to the problems faced during the pre-73rd Amendment PRI system. The problems he identified were irregular elections and suppression, insufficient devolution powers, bureaucratic resistance, domination by rural elites, and unsatisfactory working of the gram sabhas. On the reservation of SCs/STs in PRIs, he maintains that SCs/STs are not homogenous groups; some being socially and economically vulnerable and the problems of these groups are peculiar to their occupations and are not comparable to other groups of SCs/STs. Unless there are adequate representatives of SCs/STs in PRIs from among these groups, it is most likely that the emerging leadership from the

SCs/STs may not be able to attend to the problems of these groups. As a result these groups may be further marginalized. Bohra\textsuperscript{21} in his article \textit{"Women in Decentralised Democracy"} is of the opinion that reservation does not create egalitarianism but gives the weaker sections, i.e. the SCs, STs and women a share of participation. Social change never occurs without the conflict of ideas, interests and without the active participation of those excluded from the decision-making process. Also he maintains that reservation by itself may not lead to effective participation. However, this opportunity can be used for political training and mobilization, which forms the basis of collective common interest and common development. L. K Tyagi and B. P Sinha\textsuperscript{22} in their article \textit{"Empowerment of Weaker Sections through Panchayats: A Diagnosis"} while discussing about the empowerment of weaker sections through panchayats after conducting a study in the districts of Rajasthan and Haryana are of the opinion that that though people realize the importance of representation to weaker sections by way of reservation, yet the process is moving extremely slow. The tendency of the dominant people to avoid, suppress and manipulate the views of SC/ST members is also prevalent. Further they suggest that, we should not make the mistake of assuming that the task of empowerment of the weaker sections is over by providing them adequate numerical representation in panchayats through reservation. The process will have to be facilitated by education, economic opportunities and intensive awareness campaign. Bhargava\textsuperscript{23} in his book \textit{Grassroots Leadership: A Study of Leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions} also speaks on the same line that always a person belonging to the dominant caste of the ward or village panchayats

\textsuperscript{21} O.P Bohra, op. cit., pp. 673-683.

\textsuperscript{22} L. K Tyagi, and B. P Sinha, op. cit., pp. 134-147.

is elected to the leadership. In this context, reservation provides a scope for members of communities belonging to SCs, STs to have representation in the panchayats. Salvem\textsuperscript{24} in his article "Caste, Empowerment and Panchayati Raj" after examining the nature of relationship between the system of Panchayati Raj and the prevalent caste system and its consequences in the context of village communities suggests that, empowerment will have to involve alterations in land relations in the economic sphere and facilitation of education in the social sphere. Otherwise the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional amendment Act will remain only a paper tiger for the weaker sections, especially the untouchables and women whom it attempts to empower.

On the question of women's empowerment through the PRIs Neera Agnimitra\textsuperscript{25} in her article "Women in Panchayats: Empowerment or Illusion" after analyzing in detail about women's empowerment in panchayats is of the view that women's empowerment is legitimate and critically important in its own right not merely to address the issues of decentralized democracy, but also to foster the well being of all women. Further she adds that to leave women, especially the rural women, out of participation in decision-making and to deny them a share in the fruits of development is to miss the point of what effective participation is all about. Eashvaraiah\textsuperscript{26} in his article "Reservation for Women in Parliament and Legislatures: An Antidote to their Marginalisation" opines that social structure, customs and practices, high illiteracy among women and the unending violence unleashed during and after elections, seem to be some factors

\textsuperscript{25} Neera Agnimitra, op. cit., pp. 441-455.
deterring women from entering into the political arena. Further he maintains that it may also be unrealistic to expect larger participation of women in public life in a male dominated society without congenial atmosphere and proper encouragement. Susheela Kaushik27 in her article “Organising Women for Panchayati Raj” is of the opinion that women’s effective participation in Panchayati Raj or their usefulness for women’s rights and development will not be available, if the Panchayat system itself does not operate in a principled, democratic and meaningful way. Hence all those who are interested in greater participation of women and benefit from Panchayati Raj should simultaneously work for strengthening the system in general and direct it towards greater people’s participation and work for the development of the weaker sections. J. P Singh28 in his article “Indian Democracy and Empowerment of Women” is of the opinion that although India is committed to the cause of empowerment of women, the journey towards progress is long and arduous. He believes that in a world of challenge and competition, both the state and the society have to constantly attune themselves to the changing needs. 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 equality and development. Bidyut Mohanty29 in her article “Women and Political Empowerment” states that empowerment has been defined as the change of self-perception through knowledge. She clarifies that by providing

reservation, our policy makers’ intention was not only to improve only the number of elected leaders but also to improve their economic independence, access to resources as well as to education so that by examining their socio-economic situation we can derive the conclusion whether women are really empowered or not. G. Palanithurai in his article “The Genre of Women Leaders in Local Bodies: Experience from Tamil Nadu,” rightly says that 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, which had been created over centuries to work against the interest of women, cannot be altered overnight. He maintains that to fight against the existing structure, an organized movement involving masses is imperative. In order to make the women achieve result in their positions, a number of interventions are necessary. Further he opines that periodical training, orientation and sensitisation can help the women leaders to perform the assigned role in a better way. S. L Goel and Salini Rajnesh in their book *Panchayati Raj in India: Theory and Practice* are of the opinion that women empowerment is not something which can be handed over to women. This is a process, which involves sincerity, earnestness and capacity and capacity on the part of both men and women. The main efforts required in the context of 73rd Constitutional Amendment is to break the hegemony of male chauvinism in the rural areas. Further they believe that women’s entry into the functioning of Panchayati Raj at all levels particularly at

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decision making levels will usher an era of equality and prosperity to the villages and empowerment of women leading to rural development on moral values. Ultimately it provides women with the opportunity to transform the legal, political, economic and social system as per the vision of the 21st century to realize their demand for an equitable, environmentally clean and peaceful world where there would be no difference based on sex, creed, faith, etc. this would make 21st century really fruitful. Lokesh K. Prasad in his article “An Inquiry into the Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions,” is of the opinion that it is a matter of national pride that India became the only country in the world that not only paved the pathway for the creation of institutions of local self government, but has also reserved one-third seats for women. He believes that empowered by the constitutional status, active participation, involvement and control of women in the development process would give rise to a socio-political system more conducive to attain economic development along with a greater degree of social justice. Because to make democracy meaningful in a traditional society like India, full involvement of women was nothing less than a necessity. A. Rajeswari in her article “Panchayati Raj Institutions and Women” is of the opinion that so far the role played by women in PRIs has been weak. Only those women who are connected to political or influential personalities come forward for elections. Lack of education, social and family barriers and preoccupation with household duties also prevent women from participating in the political process. Welcoming the 73rd Amendment Act, she is of the view that the

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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. About the women of SC/ST categories she maintains that initially these women may find it difficult to mix with the representatives of general category. To cope with the problem it is necessary to inculcate confidence among them and to bring attitudinal changes through training in the numbers of upper classes. Stern action should be taken against such persons who create communal feelings. Manoj Rai, et.al's, book *The State of Panchayats: A Participatory Perspective* in its study of women and Dalit leadership in panchayats maintains that 73rd Amendment can be seen as an instrument to facilitate the empowerment of women, by first empowering the women elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions and then to empower women everywhere; provide justice to women and Dalits, represent their interest in the hope that this could transform politics dominated by male upper castes. Reservations would help them to take their rightful place with the upper caste men, as human beings, as citizens, as equals. They believe that reservation is not an end in itself, but a means to an end—that of empowerment of the weaker sections, particularly of women and Dalits.

So far as the studies on the state of Orissa is concerned, Snehlata Panda in her article “Political Empowerment of Women: A Case of Orissa” maintains that, women’s entry at the grassroots level democratic institutions is a positive indicator of change in the socio-political dynamics of the rural society of Orissa. The stereotyping of women as reproductive units of society is radically changing

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in the rural value pattern as a result of political empowerment of women and the performance of the PRI representatives has ended all speculation on their capabilities and interest in discharging their duties. Evelin Hust\textsuperscript{35} in her book *Women's Political Representation and Empowerment in India: A Million Indiras Now?* which deals with the PRIs in Orissa, maintains that with regard to women's political presence, the presence of SC women was over-proportional. This fact disproves the supposition that the quota mainly benefits the elite. It appears that high status families are still reluctant to introduce their womenfolk into the public sphere. So far as reservation is concerned, she goes further to add that the expectation that women's political presence will lead to a transformation of politics, because of women's natural inclination towards cleaner politics, is tenable neither theoretically nor empirically. However, she feels that reservation for women is a step towards women's empowerment. Pratyusna Patnaik\textsuperscript{36} in his article "Affirmative Action and Representation of Weaker Sections: Participation and Accountability in Orissa's Panchayats" while discussing about the concept of representation, participation and accountability, studies the participation of elected representatives belonging to weaker sections in the functioning of four gram panchayats in Orissa's Dhenkanal district, in order to observe the extent to which numerical representation has been successful in the actual exercise of power by these sections. He finds that elected representatives were not able to properly articulate group-specific interests or to exercise their own judgement in panchayat decision-making, thus bringing into question the very notion of representation of marginalized groups through affirmative action.


Introduction

The representatives in a majority of cases were answerable to the elites of the village and remained under their control rather than exhibiting any accountability to citizens at large. Affirmative action thus, has not ensured effective representation of disadvantaged groups in the panchayats with respect to the participation of elected members, their responsiveness to citizen's interests and accountability in local government.

At the end, it can be inferred from the general survey of the literature mentioned above, that not many studies are to be found addressing the role and empowerment of Dalit women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In fact, most of the literature only deals with the problems and ways of empowering women in general.

In this context, the study undertaken is certainly a new venture, which will throw some new light on the subject.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the meaning, intensity and level of political participation of the Dalit women at the grassroots level in Kalahandi.

2. To find out the possible co-relation between the socio-economic position of Dalit women and how it affects the nature of their participation.

3. To assess the effect of Dalit women’s participation on the PRIs in general and on the women in particular.

4. To find out the hindrances in a meaningful democratic participation of Dalit women in PRIs in the backward areas.
METHODOLOGY

The study undertaken is an empirical, descriptive and analytical study. The data/information have been collected from two sources: Primary and Secondary. The former involved field work in the concerned area to get the first-hand information and find out the objectives stated above. The secondary sources involved books, journals, research notes, government reports and documents and newspaper reporting.

Sampling, Tools and Techniques

The District Kalahandi, which the researcher has chosen for the study is one of the backward districts of Orissa. Kalahandi district comprises of 13 Blocks. Total population of the district according to 2001 census is 1,335,494 persons, comprising of 667,526 males and 667,968 females. Rural population of the district is 1,235,275 persons (615,612 males and 619,663 females) and urban population is 100,219 persons (51,914 males and 48,305 females). Where as the total SC population of the district is 236,019 persons, out of which 117,344 are males and 118,675 females.

The district Kalahandi, Orissa has been selected as the area of case study primarily because it is one of the most backward districts of Orissa which is famous for its utter backwardness, poverty, illiteracy, starvation deaths, selling of children and so on. And so far as the Dalits are concerned, they are still economically and socially not independent. The rural Dalit women are even in more abject conditions than the Dalit men. Because they suffer from three kinds of handicaps- as women, as rural persons and as untouchables.
From this district only 2 Blocks (Koksara and Dharmagarh) have been selected as the area of the case study. This decision was basically due to the time and financial constraints of the researcher. These 2 Blocks were selected as the universe of the study for the simple reason that even if both the blocks are rural areas, in comparison to the Koksara block, Dharmagarh block in more remote and backward. And secondly, the SC population of Koksara block is higher than Dharmagarh block, but there was only one seat reserved for the SC women whereas in Dharmagarh block two seats were reserved for SC women. Above all, familiarity with the socio-economic milieu and geography of these blocks has enabled the researcher to have access with the people and the institutions to a greater extent and establish rapport with them for the successful conduct of the field research.

Out of these 2 Blocks, 4 Gram Panchayats (GPs) each have been selected. From Koksara Block the 4 GPs are: Khuntia, Temra, Mushapali and Badpodaguda and from Dharmagarh Block 4 GPs are: Kankeri, Tambachhada, Parla and Badbasul have been selected as the representative sample.

Since the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act has been implemented, there were only two elections being held in Kalahandi (in 1997 and 2002). As there is only 33 percent reservation for women in PRIs, therefore, the total dalit women representatives of the two blocks were 28. Out of which only 2 had been re-elected again in 2002 (1 ward member of Badpodaguda GP under Koksara block and 1 Sarapanch of Kankeri GP under Dharmagarh block). Hence, 11 women representatives from Koksara block and 17 women representatives from the Dharmagarh block were interviewed.
Along with that interviews of the Panchayat officials, village heads and elders, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), 1 Ex-ZP Member, 1 ZP Member, 4 Dalit male Sarapanchs, 4 ST male/female Sarapanchs, 1 ST women P. S member, students and youths of the locality were also conducted to collect information about the performance of the dalit women representatives and what they felt about the entry of the dalits and women representatives into PRIs.

Interview schedules are the major tools and technique used to get response from each respondent, which were administered, through the household survey. Another research technique Focussed Group Discussion (FGD) was also resorted to obtain complete information from the respondents.

CHAPTERISATION
Chapter I: Introduction: This chapter deals with the basic premises of the study and the methodology adopted for the research. It also focuses on the literature available on the area.

Chapter II: A Democratic Theory of Women's Representation: This chapter deals with the concept of empowerment and women, political participation and different theories of representation. It also focuses on general nature of women’s participation in Indian democracy. Here the level of participation of all sections of women has been taken into consideration to understand the pattern of women’s political participation in the Indian society.

Chapter III: Panchayati Raj in India: This chapter deals with the history of PRIs in India and the state of Orissa. It also discusses about the performance and experience of women in PRIs in different states in India.
Chapter IV: Socio-Economic Conditions of Dalits in India: With Special Reference to Kalahandi District in Orissa: This chapter discusses in detail the origin of scheduled castes, the socio-economic conditions of dalits in India and the socio-economic conditions of dalits in Orissa and Kalahandi.

Chapter V: Political Participation of Dalit Women in Kalahandi District in Orissa: A Case Study of Koksara and Dharmagarh Block: This chapter explores in detail the performance, experience and the problems faced by the dalit women representatives in panchayats of Koksara and Dharmagarh blocks of Kalahandi district.

Conclusion.