CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION II

This chapter has three sections. In the first section the various pressures inhibiting women’s participation are analysed. Suitable case studies highlighting the problems faced by the respondents are presented in the second section. The third section presents suggestions for enhancing women’s participation.

Section A
PRESSURES INHIBITING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

In this section the analysis is centered on various pressures inhibiting the participation of both the groups of respondents—the common women and the elected women representatives. These pressures are identified as problems. For identifying such problems a problem checklist was prepared, listing difficulties in different domains including family, mobility, politics and other factors constraining women’s participation.

‘z’ tests were carried out to analyse the significance of the influence of the problems on the respondents. Two levels of significance, 0.05 and 0.01, were identified for each variable. Depending on the two significance levels, the difference between the groups was identified as significant (0.05 level) and highly significant (0.01 level). Rank Correlation and Logistic Regression analysis were used to analyse the variables.
1. Family

The family is the most important basic unit that performs several functions in society. Men and women perform different roles in the family and as such there exists a division of work between the genders. When analysing women’s participation, their role as housewife, mother and caretaker is to be considered. Therefore, the age old responsibilities identified with women, along with other factors, are taken into consideration. The five statements intrinsically related to women’s role in the family are presented in Table 5.45.

Table 5.45
Problems Faced by the Respondents in the Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Panchayat members</th>
<th>NHG Members</th>
<th>‘z’</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Percent N=108</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Percent N=300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The entire responsibility of taking care of children.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34.26</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>41.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The dictum that household work comes first and any other work as secondary</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29.63</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>40.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Insistence to keep the good name of the family</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>61.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Responsibility to manage the whole affairs of the family as the husband is busy.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49.07</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>47.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Male dominance in the family</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>65.74</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>74.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Primary Data. * Significant at 0.05 level ** Significant at 0.01 level
Fig. 5.1 Problems Faced by the Respondents in the Family

- The entire responsibility of taking care of children: 34.76%
- Unaesthetic that house and other work is not recognized: 41.13%
- Insistence to keep the good name of the family: 40.67%
- Responsibility to manage the whole affairs of the family: 62.47%
- Male dominance in the family: 65.74%
1. The Entire Responsibility to Take Care of Children

An analysis of the responses of the respondents presented Table 5.45 shows that 41 percent of the sample NHG members and 34 percent of the sample Panchayat members have restrictions because childcare is their sole responsibility. When both the groups are compared no significant difference is found.

In the case of the NHG members they often attend group meetings along with their children as there is nobody else to take care of them. Some of the Panchayat members pointed out that sometimes they felt guilty that they could not take care of their children as they did earlier. For those who have infants a major portion of their time is devoted to the children. The predominance of the nuclear family aggravates the situation. As such the members find it very difficult to participate in meetings, particularly when they are held frequently and invariably late in the evenings.

Therefore, the responsibility of a mother poses difficulties for members of both the groups of respondents to participate effectively. It is seen that more or less the same percentage of women in both the categories are constrained due to this factor and no significant difference is found in this aspect.

So, it can be concluded that childcare negatively influences women’s participation in public activities outside the home.
2. The Dictum that Household work comes First and any other work is Secondary

There is a conditioned situation wherein women are to hold household work as of prime importance. In Table 5.45 it is seen that 30 percent of the Panchayat members and 41 percent of the NHG members face this problem, which affects their participation. A significant difference is found between the responses of the two groups at 0.05 level.

The respondents say that before going out they complete almost all the household work. For the women Panchayat members it is often a double burden as they have to play simultaneously the roles of housewife and public worker. For the employed women the situation is worse. In the common women’s category the problem of wage labour complicates the predicament. Even for those women who are not wage earners the invisibility of ever so many household works steals much of their time though such engagements do not bring any direct financial benefits to them.

It is to be concluded seen from the above analysis that more than one third of the NHG members and slightly less than that of the women Panchayat members find it difficult to participate in public activities outside the home as their primary responsibility is household work. There is significant difference between the groups as there are more women in the NHGs who face this difficulty than women Panchayat members.
Hence, it can be concluded that household responsibilities inhibit women from actively involving themselves in public activities. The difference between the two groups denotes the relative freedom of the women Panchayat members in pursuing public activities.

3. insistence on Keeping up the Good name of the Family

The general notion that the family’s pride and dignity depend on the character and behaviour of women of the family is one of the major reasons why women face restrictions.

It is clear from Table 5.45 that 62 percent of the NHG members and 33 percent of the Panchayat members have difficulties in taking part in activities outside the home due to such familial insistence. Comparing both the groups, the difference between the two categories is highly significant at 0.01 level.

According to the respondents they have to observe several don’ts like mingling with men, participating in demonstrations and processions, moving about at night, approaching police stations for settling disputes and so on in their day-to-day functioning so that their social roles do not adversely affect the good name of their families. This is a hurdle that limits their participation in various activities outside the home. Some of the NHG members reported that they attend the Neighborhood Group meetings without the knowledge of their husbands. So, it can be inferred that
restrictions in the family create hurdles to their participation in activities outside the home. The majority of the women in NHGs and almost one third of the women Panchayat members face this problem.

However it can be inferred that the women Panchayat members enjoy more freedom than the members of the NHGs in participating in the activities of the Panchayat.

4. Responsibility to Manage the Entire Affairs of the Family as One’s Husband is Busy

Women handle most of the household affairs because men are generally busy otherwise. When women involve themselves in public activities outside the home, it will not reduce their responsibilities at home. Thus they hold multiple burdens.

Table 5.45 shows that 49 percent of the women Panchayat members as against 47 percent of the NHG members are overburdened with affairs of the family. There is no significant difference between the two groups. Some of them pointed out that they couldn’t depend on their respective husbands for help in many matters as they are said to be busy. Caring for sick children, looking after aged parents and home management on special occasions in the family are some of the instances cited by them. Comparing the two groups it is evident that there is no difference in this aspect between them.
From the above analysis it is seen that overburden of household responsibilities creates obstacles to the participation of women. More or less the same proportion of women in both the categories face this kind of hurdles as there is no significant difference between them.

5. Male Dominance in the Family

The dominance of the males in the family restricts women’s participation. As given in Table 5.45, 66 percent of the women Panchayat members and 74 percent of the NHG members face hurdles due to male domination. In essence the two groups do not show any significant difference.

Some of the women Panchayat members reported that they cannot defy the directives of the males of their family even when the demands are pressing. In the case of the NHG members they have to get permission from the males of their families to attend the Gram Sabha meeting, NHG meetings and any other activity outside the home.

So, male dominance poses difficulties in the participation of women. No substantial difference is noted between the two groups in male dominance creating difficulties in their participation. More or less the same proportion of both the categories face the problem and hence no significant difference is found.
In analysing the problems posed by the family it is found that both the groups of respondents face obstacles in their participation. Comparing both the groups more members of the NHG than Panchayat women face obstacles. The relative freedom that the Panchayat members enjoy in household responsibilities could have had a positive influence on their participation. Nevertheless, as women, the Panchayat members also face all the obstacles like the others and the difference found between them is only relative.

II. Freedom of Mobility

Freedom of mobility is indispensable for every activity. Women, unlike men, are found to be in a disadvantageous position because of the restrictions imposed on them. They pay heavily for this by way of confining themselves to certain “protected” spheres or areas of activity. Coupled with family responsibilities, the restrictions on or lack of freedom of mobility is a serious constraint to their activities outside the home. There are five problems intrinsically related to women’s mobility as shown cited in Table 5.46.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Panchayat members</th>
<th>NHG members</th>
<th></th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Percent N=108</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Percent N=300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Need to get prior permission to go out.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61.11</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>84.67</td>
<td>5.104**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Compulsion to reach home at stipulated time.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48.15</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>3.396**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No permission to travel alone to distant places.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>62.33</td>
<td>2.235 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cannot set out early in the morning.</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71.30</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>0.884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. On the spot decision for journey is not</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36.11</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>5.593**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data. * Significant at 0.05 level ** Significant at 0.01 level

1. Need to Get Prior Permission to Go out of the Home

In the case of both the groups of respondents, as Table 5.46 shows, over 61 percent of the women Panchayat members and 85 percent of the NHG members face hurdles to participation as they are expected to get prior permission from their family members, usually men, before going outside the home. There is significant difference in the responses of the two groups.

In general the respondents reported that sometimes they are forced to postpone or cancel journeys for want of permission from the family and are not at all free to take independent decisions about a journey.
Fig. 5.2 Problems Faced by the Respondents in Freedom of Mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need to get prior permission to go out</td>
<td>61.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsion to remain home at stipulated time</td>
<td>46.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No permission to travel alone to distant places</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot eat out early in the morning</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On short notice for project is set possible</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Prior permission is imperative for women members when they go outside the home. Women Panchayat members enjoy more freedom of mobility compared to the NHG members.

2. Compulsion to Reach Home at the Stipulated Time

The stipulations on time schedule that women have to keep when they go out is the next problem shown Table 5.46.

Of the total respondents, 67 percent of the NHG members and 48 percent of the women Panchayat members face difficulties in participating in various activities due to the strict application of the time schedule stipulated by their families. Comparing two groups on the basis of this issue a significant difference is found between the groups.

The women Panchayat members reported that usually they cannot attend meetings in full as they have to leave early so as to reach home at the stipulated time. Moreover, it is said that they cannot attend prolonged sessions of meetings even if they are free from restrictions. They cannot remain long outside the home as they are mentally preoccupied with family responsibilities. In the case of the NHG members they usually avoid going home late, In some cases it is reported that they have to serve food to their husbands and children and that, otherwise, they will not take food at home, These problems, which prevent them from active participation, are not uncommon.
So, the majority of both the groups of women experience problems in mobility. Comparatively the women Panchayat members are in a better position than the women members of the NHGs.

3. No Permission to Travel Alone to Distant Places

Another problem reported about women’s freedom of mobility is their inability to travel to distant places.

Table 5.46 shows that 62 percent of the women in NHGs as against 50 percent of the women Panchayat members face problems in traveling alone. Comparing the two groups a significant difference is noted between them. The women reported that security problems often block their freedom of mobility. The situation is such that either somebody has to accompany them or they have to cancel the journey altogether. The NHG members can travel to nearby places provided they follow the time schedule stipulated by the family.

Hence, it can be concluded that the majority of the women respondents find it difficult to travel alone because of restriction. Considering both the groups, the Panchayat members are relatively more free to travel alone than the other group.

4. Moving Out of Sloni: Harly in the Morning

As housewives and mothers household chores in the morning always restrict the mobility of women.
Table 5.46 shows that 71 percent of the women Panchayat members and 67 percent of the NHG members cannot go out in the morning as they are tied up with domestic duties. There is no significant difference between the two groups of respondents in this regard.

The women have to attend to preparing food for the day, helping children to get ready for school, attending to the needs of their husbands and sending them off to work, taking care of aged parents and seeing to it that domestic animals are fed properly for the whole day in their absence. As a result they cannot go out early in the morning.

So, the majority of the women respondents face difficulty in going out early in the morning. Women in both the groups are found handicapped by these difficulties without much difference.

5. On the Spot Decision Regarding Journey

Finance for a journey, household responsibilities and permission from the family often create unfavourable conditions for women to take up a journey. They can not take on the spot decisions because of such obstacles.

Table 5.46 shows that 67 percent of the women in NHGs and 76 percent of the women panchayat members face such difficulty in going out. The difference between the groups in this regard is highly significant.
In the case of the Panchayat members the monthly remuneration they get is not at all sufficient for their needs. Moreover they do not get the remuneration on the due dates. Unlike men, women are not free to spend and have not got many opportunities to manage money as many women depend financially upon their male partners or elders. Other aspects like getting permission, duration or time of journey as well as destination influence women’s movement. Compared to men, women are found to be in a disadvantageous position in this regard and it is a severe handicap for them to involve themselves actively in public activities.

Therefore, the majority of the NHG members and one third of the women Panchayat members face difficulties in participating in public activities outside the home due to their inability to take independent decisions regarding journeys.

Comparing both the groups, the women Panchayat members are found to be relatively more free to take their own decisions to move out than the common women.

So, it can be inferred that restrictions on mobility inhibit the participation of women in public activities. Comparatively, a higher proportion of the common women face travel restrictions than the women Panchayat members. Relatively greater freedom of mobility is found to have enabled the Panchayat members to participate in outside activities more than the common women. At the same time, considering the women
Panchayat members alone, it is found that a considerable percentage of them do face as much difficulty as the common women in their daily life. Therefore, it can be concluded that the difference is only relative.

III. Problems in the Field of Politics

It is true that women are not properly represented in decision-making bodies. The division of labor between the sexes demarcates the domain of politics exclusively in favor of men. Those in the other sex who tread in this realm are very few and it has a lot to do with the unhealthy political atmosphere in the country as well as grassroot level politics. There are five obstacles listed in Table 5.47 that restrict women’s participation in politics.

1. Corruption and Bickering in Politics

The increasing corruption and bickering for power in local politics make it difficult for women to participate in grassroot level development activities.
Table 5.47
Problems Faced by the Respondents in Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Panchayat members</th>
<th>NHG members</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percent N=108</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percent N=300</th>
<th>( z )</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corruption and bickering in politics</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>57.67</td>
<td>6.241**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nexus between political parties and the underworld.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>10.648**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference and lack of confidence among people towards politicians</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>73.67</td>
<td>3.684**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against women</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>90.33</td>
<td>1.624</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political favouritism</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data * Significant at 0.05 level ** Significant at 0.01 level

As Table 5.47 shows, as high as 91 percent of the sample women Panchayat members and 57 percent of the NHG members stated that unbridled corruption and bickering in local level politics is a serious problem hindering their participation in development activities. The difference between the two groups is highly significant with more Panchayat members facing the problem than the other group.

As the women Panchayat members are in the field of politics they are more familiar with bickering than the NHG members who have no first hand experience of such squabbling. So the elected representatives are more inhibited by this in their bid for genuine participation. More specifically, these women expressed their unwillingness to compete again in the next elections partly due to their inability to cope with such conditions. It is also
Fig. 5.3 Problems Faced by the Respondents in Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Description</th>
<th>Percentage (Men)</th>
<th>Percentage (Women)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corruption and bribery in politics</td>
<td>90.74</td>
<td>69.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nexus between political parties and the underworld</td>
<td>57.67</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inefficiency and lack of confidence among people towards politicians</td>
<td>90.76</td>
<td>73.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against women</td>
<td>95.33</td>
<td>90.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Bribery</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reported that corruption charges and allegations are leveled increasingly against women representatives, and especially women Presidents in the state, with the sole objective of denigrating them in public.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of the women at the grassroots face problems in participation due to corruption and bickering in local politics. It is found that women Panchayat members who are the contenders in the field encounter more difficulties than the common women.

2. Nexus between Political Parties and the Underworld

The degenerating political situation in which political parties indulge in all kinds of maneuvering to stay in power keeps women in a disadvantaged position.

As Table 5.47 shows, 69 percent of the women Panchayat members and 11 percent of the NHG members face difficulties in participation because of the existing illegal connections of the political parties. The difference between the groups is highly significant.

It indicates that NHG members are less informed and are not aware of such a nexus in real life. The Panchayat members, on the other hand, are familiar with such illegal links out of their general awareness and also with the experience they undergo in their respective Panchayats. Some of them reported alleged links between political parties and the liquor mafia, illegal
quarrying and river sand mining in their areas. It is with the collusion of the Panchayat leaders that many such illegal activities are thriving in rural areas. Most of the respondents reported that many a time the lack of cooperation in such matters is the root cause of the various problems they face in public life.

So, it is clear that the majority of the women Panchayat members face problems in their participation. The difference denotes that a higher proportion of the Panchayat members face actual problems as compared to the common women.

3. Indifference and Lack of Confidence among People Towards Politicians

Degradation of values and principles in political life has alienated the common people and they entertain strong reservations and disregard towards the field as such. This attitude will adversely affect the willingness of women to take up a political career.

Table 5.47 shows that 74 percent of the NHG members and 91 percent of the women Panchayat members stated that such disregard and indifferent attitude of the people is of serious concern to them. The difference between the groups in this regard is highly significant at 0.01 level.
The attitude of the common people towards politics and politicians is one of aversion and indifference. Such general apathy discourages keeps women away from public life, as they do not want to be counted as one among such despised people. The majority of both the category of respondents felt that the existing indifference and lack of confidence among people adversely affects their participation. Comparatively, it is found that the Panchayat members are in a more difficult position than the common women.

So, it can be inferred that the adverse public feeling towards people’s representatives and the degenerated political atmosphere inhibit women’s participation.

4. Violence against Women

Table 5.-17 shows that 95 percent of the Panchayat members and 90 percent of the NHG members stated that violence committed by opponents against women is a severe obstacle to their participation. There is no significant difference between the two groups of respondents in this regard.

Over 90 percent of the women in both the categories were constrained in political participation due to the violence perpetrated against women. So, it can be inferred that violence against women is a deterring factor affecting the active participation of women in public activities.
5. Political Favouritism

Partisan considerations in all aspects devoid of justice and fair play has become commonplace in public life. The situation has grown so out of proportion that nothing can be done without depending one or another political party. The parties, for their part, perpetuate their power by favoring one group against another.

As many as 71 percent of the Panchayat members and 67 percent of the NHG members reported that the political favoritism practiced at the Panchayat level by the political parties hinders their participation. There is no significant difference between the two categories of respondents in this regard.

Power and positions often go to those who are relatives and affiliates of party men rather than the deserving ones. Very rarely do women representatives occupy such posts as Panchayat President, Vice-President and Chairperson of different Committees in the Panchayat in the normal course. Likewise, partisan considerations in distributing benefits under various programmes, granting multiple benefits to influential people, changing the beneficiaries list finalised by the Gram Sabha, inserting new names in the list at the time of implementation are cited by the common women.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of the women at the Panchayat level find obstacles to participation due to political favouritism.
Considering the cited problems affecting both the groups of respondents, it is clear that such obstacles in the political field hinder women’s participation. Comparing both the groups, it is found that a big majority of the Panchayat members face more hurdles than the common women in this regard. Therefore, it can be concluded that while the problems in the field of politics pressurise women Panchayat members to withdraw from active participation, the NHG members also do not want to come to the fore because of the same reasons.

Correlation of Ranked Problems of the Two Groups

Table 5.48 presents the difficulties that women face against their initiative to participate in public activities. Such constraints born out of beliefs and prejudices may have an adverse influence on women’s participation.

The respondents were asked to mark the order of preference (1 to 8) to the listed problems according to the intensity with which each hindered their participation in public activities outside the home. The average of the preference was then calculated. Evidently, the least mean score will get the first rank and the highest mean gets the last rank (8). Rank correlation found to be 0.983 which is significant at 5 percent level of significance. It means that the two groups of respondents, regardless of their different position have similar opinion as far as the hindering factors are concerned.
Table 5.48
Respondents’ Ranking of Various Problems Hindering Their Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Panchayat Members</th>
<th>NHG members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Societal non-acceptance of gender equality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance to accept women as leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that women do not have time for public activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that house keeping is the primary duty of women</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice against women’s faculties</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spreading stories about women social workers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that women are for house keeping and men for public work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposition of moral values and social taboos more on women than men</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Rank Correlation | 0.983* |

Source: Primary Data * Significant Correlation

Therefore, it can be assessed that women in general are affected by the factors listed in the table in the same manner and intensity.

Logistic Regression Analysis on the Influence of Problems in Participation

The important problems identified in the regression analysis that adversely influence women’s participation are presented in Table 5.49.

Logistic regression analysis was carried out by using 15 variables enlisted in the Check List under three major heads, such as, Problems in family, Problems in freedom of mobility and Problems in politics. Participation is the dichotomous dependent variable having values zero and one. ‘Zero’ is given for ‘no participation’ and value ‘one’ for ‘participation’. Likewise,
the 15 independent variables are also taken as dichotomous variables giving values ‘one’ (Yes) and ‘zero’ (No). Backward selection method was applied for finding out the significant variables which adversely affect women’s participation in activities outside the home. Among the 15 variables analyzed, seven variables are found to be significant. The table 5.49 presents the Omega and corresponding probability of the significant variables. From the table it can be seen that probability increases when the responses were negative. That means presence of such problems reduces the probability of participation than their absence. The important variables under different heads are discussed below.

Table 5.49

Probability of Women’s Participation in Activities Outside the Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The dictum that household work comes first and any other work is secondary</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to get prior permission to go out of the home</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.44</td>
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<td>Have to reach home at stipulated time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannot set out early in the morning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.51</td>
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<td>Self decision for journey is not possible</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-2.05</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nexus between political parties and the underworld</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-1.56</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference and lack of confidence among people towards politicians</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>-1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.067</td>
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Source: Primary Data
1. Problems in Family

Among the five problems listed under Problems in family only one that is 'the dictum that household work comes first and any other work is secondary' is found to be significant. It is seen that probability increases from 0.30 to 0.53 when the response turned negative. That means for those women who do not face such restrictions in the family have more chance in participation than the others. In other words it can be said that probability of participation is reduced when women are bound to perform household work primarily.

2. Problems in Freedom of Mobility

Among the five listed problems regarding mobility, four are found to be significant. They are, ‘need to get prior permission to go out of the home’, ‘have to reach home at stipulated time’, ‘cannot set out early in the morning’, ‘self decision for journey is not possible’. In all the significant items probability is comparatively high when the response is negative.

It is, there fore; clear that restrictions on mobility and lack of freedom to travel inhibit the participation of women. The probability of participation increases as restrictions decrease.
3. Problems in Politics

Among the five problems enlisted under the head ‘Problems in politics, two are found to be significant. The significant variables are, ‘nexus between political parties and the underworld’, ‘indifference and lack of confidence among people towards politicians’. The analysis shows that probability is very less (0.17 and 0.20) when such problems exist in the field.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the erosion of ethics in the field of politics restricts women’s participation. Moreover, the negative attitude of people towards politics in general and leaders in particular discourages women’s initiative to participate in grassroot level development activities.

Conclusion

On the whole, from the above analysis, it is clear that women’s participation in activities outside the home is restricted mainly due to the problems they face in their freedom of mobility. Family and general political atmosphere as well play a significant role in limiting women’s participation.
Hypothesis Testing

From the above analysis it is clear that the hypotheses “restrictions on mobility and time constraints due to the traditional roles played by women in the home restrict their active participation outside the home” stands validated in the case of both the categories of respondents.

In order to bring home the difficulties that women in public life as well as NHG members are put to while participating at the grassroots suitable case studies are presented in the next section.
CASE STUDIES

This section presents selected case studies from the study area highlighting the hurdles faced by women in their participation at the grassroots level. It includes the case study of a woman Panchayat member, a President and a Neighbourhood Group.

I. JASMINE

Jasmine, a 45-year-old woman elected member of a Gram Panchayat hails from a lower middle class family. Her husband is a farmer and the couple have two children, a boy and a girl. She is educated up to the 10th standard and had been working as an Anganwadi teacher when she got elected Panchayat member.

Background

Jasmine had experience in social work, as she had been a member of the local church committee from her school days. The people of the locality knew her well and the local unit of the political party approached her husband to permit her to contest in the elections. For the first time she became a member of a party for the purpose of contesting the elections.
“The initial days were depressing,” recalled Jasmine. She could not understand what was going on in the Panchayat meetings. Automatically inducted into the Welfare Committee as a member, she was supposed to perform activities related to the welfare of the people, especially women. “The Welfare Committee is a women’s Committee,” said Jasmine “because women members are invariably put into this Committee and the other ‘important’ Committees such as Development and Finance are taken care of mostly by men. The Development and Finance Committees are the prestigious ones, which are always presided over by men. Moreover, the President is a woman, but the Vice-President, who is the ex-President of the Panchayat, controls the whole affairs from behind the scenes. All the decisions in the Panchayat are taken unilaterally by the Vice-President on behalf of the President.”

The projects are “highjacked” by the influential members to their own Wards. Women who do not know the details and sources of funds satisfy themselves with what is given to them. “People, on the other hand, blame us for not giving them benefits. They often compare our performance with that of the men in the field.” Jasmine adds, “We do not even know what is
up there. The whole thing is decided in advance and the only thing left is to affix one’s signature. This is the type of participation we have.”

In Party Committee Meetings

“You are like food; if we want we will eat, otherwise we will throw it away; we have the choice.” This was the welcoming comment that Jasmine and other women party members received in her party office after the election was over. “It is after all due to reservation that you are here,” continued the speaker, one of the party functionaries in the Area Committee. Jasmine cannot, even now, digest the male domination in the party. She explained about the dominance of party men and the tactics used in avoiding woman members in the decision-making process. The party meetings are always convened at night. “Always my husband will accompany and wait for me.” However, beyond a particular hour, she could not stay in the party office even if her husband is with her. “They take decisions; we obey them both at home and also outside.” It is found that women are tolerated rather than co-opted as one among them in the party. Important party decisions are taken without the presence of women.
“For a woman member the first problem is her own party men,” Jasmine said, explaining her own bitter experiences. In one such instance, when she had to construct a village road in her Ward through a disputed property, she encountered hidden resistance from her party men because of the fact that she was a woman who belonged to a so-called lower caste. She got support from the party and some of the functionaries accompanied her to the Ward and tried a political settlement to the issue. After weeks of prolonged consultation and rapprochement she finally got the consent of the two parties concerned to cede part of their land for the construction of the road. Her genuine efforts led to a solution to the contentious issue in the area, which was a stumbling block for the residents of the area for years to get connected to the mainland. But all was not well with her plan. One fine morning, she found that the decision they had taken had been reversed by the parties concerned overnight. Some interested outsiders raised a new dispute over the same land. The whole programme was stalled. She consulted her party people, who had helped to solve the problem in the first place, and, in the process, she came to know from some of the local people that the “interested people” who wanted to sabotage her efforts were the same men in her own Opposition
party. In their capacity as “men,” they wanted to show that the “woman” was not capable of solving the issue easily.

The popularity which Jasmine enjoyed among the common people could not be digested by the men in her area. They even played caste politics, instigating other caste people in the Ward against her. They deliberately tried to tarnish her name and even went to the extent of embarking on character assassination. “Allegations, corruption charges and whatever that is capable of making an ordinary pull back her steps from her activities will be done,” stated Jasmine. However, she completed the project with the help of the people though it took a few more months. So, she says that for a woman being a member of the ruling party is not an advantage. Rather she has to fight the odds because she is a woman in the first place. It is very difficult to thrive in the midst of men, as she will never be considered one among them but as a “mere woman.”

In Committees

In Committee meetings, she observed, if a women member asks for the minutes of a previous meeting (at which she was absent) or any other information regarding decisions taken in the Committee, men do not tolerate such inquiries and belittle her by asking, “What is the use of your knowing such matters?”
In other such instances, in a teasing manner, they comment, “It is not that easy as you cook in your home.” At first she felt hurt by such comments and found other women members keeping silence and nodding to decisions without raising any doubts on their part. She also found herself in a disadvantageous position in the Panchayat owing to her inexperience. For instance, she was not aware of the sources of funds, programme allotments to the Wards and, above all, what are her rights and responsibilities in such matters. Such capacities often come with experience but are enough to tag women as incompetent.

In Committees she found that decisions are taken without proper discussion. Often, before she could comprehend issues properly, her male colleagues, virtually ignoring the presence of women members, arrived at the final decision. She also blames other women members for their mute, non-assertive role in the Panchayat administration as the main reason for the disregard women in general face in the Panchayat. Such obsequious behavior of the majority of women representatives naturally belittles the efforts of other women like her who often become a hurdle for the “smooth functioning of the Panchayat.”
Objecting to Party Decision

Objection to party decisions is not supposed to come from a disciplined party worker. But Jasmine interfered in a decision taken in her Panchayat against the cancellation of the accreditation of a Lower Primary School by the Education Department due to lack of required number of children. The party in power in her Panchayat wanted to protect some teachers in the school and the Panchayat decided accordingly. At the time of the inspection the school authorities filled the classes with students from other schools. Jasmine exposed this to the Education Department. As a result, the Department took prompt action and the recognition of the school was cancelled. Naturally, Jasmine became an outcaste in the party. “They would not inform or consult me about taking any decision and became the opposition member in my own party,” said Jasmine.

Bureaucracy

Another difficulty that women representatives encounter is lack of support from the local bureaucracy that often “takes the women members for granted,” reported Jasmine. Their authoritarian attitude and “know all” approach was enough to create an inferiority complex among the new entrants, she observed. “You do not know even this? Such people better stay
back home.” These kinds of comments often dishearten women who already suffer from the initial blues of entering into a hitherto unknown milieu of work.

Corruption

“I should not disclose such details, but, at the same time, I should do something.” Jasmine disclosed some of the illegal connections and scandals in the Panchayat. “In this case, there is no opposition party. All are equal,” said Jasmine satirically. She was offered an amount as part of the bribe given to the Panchayat for granting a license for illegal quarrying which the previous local government had cancelled for ecological reasons. “All the opposition party members were given their due share.” She disclosed the secrets of the tacit understanding that her party has with the local liquor mafia. The improper tax collection from big proprietors causes loss of funds to the Panchayat. Such instances are not a matter of concern nowadays and it has become quite commonplace.

In solving public issues

Like adding insult to injury, Jasmine suffered the worst humiliation when she went to the police station to deal with a litigation case in her Ward. “The police misbehave and make advances. They think that a woman in public life is always
available.” So, she asserts, “No position will ensure a woman security in society.”

At the same time, she has respect for some men in the police force who have heated her as an individual and helped her to solve many issues in her Ward. She has even constructed a bridge amidst opposition from some quarters with the help of the police. Still she wants to highlight the vulnerability of women in such situations. Common people will not necessarily consider the performance of women on par with that of men in public life. Unlike men, women are bound by codes of moral conduct. Spreading stories against such women is a common practice among people.

Another thing she is worried about is the monthly honorarium of Rs. 1000 that she gets. “It is not at all enough. If we want to do some help to ailing people in the Ward there is no way.” Money is a real problem. No family will allow women to use the family income for public affairs. She never discloses to her husband about any such financial commitments she makes in her Ward.

At home

In the domestic sphere also she is bound by many constraints. Jasmine, like any other housewife, has to be a real
housewife, no matter whether she is an elected member of a
Panchayat or a social worker. “Husbands are husbands and
wives are bound to be wives.” There has not been any change in
this mindset,” Jasmine registers her concern rather poignantly.
She always finishes all the domestic work before going out.
With two college going children, she is in a fix every morning.
Her husband, though he helps her in solving Panchayat affairs,
ever shares the household work. But she appreciates her
husband for giving support to her activities outside the home.

Unlike many other women representatives, Jasmine wants
to be in politics and looks forward to be reelected. If she does
not get a party ticket she is determined to contest as an
independent candidate. The obstacles she has encountered and is
still facing have made her determined to fight to the last in her
own way.

An indifferent husband, a dissatisfied family, uncared-for-
children, accumulating domestic chores, discrimination in the
family, the notion that social work is not women’s cup of tea,
home management and keeping the kitchen fire burning and the
family fed in time are a few of the burdens that the Jasmines of
the present day politics have been shouldering. “One cannot
expect miracles from such women members, for miracles are
reserved for men,” said Jasmine despairingly.
II. JAYASREE

Jayasree, a 32-year-old postgraduate woman, belongs to an educated and middle class family. She got elected to the Panchayat in her maiden attempt. More important was her getting elected from a general seat and her subsequently becoming the President of the Panchayat. She was a student leader in her school and college days and a staunch supporter of the party of which she is a member.

Young and energetic, this woman President has got a clear vision about her work and responsibilities. Despite many odds, she tries her best to deliver the goods. In the initial days she got support from all party members. But, when it came evolving and making decisions with regard to the functioning of the Panchayat, she felt strong undercurrents within her own party. “It is a crown of thorns, my Presidentship,” she laments.

On People’s Participation

“Many things can be corrected if the common people participate. They will not attend the Gram Sabha; even if they attend, just after the beneficiaries list is red out they clear out,” says the Panchayat President in Jayasree. The benefit-induced participation makes people blame the local government for not
giving this and that, Jayasree reasoned about the failure of planning in the state. Her initial enthusiasm to conduct the Gram Sabha meetings gradually lost its sheen due to the inert attitude of the people. Moreover, the lack of interest on the part of the common people in public utilities like roads, bridges and similar facilities is appalling, said Jayasree: “They want only financial handouts.” This inertia on the part of the common people is a blessing in disguise for the political patties. It helps them to capture power and perpetuate their rule. She feels that the participation of the people in the resource mobilization of the Panchayat and its affairs will make them learn what the Panchayat do for them and what they can do for the Panchayat as a whole. “But there exists a gap between the people and the local government and planning is not people centered,” she points out. She also points to the difficulty caused by the lack of funds and the time lag in getting funds. As a result the Panchayat is not able to meet all the needs of the people.

Tussle with the Party

Jayasree is a typical example of how a woman can be intimidated in the struggle for power. The virtues she once thought of as necessary for a people’s representative, such as honesty, integrity and, above all, impartiality, which she wants to preserve in her own person, became a disadvantage to her
when she started taking decisions on different matters in the Panchayat. In the case of beneficiary selection, for instance, the party stipulation on giving benefits to its own dependants/followers instead of those who are really poor but believe the ideologies of other political parties put her in a predicament. She admits that she could not, all the time, resist such wrong decisions dictated by her own party.

This has created many difficulties for her both inside the party and among the people. Because of her close contact with the people, they started questioning her decisions, charging that she had “changed colour” once got elected. The party, on the other hand, was disillusioned with the unexpected resistance from its own representative-turned-President. Implementing party decisions through the party representative in power became difficult in the course of her term.

Corruption

It all went wrong when she declined to be a party to a bribe for an appointment in a village school within her jurisdiction. She refused to accept her “share” and informed the authorities concerned. As a result, the post went to a deserving candidate instead of party’s candidate. The “party fund,” as such bribe money is usually called, was thus lost by the very
“indifference” of the President. These incidents roused a storm against her in the party and she became an eyesore to the party members.

Panchayat Committee Meeting

In the Panchayat Committee meetings also she used to support those genuine issues that were raised by the Members even if the were from the opposition parties. In the case of allotment of benefits to the different Wards she always stuck to the criteria laid down for such programmes. As such, every representative under the Panchayat got an equal share of the allotted funds to implement developmental activities. Such non-partisan attitude on the part of the President invited the wrath of her political party within few months of her assuming office. But, the directions from the party to take partial decisions put her in a difficult position. To do justice to her conscience she defied many orders from “above.”

Character Assassination

Character assassination in its most putrid form was unleashed against her in the Panchayat. She was publicly projected as immoral through vicious posters depicting her alleged relationships with several men. When such stories spread
even her close relatives started to blame her. A family of repute with considerable public contacts in society, they were all cheers when she was put on the seat of power. But the euphoria did not last long. Her being unmarried was a vulnerable point. Many marriage proposals were scuttled halfway through due to these politically motivated malicious allegations that kept sprouting against her womanhood. Her parents and brothers, who were once supportive, now compel her to quit the post. If she continued she would remain unmarried, they feared. “I should never have taken this decision,” a visibly upset Jayasree lamented about the strife in her personal life.

Personally, Jayasree is much disturbed over the situation she faces in her Panchayat. However, she is determined to complete her term in office. There was a move in the opposition with the tacit support of the ruling party against her. Asked whether she would contest again, she said that she would never get a party ticket and that, moreover, she was not interested in contesting again as individuality and independence are not welcome, particularly when wielded by women. She wants to live peacefully and does not want to put her parents to mental trouble about their only daughter any longer.
She laments that women’s role in public is often expected on the lines of a coy damsel ready to obey the dictates of the so-called experienced men around them. A role as an equal partner in sharing power and position is still a dream. According to her, grassroots democracy still has to go a long way to accommodate one half of the population with equity and justice.
III. A NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP

Background

NHGs, popularly known as “Ayalkoottams” in the locality, now consist only of women members in the neighbourhood. The Ayalkoottams that once consisted of both men and women of the locality were done away with gradually in the wake of the forming of Self Help Groups for poverty alleviation as part of a policy reorientation in favour of economic empowerment in the state.

There are 27 women in the NHG selected for the case study. It meets once a week, usually in the afternoons, for the convenience of all the members. The majority of the members are housewives. Some run petty shops, teashops and chit funds in the locality. After learning about the micro credit programme implemented under the local Panchayat, they grouped together into an SHG.

The group members elected a President and a Secretary from among themselves by consensus. The group works in terms of thrift and credit. When it received a sum of Rs. 5000 as revolving fund from the Panchayat, it started issuing small loans to its members. The leaders of the group manage the accounts of the group and conduct meetings and prepare minutes. All the
members have attended seminars conducted by the Panchayat authorities for the purpose of inculcating necessary skills in rural women such as account maintenance, writing of minutes of meetings, maintenance of bank accounts and other aspects related to availing of group loans and beneficiary selection criteria for various programmes under the Panchayat. The Ward Member is supposed to attend the group meetings but it is not binding upon the Member to do so every time.

Apart from micro credit the group identifies beneficiaries for various welfare programmes under the Panchayat. They select the poorest and most needy from among the people of the Panchayat according to the criteria laid by the government. The list prepared by the group is then submitted to the Panchayat for final selection. Projects of rural housing, sanitation and self-employment benefit programmes are also implemented in the Panchayat.

Discussions in the Group

Most of the women in the group are educated upto high school level. In their weekly meetings they discuss various facets of their credit programme in detail. Besides, the feasibility of starting new ventures and the repayment of loans are the main subjects of discussion. The Ward Member attends the meeting
occasionally. The minutes of the group meetings are submitted to the Panchayat for scrutiny and, on the basis of the assessment made, the group gets loans.

Awareness

When enquired about their awareness of the powers of the Gram Sabha, the Right to Information and other related subjects, no one in the group was found to have even heard of such things. They did not know the powers of the Gram Sabha to remove a representative for not convening the meetings of the Gram Sabha beyond a stipulated time.

Attending Gram Sabha

When they are beneficiaries of a programme, the women (only the beneficiaries) in this group attend the Gram Sabha meeting. Regarding other Gram Sabha meetings, they said, “We do not know when they convene and conclude.” “Nowadays they don’t announce through loudspeakers also,” said some of them. “Even the Ward Member and the President do not attend the Gram Sabha meeting,” chipped in another member. Moreover, nobody cares to check the Panchayat Notice Board for programme implementation and allotment details. Most of the time the Notice Boards are used as “poster boards.”
According to them there is no use in attending Gram Sabha meetings as such. While some people get multiple benefits, genuine beneficiaries are left out. Though the beneficiaries are selected in the Gram Sabha, the names are changed in the final list at the time of implementation. The interference of local political parties in the decision on selection of beneficiaries is the reason they cite for this. However, these women are the only section of the people who attend the Gram Sabha. The others, the middle class and the educated people, do not turn up at such meetings.

At the same time, the personal difficulties of some of the women who had to take care of small children and household work together cannot be ignored. A few of them are not allowed by their husbands to go out to the nearby school or the community building to attend a “useless Gram Sabha.” Women members of the family attending meetings of the Gram Sabhas is not at all a priority. “Why should they go leaving the children and the domestic work unattended to?” is the attitude of the males. “Because of the group loan I am here in the first place,” says one of the women who is just married. Even for attending the group’s meeting a few others mentioned reservations in their families. “It is better not to allow women to mingle with other women,” one of the women’s husbands is reported to have said.
Corruption in Administration and Power Politics

“We get benefits at the mercy of those in the Panchayat office,” was the comment when asked about the bureaucracy. Narrow party politics and corruption at the lower levels is a great hurdle for the common people. One of the group women reported that she was asked to spend a “sum” to get a housing loan at the earliest. Likewise, when such benefits are granted, they tend give “something” to these men in the Panchayat office as an assurance of the steady flow of future benefits. The majority of the women in the group alleged that all decisions were taken in a partisan manner in the Panchayat. When the relatives of the Panchayat Member get multiple benefits, the papers of the genuine beneficiaries in the list are put into the dustbin citing technical reasons.

Participation in Planning

The majority of the women in the group reported that activities in their Panchayat are carried out entirely based on the directives of the political party in power and the people have no role apart from availing of the benefits. Those few who attend say that usually no productive discussion is done in the Gram Sabha meetings where they can participate in a meaningful way. The Ward Level Committees and Task Forces for the purpose of
implementing various plan activities are in practice constituted on political party basis. “Members of such bodies are mainly the activists in the local political parties. No woman has representation in such bodies,” reported the secretary of the group. At the same time, during the discussion on the items of the draft plan for the financial year presented by the Panchayat authorities before the Gram Sabha, it is the members of the Task Forces and the Ward committees who suggest changes according to the needs of the locality rather than discussing the matter openly in the presence of the common people.

On the face of it one may be prompted to think that it is the lack of interest on the part of the people that leads to such domination of parties in local governance. It is only partly true, “The parties in the first place do not want to share responsibilities with the common people or rather do not want to lose their importance in local politics,” said the group leader. According to her, no genuine effort is being made to sensitize the people on the one hand and involve them in matters concerning their own affairs on the other.

When asked about their role in identifying and assessing resources and suggesting measures, these women are not aware of such functions that the Gram Sabha, including themselves,
has got to fulfil in local governance. Becoming participants in
class level decision-making is not the focus of the existing
activities. To quote one of the people’s representatives, “People
are mute spectators of ‘programme projects implemented from
‘above’ without their involvement.”

Other Concerns Regarding the Working of the Group

The group, for that matter any other NHG, works as a
mini bank. It is a blessing for many poor people to fall back
upon when they are hard up. At the same time, it should not be
overlooked that the majority of the common women do not
utilize the money for sustainable income generating activities.
Misutilisation of lump sum amounts such as the one given under
the SGSY scheme for starting self-employment ventures with
huge subsidies have been found utilized for buying all kinds of
consumer and electrical gadgets by the members. “The Block
officials asked us to do business in electrical equipments,” said
the President of the group. The result was that the entire subsidy
amount of Rs. 1,25,000 given to the group was spent for
purchasing household appliances like refrigerator, mixer,
grinder, television etc. Some of the women bought gold
ornaments with the money. In short the self-employment loan
was used in an unproductive manner and did not yield any
sustainable income to the members. Such unfortunate outcome
of the poverty alleviation schemes points to the hidden hands of
multinationals at the backdrop of liberalization. By creating
instant and artificial purchasing power among the poor, this
policy helps to spread consumerism to the nooks and corners of
remote villages.

Therefore, poverty alleviation with people’s participation
remains illusive, as the people, especially women, do not
participate in the planning process at the local level. The concept
of empowerment is used and manipulated in various ways to suit
the needs of various agencies implementing programmes and
projects. The limited role they play in the local administration as
beneficiaries is often projected as “active participation” of
people by the government. Misutilisation of funds points to the
folly of planning without people’s participation.
SUGGESTIONS

The overall analysis and discussion on the participation of women at the grassroot level clearly reveals that women’s participation is intricately intertwined with the social, economic and political dimensions of the development process. The policy of economic empowerment at the cost of social and political participation will lead to a lopsided development among communities. Lack of integration and the resultant alienation will keep millions on the periphery of the development process. Therefore, a multidimensional and concerted action is needed to effect a change in the right direction. Some suggestions to enhance women’s participation that emerged from the present study are presented hereunder.

1. Ensure secure travel and boarding facilities for women

Physical security should be provided to all women. Arrangements are to be made to promote confidence in women about traveling and boarding. Special Women Aid Posts should be established with the help of the police in railway stations, bus stands and other places of importance.

2. Sensitize people to the importance of women’s participation

Departing from the conventional method of creating awareness in a gender specific manner, all awareness programmes should cover both men and women of all age groups so as to ensure that all people are sensitized to the importance of women’s participation.
3. Educate children on gender equality and women’s participation

“Catch them young” should be the motto of gender justice. The gender bias is learned. The socialization that a child receives from her family makes her imbibe a set pattern of roles for each gender. This stereotyping perpetuates sex role differentiation. The school curriculum should include courses educating children on gender equality. Visiting Gram Sabhas and observing the actual proceedings will also cultivate a civic sense in them.

4. Organise vocational training programmes for girls to make them self-sufficient in life.

In order to make women self-dependent in life, vocational training programmes for girls in schools shall be provided. This will reduce dependency and enhance self-sufficiency among women.

5. Provide wide publicity through the mass media to educate people

Providing publicity to the provisions of the Panchayati Raj Act, especially the powers and functions of the Gram Sabha, through newspapers and other visual media will enable women to make their presence felt in discussions and deliberations. Vigilant people in the Gram Sabha can check corruption and favouritism. There is no substantial change in the government’s policy towards women despite the enactment of the 73rd and the 74th Amendment Act. Women in the Panchayat are still treated as beneficiaries of various programmes. The much-toted part of this Act is the reservation for women. The rest of the Act is unknown to the public.
They do not know what their rights are. Even the Constitutional requirement of convening the Gram Sabha at mandated intervals is not known to the people. Therefore, publicity and awareness generation are the need of the hour.

6. Transparency in governance at the local level and confidence building among people

The public have lost trust and confidence due to the politicization of the activities of the Panchayat. Transparency in administration is to be ensured. Local people should know the provisions of the Act like the right to information, ombudsman etc.

7. People’s representatives shall act as agents of change

Power politics at the grassroot level spoils the spirit of participation of the common people. The avowed motto of ‘power to the people’ is still elusive due to this and power seems to have got stuck in the Panchayat. Decentralisation has actually created another level of power structure at the lowest level. Therefore, genuine efforts to share power by strengthening Gram Sabhas and NHGs should be made. For that periodic convening of the Gram Sabha and deep and wide deliberations on local issues is necessary. The elected representatives, with the help of the Panchayat, should promote women’s participation.
8. Reactivate the Neighborhood Group to function as a corollary to the Gram Sabha

Panchayati raj institutions will become meaningful only when the common people are given an opportunity to take decisions for their well-being and suggest measures for various resource mobilisation. The NHGs all over the state are working like SHGs comprising only women. This has shrunk the role of women in the Panchayat from participation to benefit sharing.

9. Give women representatives equal share in power positions in Panchayat administration

Women’s representation for the sake of fulfilling the mandatory provisions of the Constitution is what is now seen at the grassroot level. Sidelining women candidates inside the Panchayat to prevent them from getting selected as Chairpersons of various Committees and knowing details of the financial affairs of the Panchayat is to be checked. Women representatives should be given adequate representation in Committees as Chairpersons.

10. Training programmes for promoting capacity building among the Representatives

Many at the grassroots often highlight the incapacity of women representatives in administering the Panchayat. For instance, the Secretaries of various Panchayat are of the view that elected representatives,
both men and women, are ignorant of the Constitutional provisions and the rules and regulations which govern local self-government. Without properly understanding such provisions these representatives often get into unnecessary arguments and blame the bureaucracy as non-supportive to their cause. Orientation in such basics is to be imparted to them so they can fulfil their duties with confidence. Other areas that deserve attention in this regard are information on various agencies providing funds to the Panchayat, the procedures for availing of such benefits, and other related matters.

11. Support measures for working women Members to be implemented to enable them to fulfil their functions without stress.

Women members who are also regular employees bear a triple burden—as employees, as people’s representatives and as housewives. Most of them find it difficult to cope with the multiple work burden. Keeping them away from public activities is not a solution. Sensitizing the men in the home to share the household work and help these women is necessary. Support measures for child rearing like creches should be introduced on a wide scale. The stress and strain caused by multiple burdens also contribute to their pulling out after the first term in office.
12. Strong measures to curb violence against women Representatives

The violence perpetrated against women representatives by political parties in order to deter them from contesting as well as to make them quit offices once they get elected discourages women from coming forward to participate. Such incidents send wrong signals to other potential candidates and to the society at large. Character assassination is a strong weapon in the hands of political parties to settle scores with rival women candidates in elections. Slandering and defaming women solely for political purposes is very common. Lack of participation of women in the party structure is one of the reasons for this. Strict enforcement of laws against those who commit such crimes is necessary.

13. Women should be given equal representation in all positions of power including in the organisational structure of Political Parties.

Women representatives are the “quick fix” for political parties for placing in positions at the time of elections. They are like pawns moved from one squire to another according to the directives of political power players. The male dominated militant political party structure deters women from coming forward to play active roles in politics. This situation should be changed.
14. Strong political will to effect changes for gender justice

This is the most important point of all. Development based on equity and justice is a cliched slogan for all political parities and thereby for successive governments. Therefore, more than all the other suggestions, concerted action towards a just world is urgent.

Conclusion

The problems of women are actually the problems of the particular society. They are the symptoms that a sick society exhibits to indicate the internal disorganization. Women’s development and empowerment depend upon the regeneration of society with gender justice. Empowerment is a composite whole, with social, economic, political and cultural dimensions. A piecemeal approach will not suffice for a cause that is deeply rooted in the society, Strong political action that envisions a future just social order is the only way out.