Chapter-4

Review of Literature
There was a need for women empowerment through Panchayat raj because there was a lack of representation and token participation did not serve the purpose. It was seen the last chapter that the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act, which was passed in 1993 fulfilled this need for empowerment by providing 1/3rd reservation of seats for women in Panchayat raj. It was found in some states that the out-come in terms of women participation has been encouraging like in case of Karnataka, west Bengal and Orissa, even prior to 1993, had witnessed appreciable numbers of women as members of Panchayats. In all these states it was found the seats were reserved for women from 15-25% even prior to the passing of 73rd constitutional Amendment Act. (Mishra 1997: 15-16). A numbers of studies have shown that a great number of women have been elected in Panchayats after 1993. Here we look at some studies of different parts of the country conducted by different eminent scholar’s and to find out the extent of empowerment of women through Panchayat raj.

This is a study of women elected representative of Karnataka Panchayat Raj Institution, conducted by George Mathew (1994). This study gives an insight into women’s present position in Panchayats and possibilities hold for the future, and also gives an insight into the nature of their participation, their present sociological and cultural compulsions
and their leadership role in public life. The study revealed that women from the dominant caste-the lingayat’s and vokkaligas – formed 60% of the elected member’s in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRJs) in Karnataka. It may be mentioned here that these two castes constituted 50.61 percent of all the member’s of the Panchayat Raj Institutions. There was a predominance of young member’s among women compared to that among men. More than three-fourth of the women of Zilla Parishad (highest body of PRIs) member’s were below 45 year’s and more than half the member were in the age group of 25 to 35 year’s. it was also found in this study most of the elected women member where un-educated. A majority of women member’s gave their occupation as agriculture and house wife. This study also show’s that most of the elected women member’s of Panchayat were relatively in-experienced in politics and public life.

The participation of women in Panchayat activities was a eye-opener from this study. In the Panchayat meetings every time men escorted the women member’s and also accompanied them to the meeting hall, prompting them to speak, and husband of an elected women always wanted to speak on behalf of his wife in the block meetings. If any women member wished to raise any question or any issue, she choose to speak about it to the Block Development Officer (BDO) or any other
higher authority, after the meeting was over and all male members left the meeting hall. Quite often a male member would be there to support her. The social distance in the presence of men, and the relative inexperience and uncertainty as to what they say would be accepted or not, often came in the way of women's participation in the Panchayats meeting. Most of the elected women representative did not visit the block office except on meeting days. It was said, women who becomes the member's of Panchayats will disturb the harmony of homes and the family life, because with the entry in Panchayats, women acquired the additional responsibility of public life along with house-hold work. Some member found the conflicting role as a strain on their time and resources. This caused a feeling of guilt that they had not been able to fulfill their obligations to their families. It was found the most of the women member's continued to have all their time for house-hold chores, as usual. But with the passage of time women were expressing themselves, they had an opinion on various matter's that come up for discussion. A qualitatively improved participation in term's of the content of their comment's was also evident. Many women member were taking interest in acquiring a better knowledge of the working of Panchayat's matter.

In a study of women elected member's of Panchayat's of Banglore, Karnataka, conducted by B.S. Bhaghava and Subha (1994). It was found
that most of the elected women representative got elected from the reserved seats, most of them were un-educated and having a very little political background, and many of them got elected for the first time in the Panchayat so, they were in-experienced in politics and public life. It was also found that most of them were house-wife and belonged to poor families. It was found that most of the women Pradhan forced by their husbands and father-in-law and they themselves never interested in Panchayat election and they never went out for any election campaigning. Most of the women Pradhan were busy in the house-hold chores and their husband, father-in-laws and other elder male member of the family discharging the duties on the behalf. They went for Block meetings on their behalf and very active in Panchayat’s works, and they did not allow their women’s to take active part in Panchayat matter’s. This was because in Panchayat there was no fixed hours of work and there a possibility of conflict between house-hold role and Panchayat activities.

In a study conducted by Snehalata Panda (1995) in Orrisa. It was she found so many problems which are being faced by the elected women leader’s in Panchayats. Women are adversely affected by the caste and class division, feudal attitudes, Patriarchal nature of the family and village social environment. It was found in this study elected women leaders of Panchayat had to share responsibilities of village
administration in addition to their responsibilities in the family and the farm. There was a myth that women after becoming the member of Panchayat would disturb the harmony of home and the family life. The family works schedule would be disturb as there would not be fixed hour's of work because women elected member had attend Panchayat meetings or problem's. Therefore, women had to take the help of male member of the family and so were not free from mole dominance. Mostly elected women leader's of Panchayats did not have the freedom of choice in the family or farm decision making process, therefore, in the Panchayat's activities their choice would be limited to the choice of the male member's mostly the husband or adult male members.

It was also found that the traditional concepts of gender roles in the family is so firm that women representative would engage themselves in house-hold work as usual and the men in their families would discharge the political responsibility on her behalf. Due to lack of economic independence, lack of informal education and knowledge of public affairs, women elected representative would not like to burden themselves with the task of village administration. They are scared of being isolated in the family where traditional notions about the role of women still persist.
A comparative study of four gram panchayat of Barwala Block of Punchukula District of Haryana was conducted by Manju Panwar (2001). In this study the researcher found that the women Pradhan (head of the village Panchayat) who was free from the house hold chores can perform the role of Pradhan much better than the Pradhan who were busy in the house-hold chores and taking care of the children. The researcher found that the education is not the only the factor that makes women more assertive. There were women Pradhans whose educational level is low but they were well aware of the needs and the Problems of their villages and the governmental schemes. This was because of the exposure of the out-side world prior to her Panchayat work so, she could handles the Panchayat problem's very well, she had developed the confidence in interacting with the higher officials of the Block office. They also chaired gram panchayats and gram sabha meeting quit regularly and look after the development work of their respective gram panchayat and performed their role actively.

In a study of women in Panchayats of Haryana by Sushella Kaushik (1993), of 100 elected women Pradhan in four district of the state over two years. It was found that majority of the elected women Pradhan were illiterate when elected to office, most of the women Pradhan were young and having no political Background. Two year's in
office made aware of their illiteracy, their inability to read documents and their (hitherto perfectly acceptable) dependency on their husbands to read for them. With the passage of time the women Pradhan realized the importance of education and they felt the need to educate their children’s and especially daughters. Initially, most of the women Pradhan had no idea about the Panchayat system, their husbands did all the work, with two year’s in office, many of the women pradhan were calling the shots, organizing quorums, exercising their judicial powers, organizing and evaluating development work of their gram-panchayats. A few women Pradhan’s had, with two years, affiliated themselves to political parties. Some pradhan also wanted to fight for higher post like Zilla Parishad member and even MLA’s. Similarly, many women Pradhan were quite aware of the fact’s that law made women equal to men, they can not take them for granted, now they think that they had a distinct identity from their husbands. Their men consulted them on most important matters like the education and marriages of their children’s buying and selling of property and freedom in the house-hold chores. The village people had recognized their authority when there is wedding in the village, they are the first to got the wedding invitations.

In another study of Haryana by Amita Jhamtani (1995) in which she found that most of the women Pradhan belonged to the family of men
Panchayat leader’s. It was also observed that in some places that women
leader’s was so old that she could hardly move around, because the male
member of the family just wanted to retain the pradhan seats within the
family in the form of daughter-in-laws, wifes and mother’s. In most
cases, the reservation merely strengthened the grip of rural elite. The
funds meant for women’s welfare were not used for the right purpose.
Because of ignorance on the part of women about the financial
procedures and their rights, coupled with improper methods of identifying
and nominating women Pradhan, they have not been accepted as equals in
Panchayats by the men. This study shown that educational backwardness
and male dominance are the two major handicaps which stop’s women
elected women Pradhan to participate actively in the Panchayat Raj
Institutions (PRIs).

Another study conducted by Bhardwaj and Sharma (1994)
investigated women’s participation in Panchayat Raj Institution in
Haryana. The study was based upon the interview method of women
Pradhan in Rohtak District of the state. The study showed that majority of
the women elected member of Panchayat were uneducated and having
very little political background. It was found revolved that lack of
education and male domination and pre-occupation with house-hold
duties also prevented women leader’s from participating in political
process, and only those women are elected to office who are connected to political and influenced personalities came forward for elections. Due to lack of political awareness among women the male member of the Panchayat as well as their husbands and other family member keep them away from meetings, take signature on their behalf and treat them as dummy participant’s. The majority of the elected women Pradhan themselves admitted that they give priority to domestic affair’s. Most of them are busy in their house-hold chores and agriculture was their main occupation. A large majority of women Pradhan confessed that their Panchayat work is done by their husbands, father-in-law and their sons. Most of them remain a silent spectators in block meetings as well as proceedings of the house and rarely participate in panchayats work. Most of the women Pradhan accepted that they did not attend public meetings or gram sabha meetings, on their behalf husbands did the rest of the Job. Most of the women Pradhan accepted that they never went to police station, when require, and hardly contact higher authority to take up problems of the village. Many a time, husbands introduce themselves as Pradhan while dealing with government official/officers.

In a study conducted by Chander Bhan and Raj Singh (2001), in Haryana. They found that most of the women in Panchayats were illiterate and having no political background, and many of the women
Panchayat leader’s are ignorant about their right’s and duties. In this study the researcher also found that most of the women Panchayat leader’s are busy in their house-hold chores. It was found that a large number of women Pradhan themselves confessed that they generally did not attend panchayat meetings. In fact, male member of their families anchor such responsibilities, and women Pradhan hardly contact higher authorities to take up the Problems of the village, many a times husband of the women Pradhan introduces themselves as Pradhan while dealing with government officials.

It was found that the major obstacles to women’s full participation in Panchayat activities is clearly a universal social altitude that has valued women principally as mother and wifes. It was found that those women comes winglally come forward for panchayat elections who belonged to political and influenced personalities. This was also found in this study that the husband of women Pradhan keeps them away from Panchayat work and just take signature at their residence and treat them as dummy participants. The women leaders themselves admitted that they give priority to domestic duties. They did not take active part in the discussions and meetings and not only this knowledge about proceedings of meetings of gram panchayats and gram sabhas did not matter for them.
In a study conducted by Bandyo Padhya (1993) in west Bengal. He found that there was no doubt that there were many women becomes Pradhan even more than 33% in Panchayats. But the fact was that most women candidates contested only because the male member in their family could not contested the election as the seat was reserved for women candidate only they made their wives, daughter-in-law and mother contest on their behalf. The women elected member in Panchayat’s showed hardly any interest or hardly showed any interest in public life. Many of the women Pradhan accepted that they could not disobey their husbands and whatever they said they just endorse it. They hardly went to block meetings and they never chaired gram panchayat and gram sabhas meetings. They knew nothing about the progress of development work in their respective gram panchayats and on their behalf their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families discharge the duty. Most of the women pradhan were busy in the house-hold chores.

In the study conducted by Sukla Deb Kanango (1996) in West Bengal. It was that some women panchayat leader’s were clear in making the fine distinction between the process of making decision and the ultimate decision taking. As many women Panchayat leaders were pushed by their husband, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families. It was found that those women Panchayat leader’s who had
willingly plunged into the fray are mostly those who had earlier exposure to political activity within their own families or had been a part of Panchayat set-up. These were the persons who had started with sure footing and quite clear about what constructive role they could play as women leader's in the panchayat set-up. Those women leaders in Panchayat who were pushed by male member's found the responsibility very demanding because some they were engaged with their domestic responsibility. In fact many women Panchayat leader's agreed to stand for panchayat elections for even nomination because their men told that they would not have to do anything. In fact these women have not been attending Panchayats meetings for more than a year or so. Whenever their signature was required papers were sent home for the purpose. Some of the women Pradhan attending the Block meetings quite regularly in the beginning but the men folk do not pay any attention to what they say, did not give any importance. So many of the women Pradhan stopped attending the block and Panchayat meetings.

A study conducted by Rashmi Mishra (1988) in Orrisa. It was found many women did not come forward to contest the Panchayat election because of being illiterate and anticipating the problem of communicating with the Block officials for addressing the grievances of her gram Panchayats. One of the greatest hurdles in contesting Panchayat
election was the over increasing expenditure of election. This factor not only makes it difficult for women, who had very limited independence economic resources to participate but completely eliminate those who were living below the poverty line. This situation leads to dominance of women who were belong to upper caste and upper class in these positions. It was also found in this study husbands of the women pradhan influenced the women pradhan in taking decisions, and the women Pradhan are ignored and they are invariably influenced by male family members.

A study was conducted by D.R. Mandlik Trust, Maharashtra, quoted by Mahipal (1999) in three district of Konkan region. It was found that 90 percent of the elected women Pradhan were illiterate, majority of them belong to poor families, and majority of them became the Pradhan for the first time. This study shown that very few women pradhans came on their own to contest Panchayat election. They had been projected as some one sisters, mother, daughter-in-law’s etc. Most of them encouraged by their family member's and especially their husband to fight the Panchayat election. The reason was not they were interested to bring them in the mainstream by allowing them to participate in the political process at the grass-root rather the reason were the seat’s were already reserved for women and male member could not contest the Panchayat
election. When they were elected as pradhans their husbands and other elder male members of their families were the real heroes of the winning processions and elected women were happy to watch the procession through the window of the houses. It was found that most of the elected women Pradhan did not know the number is of votes they secured, they were un-aware of the institution of gram Panchayat and gram sabha etc. About half of the elected women pradhan had no idea of Panchayat meetings. Panchayat’s related paper were generally sent to their houses for thumb impressions or for signatures. In many cases male member of their families guided them in the Block and Panchayat meetings. When they tried to speak in the meetings or wanted to raised questions, they were silenced by the male member’s who claimed that the subject was beyond their understanding, most of the elected women Pradhan admitted that their illiteracy and ignorance were the main stumbling block in the way of effective and meaningful participation in the panchayat activities.

Similar another study was conducted by Chetna Gala (1991) in Maharastra. In her study she found that most of the elected women pradhan were illiterate, most of the them belonged to low-income families, and most of the elected women Pradhan were forced by their family member to contest Panchayat election. They themselves did not wanted and they are less interested in politics. Most of the women
Pradhan don’t know about the right and duties of Panchayat’s. They very rarely attend Panchayat or block meetings. On their behalf their husband’s did rest of the Panchayat work. Many of the women pradhan themselves considered as dummy/name-sake pradhan. Most of them did not knew any thing about the work of development progress in their respective gram panchayat. Most of the elected women Pradhan admitted that after becoming pradhan as such there is no change in their life, before becoming Pradhan they were busy in house-hold chores and now they are busy in the same work.

In a study conducted by Farha Naqvi (1996) in Banda District of Uttar Pradesh. The focus study was to address some basic issues and problems related to women in Panchayat Raj Institutions, primarily through a series of case studies method. The researcher found in her study that most of the elected women Pradhan were illiterate, lack of understanding of public forums, most of the women Pradhan belonged to Backward caste and poor families. In this study found that large proportion of women elected Pradhan were dummy/name-sake candidate, who stood on the behalf of their husbands and other elder male members of their families or were propped up by the powerful’s- the corollary being that reservation were not working for women Pradhan, as men still ruled the Panchayats. The women is just a rubber stamp the decision
taking by those male relatives by pull's the strings from the behind. Most of them are denied of taking parts in Panchayat meetings, and denied of making a presentation, and so on. Another constraint because of double burden of working both inside the house and outside in the fields. But, in her study she too found that with the passage of time one crucial fact out that reservation of women in Panchayat's had not only a quantifiable impact, it has fundamentally altered rural women’s relationship to politics and their perception of the political realm, with the joining of the world women and political participation a psychological barrier was broken.

Neela Mukherjee (1994) found in her study one of the most stumbling block in women’s participation in panchayat is time. It has been observe that most of the women panchayat member have very little time because most of the women Panchayat leader’s had a double responsibility to look after the house-hold chores and other the Panchayat work which created the great problem in actively participation in Panchayat. Second major stumbling block which comes out from this study is the lack of inclination of elected women member’s of Panchayat. The elected women were not properly motivated and/or not able for not able to under take additional work of Panchayats given their work load. Their work load may be such that they can hardly found time to do the justice to Panchayat work and duties. Again, they might perceive
Panchayat work to be the work of men and may lose interest for not being able to influence decision-making in Panchayats to their favour. The third major stumbling which comes out from her study was illiteracy. Most of the elected women leader in Panchayat are illiterate, and due to illiteracy there is a problem especially for technical matter’s and other matter’s like reading and writing endorsement. So, most of the women Pradhan felt certain sense of inferiority complex which can pose limits to their participation in Panchayats and they are forced to take help of their husbands and other male member of the family. The fourth major stumbling block comes out from this study was cultural inhibitions accompanying women’s participation often pose major problem for joint sessions of men and women held in the villages. It was found in this study that women Pradhans did not speak in front of male member in the Panchayat and other meetings, and they can’t express their frank opinion on any matter’s. Male resistance was also found. And lastly in this study we found that caste is a significant factor in socio-political interaction and more so for women. Women of lower caste may found it extremely difficult or almost impossible to make the Panchayat of mixed castes hear then and give their due respect and importance as members of Panchayat.

Dhawan (1994) found in his study of Maharashtra, he found that most of the women Pradhan belong to upper caste, wives of big land
owner’s and politically influential persons, tend to predominate positions reserved for women in Panchayats. However, the redeeming factor is that women in the villages are capable of progressive thinking and have a potential for valuable social participation if a conscious effort is made to secure their participation in Panchayats. In his study he found that majority of the elected women leader in Panchayat were illiterate and elected for the first time that is why most of the women members shown lack of self-confidence and hardly attend Block meeting and rarely chaired gram sabhas and gram panchayats meetings and on their behalf their husband’s and other elder male member’s of their families discharge the duties. Most of them were busy in the house-hold chores.

Ramathilagam (1995), found that most of the elected women in Panchayats were illiterate, they were forced by the husbands, father-in-law and other elder male family member’s to contest the Pradhan election. Most of the elected members of Panchayat had no political background and got elected for the first time. It was it found that most of the elected member were busy in the house-hold chores and their husbands, father-in-laws and other male family member discharging the duties of Panchayats on their behalf, such as attending the block meetings, chair the gram-panchayat and gram sabha meeting and look after the development work of the village Panchayats. All the women panchayats
members had not noted any change after being elected pradhan and considered themselves as dummy/name-sake pradhan.

Palanithurai (1999), found that most of the elected women representative in Panchayat-raj were illiterate and belonged to poor families. Most of the elected member’s in Panchayats were not willingly came forward to contest the Panchayat elections rather they were forced by their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member’s of their families so their victories in the Panchayats was mostly influenced by their husbands and other elder male member of their families reputations. Most of the women Pradhan busy in their house-hold affairs and their husbands and other elder-male member of their families look after the Panchayat related works. They attended Block meetings, they chaired Panchayat and gram-sabha and look after all the development activities of the village Panchayats. Most of the women Pradhan did not feel any change in their lives after being elected Pradhan of their respective gram-Panchayats.

Farooqui (1995), found that most the elected member’s of Panchayat were illiterate, belonged to poor families and most them elected to Panchayat first time. They were forced by their husbands, father-in-law’s and other elder male member’s of family, most of them
were un-interested in politics and did not wanted to fight the Panchayat
election. Most of the women Pradhan were busy in their house-hold
chores and their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member’s
of their families look after the Panchayat’s matter. Their husbands
attended block meetings, they chair Panchayat and gram-sabha meetings
on their behalf and even the leader’s of parties, government official’s
such as B.D.O. and other higher official’s of Block office did not discuss
Panchayat’s matter with them. Most of them admitted that after being
elected nothing has change, they themselves considered dummy/name
sake pradhan.

The review of literature shows that one-third reservation of seats in
Panchayats through 73\textsuperscript{rd} constitutional Amendment had opened a channel
in the power structure for women from different strata and they are
participating in great number’s to occupy the legitimate space in the
Panchayats. It was found in most of the studies that elected women in
Panchayats were illiterate. A majority of them gave their occupation as
agriculture and most of them were in-experienced in politic and public
life. They were got elected in Panchayats from the reserved seats, and got
elected for the first time in Panchayats. It was also found that most of the
women pradhan were belonged to scheduled caste or Backward caste and
belonged to poor families. Most of the women Panchayats members were
not willingly came forward to fight the panchayatelection rather they were forced by their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families. It was also found that most of the women panchayat member's were busy in the house-hold chores and hardly took any interest in panchayat matters. Despite their great number's the study show their in significance participation in decision-making process. Their were inherent impediment's and hurdle of the patriarchal structure associated with women's empowerment through panchayat raj. Most of the women Pradhan working as a dummy/name sake pradhan and their husbands, father-in-law and other elder male family member's of their families fulfill their own political ambitions, through them. These elder male members attended meetings of block and chaired Panchayats and gram-sabah meetings.

The study also reveled that women Pradhan are becoming articulate and they had their opinion on various matter's that came up for discussion. A qualitatively improved participation in term's of the content of their comment's was also evident from the above studies. Many women Pradhans were taking interest in acquiring a better knowledge of the day to day working of Panchayat matter's. Most of them realized the importance of education. Many of the women pradhan had developed the confidence in interacting with the higher officials of the block offices.
Many of them organizing quorums, exercising their judicial powers, organizing and evaluating development work in their respective gram-panchayats. Many of them wanted to fight the election even for higher post. Many of them affiliated themselves to political parties. Many of them became the part of decision making in the family such as education and marriage of the children, buying and selling of property etc. people of their villages had recognized their authority and they come to them for the solutions of their personal as well as the problems of the village. This show's that there is a change in these women and they may be able to challenge patriarchal structure in the future and really become empowered through panchayat raj.