Map of India showing Location of Punjab as the border state with Pakistan.

Source: Census of India 2011, New Delhi.
CHAPTER – I
WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ
INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century there has been a proliferation of state agencies established to promote women’s status and rights and enhance their participation all over the world. These agencies vary in scope, size, resources, stability and location. They appeared at different times in different countries but are now part of the political landscape. Participation in them by women is an indication of their demand for representation. In India, grassroots agencies of participation are called Panchayats. Women’s participation in them became compulsory after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, 1992. This study proposes to analyze political participation of women in panchayats in Punjab generally but more particularly in the district of Gurdaspur, which was chosen as a case study to analyse the participation of women in an area which has the highest number of panchayats in the state of Punjab. There were 1659 panchayats in 2009 in Gurdaspur district as against the lowest (158) in Barnala district (Statistical Abstract of Punjab 2010). Gurdaspur has a high rate of literacy i.e. 81.0% against 74.0% at the national level. Due to high literacy rate and other socio-economic factors people in Gurdaspur district are politically more conscious and aware of political participation.

A democratic policy pre-supposes participation of people in general and leaders in particular in the act of governance. In the absence of this participation even representative democracies can get transformed into just token democracies, only through a five yearly act of casting the vote and finished with it. It is this element of participation at different levels and with different intensities that it lends legitimacy to the political process and credibility to the political leadership. Robert Dahl has categorized political participation of citizens into two categories: active citizens and passive citizens. Passive citizens are those who neither concern themselves nor participate in the political system. They have a feeling of apathy towards the political system. He called them as political stratum and explained various reasons for their feeling of apathy towards politics.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Dahl, Robert (1977) A Modern Political Analysis, New Delhi, Prentice Hall of India Private Ltd., p.32.
Politically active citizens are divided into three categories: the political stratum, the power seekers and the powerful. Thus according to Dahl, all citizens are not equally active. Some are more active and some are less active. Some people do not take interest at all. Participation of citizens varies from person to person. It depends upon various psychological, social, economic and political factors which encourage or discourage the political participation of citizens.

While elaborating on the act of political participation, Milbrath describes voting, discussion, wearing a button or putting a sticker on car, petitioning political leaders, making a monetary contribution, attending political meeting, campaigning, active party membership, soliciting party funds, office seeking, holding protests and demonstrations as some of the political acts which make up the general dimensions of active participation in politics. Milbrath has evolved the concept of ‘Hierarchy of political involvement’. The Hierarchy from bottom to top has been categorized as apathetic, spectator, transitional activities and gladiatorial activities.

People who are active members of political parties, contest elections, raise funds for party and hold some public office have been categorized as gladiatorial. Transitional activities include attending a political meeting or rally or making a monetary contribution to a party. Spectator activities include wearing a button or putting a sticker on car, initiating political discussion and voting etc. Apathetic are those who have nothing to do with politics.

Political participation can be defined as any voluntary action successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate method, intend to influence the choice of public policies, the administration of public affairs, or the choice of political leaders at any level of government local or national”

Political participation is a broader and complex term, which expresses itself in various kinds of overt and manifests political activities. Political participation includes the following type of activities:

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Participation is one of those terms that are very difficult to define because while it is very widely used in today’s language, the scope and meaning that are ascribed to it often differ very widely. The term ‘participation’ is very often used to cover all the forms of action by which citizens take part in the operation of administration. According to the Human Development Report 1993, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme “Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives. People may, in some cases, have complete and direct control over these processes in other cases the control may be partial or indirect. The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human development.”

The word participation is used broadly to refer to the role of members of the general public, as distinguished from that of appointed officials, including civil servants, in influencing the activities of government or in providing directly for community needs. It may occur on any level from village to the country as a whole.

Participation comprises every kind of citizen intervention in administrative action. Participation can only be described as such in the real sense of the term when the person who participates is fully conscious of the responsibilities he assumes in doing so. In a democratic society, participation gives the ordinary citizen a means of voicing his opinion and of showing by his behaviour and action that he is able to take on responsibilities. “It gives the ordinary citizen a chance to show his willingness to carry out constructive public work and to demonstrate his good citizenship by other means than periodically exercising his right to vote.”

Participation has two dimensions: quantitative and qualitative. The tendency in the past has been to focus mainly on the quantitative aspects of people’s participation and to measure it principally in terms of number of people, irrespective of the quality of their participation or their involvement in decision making processes. In this sense, women’s participation was measured by as to how many women were affected by a project even if they were simply passive recipients of development aid, without any voice in the design, implementation or monitoring workers, political and social change, organizations and movements, women often make up the majority of the rank and file, but makers comprise a minority of the leadership and decision.

There can be no true democracy of the people without the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and level of decision making. The goals of development can not be attained without women’s full participation not only in the development process, but also in shaping its goals. Women’s participation is changing the world, in which we live, by bringing new priorities and perspectives to the political process and the organization of society.

The political participation of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women. The recognition of women’s political equality in the Indian Constitution was a radical departure from the inherited norms of most advanced countries at that time. Political participation of women also includes the gamut of voluntary activities with a bearing on the political processes, including voting, support of political group, communication with legislator, dissemination of political views and opinions among the electorate, and other related activities.

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6 Soysal, Mumtaz, op.cit., p.47.
Women’s Political Participation: Historical Perspective

International Perspective

Women’s political participation has been beset with problems even internationally. Until the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in 1868, the status of women was almost the same throughout the world. In the Greek states while woman was a subject of admiration for her grace and motherly qualities, she was completely subordinated to men. It was the Greek philosopher Plato who said that there should be complete equality between the sexes. The civilization of China, India, Rome and the various renaissances of Western Europe could boast of small groups of highly cultivated women. From the middle of the 19th century, there has been significant progress towards equality in the areas of education suffrage, property rights, equality in industry and the right to enter the professions and public life.

In general, industrialization accelerated the growth of two social movements, one for democracy and equality and the other for socialism and natural justice. Throughout the 18th and 19th century, waves of these ideologies reverberated in society.

During the twentieth century, liberal political theory underwent a change as a result of a range of other political tradition that emerged as critiques of or alternatives to liberal theory. These have included feminism, communitarianism and ecologism. The classics of feminist revolution came with the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Freidan, Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone and Juliet Mitchell.

Feminism is characterised primarily by its political stance: the attempt to advance the social role of women. Feminists have highlighted what they see as a political relationship between the sexes, the supremacy of men and the subjection of women in most, if not all the societies. The ‘first wave’ of feminism was closely associated with the women’s suffrage movement, which emerged in the 1840s and 1850s. The achievement of female suffrage in most western countries in the early twentieth century meant that the campaign for legal and civil rights assumed a lower profile and deprived the women’s movement of a unifying cause. The ‘second wave’ of feminism arose during the 1960s and expressed, in addition to the established concern with equal rights, the more radical and sometimes revolutionary demands of
the growing women’s liberation movement. Although feminist politics has undergone a process of deradicalization since the early 1970’s, feminism has nevertheless gained growing respectability as a distinctive school of political theory.

Feminist political thought has primarily been concerned with two issues. First, it analyses the institutions, processes and practices through which women have been subordinated to men; and second, it explores the most appropriate and effective ways in which this subordination can be challenged. Feminist thought has rejected the conventional view that politics is confined to narrow public activities and institutions, the most famous slogan of second-wave feminism being: ‘The personal is the political’. The central concept in the feminist theory of sexual politics is patriarchy, a term that draws attention to the totality of oppression and the exploitations to which women are subject. This, in turn highlights the political importance of gender, understood to refer to socially imposed rather than biological difference between men and women.

Nevertheless, feminist theory and practice are highly diverse. The earliest-feminist ideas derived largely from liberalism and reflected a commitment to individualism and formal equality. In contrast, socialist feminism, largely derived from Marxism has highlighted links between female subordination and the capitalist mode production drawing attention to the economic significance of women being confined to the family or domestic life. On the other hand, radical feminist moved beyond the perspectives of existing political traditions. They portray gender divisions as the most fundamental and politically significant cleavage in society and call for the radical restructuring of personal, domestic and family life. However, the breakdown of feminism into three traditions liberal, socialist and radical feminism has become increasingly redundant since the 1970s as feminist thought has become yet more sophisticated and diverse. Amongst its more recent forms of have been black feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, eco-feminism and postmodern feminism.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Women’ (1792) is usually regarded as the first text of modern feminism and was written against the backdrop of the French Revolution many years before the emergence of the women’s suffrage movement. In arguing, that women should be entitled to the same rights and
privileges as men on the grounds that they are ‘human beings’. She established what was to become the core principle of liberal feminism.

Simone de Beauvoir, a French novelist, playwright and social critic, helped to reopen the gender politics and foreshadowed some of the themes later developed in radical feminism. She highlighted the extent to which the masculine is represented as the positive or the norm, while the feminine is portrayed, as ‘other’. Such ‘otherness’ fundamentally limits women’s freedom and prevents them from expressing their full humanity. Beauvoir placed her faith in rationality and critical analysis as the means of exposing this process and giving women responsibility for their own lives. Her key feminist work is The Second Sex (1949).

Kate Millet (1934), a US writer and sculptor, developed radical feminism into a systematic theory that clearly stood apart from established liberal and socialist traditions. She portrays patriarchy as a ‘social constant’ running through all political, social and economic structures and grounded in a process of conditioning that operates largely through the family, ‘patriarchy’s chief institution’. She supports consciousness-raising as a means of challenging patriarchal oppression and has advocated the abolition and replacement of the conventional family. Millet’s major work is Sexual Politics (1970).

Juliet Mitchell (1940), a New Zealand-born British writer, is one of the most influential theorists of socialist feminism. She has adopted a modern Marxist perspective that allows for the interplay of economic, social, political and cultural forces in society, and has warned that, since patriarchy has cultural and ideological roots, it cannot be overthrown simply by replacing capitalism with socialism. Mitchell was also one of the first feminists to use psychoanalysis as a means of explaining sexual difference. Her major works included Women Estate (1971) Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) and Feminine Sexuality (1985).

Shulamith Firestone (1945), a Canadian author and political activist, developed a theory of radical feminism that adapted Marxism to the analysis to the role of women. She argues that sexual differences stem not from conditioning but from a ‘natural division of labour’ within the ‘biological family’. Society is thus structured not through the process of production, but through the process of reproduction. Women can, then, only achieve emancipation if they transcend their
biological natures and escape from the ‘curse of eve’ by the use of modern technology such as test-tube babies and artificial wombs. Firestone’s best known work is The Dialectic of Sex (1970).

There are biological and therefore ineradicable differences between men and women. Feminists have drawn attention to a sexual division of labour through which women are either confined to a domestic sphere of house-work and child-rearing, or to poorly paid and low status occupations. Men, on the other hand, tend to dominate position of power and influence in society. Radical feminists, such as Kate Millet and Mary Daly, believe gender cleavages to be the deepest and most politically significant of all social divisions, and therefore practice a form of ‘sexual politics’. In their view, all contemporary and historical societies have been characterized by patriarchy, the dominance of men and subordination of women, usually thought to be rooted in the rule of the husband-father within the family. In some respects, the radical feminist notion of patriarchal oppression resembles the Marxist idea of class exploitation. Patriarchy can only be overcome by a ‘sexual revolution’, which would fundamentally transform culture and personal relationship as well as economic and political life.

Liberal or reformist feminists, by contrast, highlight what they see as the eradicable inequalities of public life, such as the under-representation of women in senior political, managerial and professional posts, and the inadequacy of childcare facilities and welfare support for women. They believe that such goals can be achieved through a gradual process of incremental reforms, and dismiss any idea of a ‘sex war’ between women and men. In the 1980s it became fashionable to proclaim that gender inequality had been eradicated with the emergence of a ‘post-feminist’ society. However, it is difficult to see as to how gender will lose its political significance until a genuinely post-sexiest society is created, and no society has so far emerged in which significant disparities in the treatment of men and women do not exist.

**John Stuart Mill on Equal Status of Women**

The dominant liberal tradition has generally been taken for granted that “the private world”, free of state interferences is a non-political world and that women
naturally find their place in this domain. Accordingly, women are located in a wholly marginal position in relation to the political and public life. Mill directly criticized this stand and held that only complete equality between men and women in all legal, political and social arrangements can create the proper conditions for human freedom and a democratic way of life. In turning many key liberal principles against the patriarchal structure of state and society, Mill was arguing that the emancipation of humanity is inconceivable without the emancipation of women.

Mill’s early intellectual sympathy with the cause of women’s rights derived from his rearing in the utilitarian tradition. Mill’s “Subjection of Women” contains a valuable analysis of women’s oppression. The ideas that he developed were an integral part of his philosophy, a specific application to the case of women of his cherished principles of liberty and justice, including the right of choice. The emancipation of women was central to Mill’s philosophy in another way. It was a necessary condition for the achievement of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. For Mill, that goal could be reached by the fullest possible development of the moral and intellectual capacities of the whole of humanity, by the realization of full, potential of men and women alike... Inequality is the ‘legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself and one of the chief hindrances to human improvement’. His position was novel amongst those of liberal democrats in its insistence on the impossibility of the realisation of human happiness, freedom and democracy while inequality of sexes persisted.

Subordination of women has created fundamental hindrances to human development. In the first instance, it has led to the underestimation of the significance of women and the overestimation of the importance of men. The sexual division of labour has further led to the partial and one-sided development of the characters of women and men. Thus, the ability of both sexes to respect merit and wisdom has been eroded. Further, the inequality of sexes has deprived society of a vast pool of talent. If women had the free use of 'their faculties along with' same opportunities and encouragements as men, there would be greater degree of qualitative human resources available for the higher service of humanity. In Mill’s view, complete equality among men and women in all legal political and social arrangements can create the conducive conditions for human freedom and a democratic way of life.
According to Mill, liberty and democracy create the possibility of, “human excellence”. Liberty of thought, expression and action are necessary conditions for the development of independence of mind and autonomous judgment; they are vital for the formation of human reason or rationality. In turn, the cultivation of reason stimulates and sustains liberty. A representative government is essential for the protection and enhancement of both liberty and reason. A system of representative democracy makes government accountable and creates wiser citizens capable of pursuing the public interest. Mill summarized the ends of the government as the security of person and property and equal justice among individuals being the first need of the society and the primary ends of the government. The new policies that Mill defended were the enfranchisement of women, reform of the marriage laws to strengthen the independent position of women in the family and create equal educational opportunities for them.

Liberty for women, that is the right of self-determination and freedom to choose how they should conduct their lives was essential in Mill’s view. “After the primary necessities of food”, he wrote, “Freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature”. Women should be able to enter any career open to men, to marry because they wished it and not because it was the only option open to them. Within marriage, their rights and responsibilities must be equal to their husbands. Only in that way could they find that self-improvement, which would contribute to the progress of the whole human race.

To understand the status of women in the society, an examination of the political status is necessary. Though the political status is interlinked with socio-economic status, it has the capacity to influence the transformation of the socio-economic system. It has been accepted that women’s right to vote and to occupy is fundamental to women’s participation in the political process of the country. Later, the demand for political equality of women started in 18th century. In Western Europe and North America, where the idea of equality of the sexes first took root, a change in status preceded legislation and with important exception of suffrage, was often not dependent on law. New Zealand was the first country to enfranchise women in 1983, Australia and Canada in 1908. In Britain, attempts to enfranchise women before were unsuccessful, but during the 1st World War, women did such responsible work in such a variety of fields that by 1928, all women over 21 were enfranchised. In many
countries like USA and France, women had to wage relentless struggle for equal political rights. In USA, women’s suffrage was secured in 1920 and France in 1994.

In Western Europe, after the World War II, many countries enacted legislation enfranchising women. These included Greece, Italy and France. In Germany, women were enfranchised by the Weimer Constitution of 1919. In Norway in 1913, Danish women in 1915 and in Switzerland, women were enfranchised in 1971. In Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, it was stipulated in the 1936 Constitution that no legislation or agreement should deviate from the principle of women’s equality with men.

In the Middle East, in Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, women have no voting rights. Other Arab states granted either limited or total suffrage to women by the late 1960’s. In terms of representation of women in decision making bodies, the Scandinavian countries are generally considered as a model for women’s equality. Percentage of women in Scandinavian Parliaments today is fair, for example, Sweden 42%, Denmark 38%, Norway 36%, Finland 37%. However, it took many decades for women in these countries to reach this far and today the women of the world are not willing to wait that long.

In India, from its inception in the 19th century, the Indian National Congress had included women and in 1917, even elected a woman president, Annie Besant. The demand for the vote was a pact forward by a group of women to the Montague Chelmsford Committee on constitutional reform. Madras was the first province to grant limited franchise to women in 1921, followed by other provinces. The Government of India act of 1935 extended the franchise. Only after independence in 1947 and with the Constitution in 1950 all the women above 21 years were given the right to vote and the Constitution clearly stated that “the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, sex, place of birth, or any of them”. In India, women’s franchise has been described as “easy victory”. The constitutional framers in granting women’s franchise were more influenced by the world history and the Gandhian philosophy rather than of any widespread demand from Indian women.

Women’s Political Participation in India

The issue of women’s participation in politics can not be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in society. The whole issue needs to be placed in
a historical perspective with a view to examining the status assigned to them by tradition, religion and social structure.

Woman in ancient India was viewed not as a thing of pleasure but as a partner in the religious duties of a man. Women capable of carrying religious discussions were admitted into assemblies. It enabled them to play active role in administering social and religious groups. However, ‘material on the life and status of women in the Rigvedic Age is very scanty. The high ethical standards attained by the Aryan society can best be seen in the wedding hymns in the Rigveda. Women in Rigvedic period enjoyed a position of equality and were respected both in the family and society as well. But in the later Vedic period, women’s position deteriorated. There existed evidences of Sati, dowry system and polygamy.

In the intellectual field some of the hymns were attributed to female rishis. Women were educated both in the spiritual as well as temporal subjects. The spiritual side comprised of training in the religious lore and perhaps also in the historical tradition and mythology and the temporal side comprised of training in managing finances as well as military sciences.

In Vedic literature we seldom come across any reference to singing queens but we do have queens in battle field, like queen Visapala, who accompanied the king in a chariot to the forefront. Mudgalani also known as Indrasena, wife of Mudgala, helped her husband in hunting out the robbers. For political organization in rigvedic and later periods, Vidatha, Sabha and Samiti have been used for public assemblies. Female participation was not mute rather they were taking active part in the deliberation. Therefore, we can say that in rigvedic times when the family was the unit of political structure, womenfolk ruled the household and guided the destiny of the family. They also entered politics and participated in the battle field when circumstances so warranted. However, eventually women were relegated to background and politics became only the male prerogative.

**Early History Literature**

8 Ibid. p. 27
In ‘Manusmriti’ no worthwhile role has been visualized for women in the political arena. Rather, it was advocated that women needed protection of men. ‘Manu realized the great importance of women as a component part of man, the two together making a complete whole, but he also regarded women as more emotional and less rational than men and advocated for their protection throughout their life.’

Buddhist literature is opposed to the brahmanic rituals wherein woman was denied the primary role and a childless and a widow was provided no place. The lower position of women in the spiritual world and culture was elevated. In Buddhist Law, the inequality between man and woman was wiped out. Polygamy was allowed and divorce was permissible. Buddhists Sangha admitted women, not only those who were pure and virtuous in character but also sinners as well who were not acceptable under any circumstances into any other religious order. But Budha disliked the idea of women participating in politics. He never thought women to befit to rule a nation.

*Kautilya’s Arthasastra* furnishes details of salaries of the queens suggesting thereby that they were also entrusted with state administration. Female bodyguards of the kings and women spies have also been mentioned. There are instances of prostitute women being used as spies. Chanapkali was one such lady.

In the Delhi Sultanate, the then political structure and the ruling elite did not encourage women to participate in politics. Inspite of this, there are many references when females of loyal household exercised authority for example Khudavanda 1 Jahan, Shah Turkan and Rajia (1236 A.D.). During the Khilzi period, the wife of Sultan Jalaluddin Khilji commanded a respectable status. The Tughluq Dynasty witnessed the political influence of Makhdama 1 Jahan and Khudavandazada, the mother and sister of sultan Mohammad bin-Tughluq respectively. During the Lodhi

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10 Das, Ram Mohan (1923) Women in Manu’s Philosophy, New Delhi, ABS Publications, p.2.
12 Shastri, Shakuntala Rao, op.cit. p. 106.
14 Ibid., p. 13.
period. Shams Khatum, the chief wife of Sultan Lodhi was known for her influence on king.  

Royal women have played a great role in changing the course of political history in the way described ahead:

a) Matrimonial alliance: It joined the royal houses politically prominent such an alliance was Gupta-Lichchhavi alliance.

b) Mother queens obtaining crowns for their sons e.g. mother queen of Samudragupta.

c) Queen consorts influencing their husbands in making political decisions e.g. Kumara Devi.

Women in Medieval Period

The general position of women declined during the medieval period despite the fact that some of them took an active part in political and intellectual pursuits. The first example of a queen who is said to have influenced the state affairs is that of Shah-Turkan, wife of Illtumish, who ruled over Delhi during AD 1211-36. However, women of lower strata were mainly concerned with domestic affairs. It is worth mentioning that the position of Hindu women registered a gradual decline after the advent of Muslim rule in India. Many European travelers to India like Ovington, Grose Mandelso and Hamilton noted that the Muslim men were extremely jealous of their wives. All the women were closely preserved by their husbands who forbid them the very sight of strangers. The medieval period strengthened the atrocious practice of female infanticide, child marriage, sati, parda, polygamy etc.

It is interesting to note that while the status of women in general had deteriorated in the society, women in high positions proved to be good administrators. There are accounts of some great Rajput women in the history of Medieval India. Much before this, Didda, the queen of Kashmir dominated the history of Kashmir during the period between 958 and 1003 A.D.  

15 Ibid., pp. 55-107.
During the 17th and 18th centuries Maratha royal families emerged. Shivaji the great Maratha leader owed his greatness to his mother Jijabai. Tara Bai, daughter-in-law of Shivaji was also a good administrator. It was due to her that Aurangzeb was not successful in establishing his rule in the deccan during seven years after the death of Raja Ram.\textsuperscript{17}

In the hour of need, Indian women of royal families, proved themselves competent enough to lead armies, direct governments and rule kingdoms. The position of womenfolk in the country was, however miserable. They were ignorant or illiterate. Their only function was bearing and rearing children.

**Women in India’s Freedom Struggle**

The period from 1857-1900 can be termed as the period of political awakening. There was a political and administrative unification of the country which was further promoted and strengthened by the modern means of communication and transport. Western education and religious organizations like Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and Theosophical society worked for social reforms and made India politically conscious as well. Social freedom is interlinked with political freedom and for the progress of the country both as necessary pillars. Women social reformers were inspired by the urge for the social uplift of fellow sisters. They also made a distinct contribution to the cause of Indian freedom. Prominent among them were Sumanda, Pandit Ram Bai, Swarn Kumari Debi, Rani Shurnomoyee, Rama Bai Ranade, Fracina Sorabji and Rani lady Harnam Singh.

By the end of the 19 century “Swaraj” “Swadeshi” and “National Education” became the slogans of the nationalists. There was no mass awakening amongst the women at this time but there was some sort of movement spreading slowly in them. Some 500 women met at Jenokand village in district of Murshidabad to protest against government’s decision and urged the need of using the country made goods.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1905 when the British partitioned the province of Bengal, women joined men in protesting this division by boycotting foreign goods and buying Swadeshi goods.

\textsuperscript{17} Bhagi, M.L.(1965) Medieval India: Culture and Thought, Ambala, The Indian Publications, p. 85.
Women hid weapons, sheltered fugitives and encouraged the men, providing cover for their subversive and revolutionary acts. In 1920’s an independent women’s organization, Rashtriya Stree Sabha (RSS) was formed in Bombay, which required its members to join the district congress committee. In Bengal, the Mahila Rashtriya Sangha began in 1928 to mobilize women for political work. In Calcutta women formed the Nari Satyagraha Samiti in 1929 in response to the Congress call for women to be ready to serve the nation.

Kumudini Mitter preached the cause of the extremists through Suprabhat, a Bengali Magazine. It propagated the cult of revolution. Arya Vati in Delhi, started a Vidhwa Ashians, where widows and other women without distinction of caste and creed, received political training and were taught to spread the same. Sarla Devi toured extensively, more especially, the Punjab. She opened the Arya Samaj branches for women. Sucheta Kriplani, Aruna Asaf Ali, Mrudula Sarabhai, Madam Bhikaji Cama, Sister Nivedita were the revolutionaries of higher order.

In 1919 under the Montague – Chelmsford reforms, women obtained the voting right. However, they exercised their franchise for the first time in 1932. Till 1926, no women ever got into any legislature. Muthulakshmi Reddy of Madras, a dedicated social worker was the first woman to be nominated to the Madras legislative council and she was also elected as the Deputy Chairperson of the council. Devdasi Bill was introduced by her. Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, a pioneer in the women’s movement was the first to contest a seat from the South Canara constituency in Karnataka in 1926. Rakha Bai Subharaya, Renuka Roy, Annu Swaminathan were the earliest women who got into the central legislature.

Mahatama Gandhi encouraged women to participate in all aspect and phases of nationalist activity, particularly in the constructive programmes and the non-violent Satyagrahas. According to him, in the non-violent struggle women have an advantage over men, for women are superior to men in their religious devotion. Thus, by

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20 Forbes, Geraldine op.cit. p. 130.
21 Ibid., p. 135.
reinterpreting the traditional roles of women, Gandhi sought to involve them in national politics. The Swadeshi movement, the non-co-operation movement and the civil disobedience movement drew them out from the seclusion of home and made their direct participation in the struggle. Prominent women who led the struggle or lent support to it were Annie Besant, Durgabai Deshmukh, Lilavati Munshi, Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Lakshmi Menon, Maniben Patel and many others.24

In the 1942 during Quit India Movement when the top leaders were arrested and the movement became practically leaderless, women took out processions, held meetings and demonstrations. The prominent figures were Aruna Asaf Ali, Kalpana Joshi, Preeti Waddadas, and many others including Kasturba Gandhi who died in jail. In July 1943, in response to the call of Subhash Chandra Bose, a women’s regiment named, ‘The Rani of Jhansi Regiment’ was formed in Singapore with Laxmi Sehgal as it’s captain.25 Women also involved themselves in the making of the constitution. The constituent assembly set up in Oct. 1946, had among its members Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Deshmukh, Renuka roy and Hansa Mehta.26 But it was the necessity of national liberation struggle. A few political demonstrations do not bring emancipation. They did not work out any strategy for their own interests and emancipation.

**Participation of Women after Post Independent India**

Indian women's involvement in politics in the modern era started in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Political participation is a process by which women take part in political activity with more or less clear choice or preference. This was not to happen in India till almost mid-twentieth century. Attendance at public meetings, taking part in agitational activities, attendances at study circles of political parties, voting in elections, participation in election campaign, membership of a political party and membership in representative bodies are some of the important indicators of political participation.

Politics and governance of society in India have generally not been the area of female activity, women have seldom figured prominently in these fields. This is despite the fact that female deities like Kali, which symbolize power, strength and vitality, occupy a very important place in Hindu religious and social ethos. There have been instances in the various phases of Indian history where women actively participated in the 'power games' through court cliques and conspiracies. But, rarely did they play a decisive and significant role in this context independent of male protection and dominance. The nationalist movement towards the close of the 19th century provided the necessary impetus and pull to draw an increasing number of women into the political mainstream. An atmosphere for such a breakthrough was created by the activities of the social reformers and nationalists, who raised demands for education and literacy among women. As the struggle for independence acquired a mass character, growing participation of women became necessary. Since then, political consciousness among women has shown a gradual increase in both extent and depth. In India's fight against the British Raj, women came forward in thousands to sacrifice anything. They could face bullets, suffered imprisonment and bore hardship along with their male comrades to win independence.

The Constitution of India has granted women equal rights of participation in the political process of the country along with equal opportunity and rights in education and employment. Legal status (Article 14 of the constitution) provides that the state shall not deny any person equality before law or equal protection of the law in the territory of India. After Independence, Indian women were guaranteed political equality with men. The Constitution of India has granted women equal rights of participation in the political process of the country along with equal opportunity and rights in education and employment. The Indian Constitution guarantees political equality through article 326. Article 15 prohibits any kind of discrimination. Article 15(3) which empowered the state to make any special provision for women and children even in violation of the fundamental obligation of non-discrimination among citizens on the basis of sex. The Constitution also provides vide Article 16, equality of opportunities for all citizens in matters of employment or appointment to any office under the state. Article 325 makes no special electoral rolls on ground of religion, race, caste or sex.
Besides these provisions, a number of laws have been passed to ensure equality and improving the lot of women. Some of these are the Hindu Succession Act 1956, the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Dowry Act 1961, Factories Act 1958 etc.

**Five Year Plan and Women**

Besides, the social legislation planned change played an important role in creating awareness among women. The planners realized that in the whole process of development, participation of women would be essential and their welfare and development had to be alongside the development in other areas. How the different five year plans focused on empowerment of women can be viewed through the following:

1. First Plan (1951-56) sets up the central social welfare board in 1953 to promote women welfare work through voluntary organizations, charitable trusts etc.
2. Second Plan (1956-61) supported the development of mahila mandals to work at the grassroots.
3. Third, Fourth and Interim Plan (1961-74) had provisions for women’s education, pre-natal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children, nursing and expectant.
4. Fifth Plan (1974-78) a major shift in the approach towards women from welfare to development.
5. Sixth Plan (1980-1985) accepted women’s development as a separate economic agenda, took a multidisciplinary approach with a three-pronged thrust on health, education and employment.
6. Seventh Plan (1985-90) had the objective of bringing women into the mainstream of national development.
7. Eighth Plan (1992-97) saw a paradigm shift from development to empowerment and benefits to women in the core sector of education, health and employment. Outlay for women rose from Rs. 4 core in the First Plan to Rs. 2,000 crore in the Eight Plan.
8. Ninth Plan (1997-02) had empowerment of women as its strategic objective, accepted the concept of a women’s component plan to assure that at least 30% of funds/benefits from all development sector flow to women.
9. Tenth Plan (2002-07) suggests specific strategies, policies and programs for the empowerment of women.

10. Eleventh Plan (2007-11) special measures for gender empowerment and equality will be an essential component of the 11th Plan. The plan will have a special focus on four aspects - violence against women (VAW), economic empowerment, political participation and women’s health.

The Constitution of India has granted women equal rights but in practice or reality these rights are not sufficient because their voice is hardly given any weight age. The overall situation is not satisfactory. There is a difference between the constitutional rights and the rights enjoyed in reality by women. Constitutional political equality hardly made impact on women's active participation in politics. With a few exceptions women have remained outside the domain of power and political authority. Women are virtually excluded from political power all over the world. Although women constitute half of the population, only 3.5% of the world's cabinet ministers are women and women hold no ministerial positions in 93 countries.

All political systems, regardless of ideology or form, routinely deny women formal political status. Maxine Molyneux observed about political status of women, "Politics more than any other realm, has remained largely a monopoly of men because of its condensation of power and authority mainly lies in the hands of this gender." The facts of this statement can be easily observed by looking at the percentage of women occupying political power in every country of the world. As per Human Development Report (HDR 1999) women held only 12.7% of the world parliamentary seats and only 8.7% of those in the least developed countries. As a consequence, political women are seen as the deviants, the trespassers, which does not fundamentally belong to them. In India too, electoral politics continues to remain a male preserve both empirically and symbolically. Male voters are "Aware voters". That such a term is rarely used to describe uniformed male voters have consistently out numbered women voters by 11 percent over the last five elections although this gap is narrowing. Many sociologists consider that only 30% of female voters indicate that politics is still considered male territory. In fact, women cast their votes in India, there is a de-facto pattern whereby women first take advice from male family members, suggesting that they are incapable of arriving at a reasoned decision on their own.
Despite women’s mass participation in the national struggle, women’s representation in the formal political structures has remained marginal. In the Indian Parliament women have never crossed eight percent of the membership till recently. In the Lok Sabha women constituted less than three percent of the membership in 1952. Fewer women contest political positions than do men. On an average, there have been three women candidates for every 100 male contestants in past elections. Only 200 of the 9107 candidates contesting in the 1989 parliamentary elections of India were women. The percentage of those who got elected, however had declined in 1989 and 1991. Women’s candidature increased to 7.3 percent in 1996. In 1998, 43 women were elected who constituted 7.8% of the total membership. The elections of 1999, saw their number to become 49, but still not reaching the 10% mark. The 2004 Lok Sabha elections (14th Lok Sabha) are no exception to this as only 45 women were been elected.

In the 1999 elections women comprised 9.9% of Congress party candidates, 6.6% of Bhartya Janta Party (BJP) candidates, 5.5% of Communist Party of ndia(CPI) / Communist Party of India Marxist(CPI(M)) candidates, and 3.4% of Janta Dal Party (people's party) candidates. The 2004 general elections did not have many women contestants in spite of the celebrations of women's empowerment and reservation policy. It appears that the structuring of political parties remains the main obstacle in women's political recruitment. Throughout the past years, the average percentage of women members of parliament has been below eight. This is mainly because political parties do not offer candidature to women. Similar position was seen in the elections held to various state legislative assemblies in different years. It is satisfactory to note that in the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-14) out of 544 total members 59 women were elected constituting 10.85% of the total seats. Thus it is evident that the number of women participation in political process has been increasing. Women in 2009 with 59 members have the largest ever representation in the Indian parliament (See Table 1.1). This presence has, however, been inconsistently provided from the states. Interestingly, states with higher number of female candidates did not send a higher percentage of women to parliament. The success rate of female candidates was higher in Punjab with nearly 31 percent. The number reveals a lopsided engagement of women with Indian electoral politics, though major political parties now promise to reserve 33% of their seats for women. They are active in the supportive role of...
democracy with high participation in casting of votes, but are on the margins of public life.

Table 1.1 reveals that the number of women members in Lok Sabha never crossed two digits, in spite of the fact that women constitute nearly fifty percent of the voters. It has taken more than five decades and the percentage of women members in the house to move up partially from mere 4.41% in 1952 to 10.85% in 2009, a figure that is below the average of around 15% in countries which have elected legislatures. Though numerically the strength of women members in Lok Sabha has been increasing, their participation in the decision making positions is significantly smaller.

Table: 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lok Sabha</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of male members</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No. of female members</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total seats</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>95.59</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>94.60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>93.24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.76</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>94.07</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>95.78</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>96.51</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>94.85</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>92.28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>94.78</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>92.83</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>92.65</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>92.08</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>90.98</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>9.02</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>91.69</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>89.15</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10.85</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India 2000 and Accessed from http://parliamentofindia.nic.in
The long period of woman prime minister and occasional presence of women chief ministers in the states left this political marginality in elected positions at the national and state levels without much debate for a long time. While commenting upon the irony of women's near exclusion from formal politics as noticed in the poor representation in Lok Sabha even of those women who actively participated in the freedom struggle and were jailed for anti-colonial activities, Nelson and Chowdhury observed, "It was easier to get asserted for supporting democracy than it is to get elected to the democratic institutions that Indian nationalists were fighting to obtain." 27

In the statistics compiled and published by the Indian Election commission, women candidates were not even separately identified. Even the number of women electors and votes polled were not calculated and specified in the reports on the first two general elections. In the subsequent reports, women candidates were identified by a (w) against their names, as was done in the case of constituencies reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. The percentage of women electorates and the votes polled were calculated and recorded in a comparative perspective with similar figures of men only in the report on the fifth (1971-72) general elections.

Women's presence in proclaiming the democratic process in India has been consistent, if their voting number is a criterion. In each election since 1962, more than 45% of eligible women voters have caste their preference for Indian leadership. Their number continued to be marginally less than male participation in elections until the present election when women voters outnumbered the male voters forming 54.17% of the total voters in (2009) (Table 1.2).

---

### Table 1.2
Gender-wise Breakdown of Voters, Contestants, and Elected Candidates in India (1957-2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total voters</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Contesting candidates</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Elected candidates</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>65,802,050</td>
<td>46,440,421</td>
<td>(97.04)</td>
<td>1,919 (96.68)</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>66 (3.32)</td>
<td>643 (93.72)</td>
<td>71.39</td>
<td>76.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(58.62)</td>
<td>(41.38)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(97.17)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>(2.83)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>86,460,437</td>
<td>66,264,048</td>
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<td>2,320 (97.11)</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>67 (3.20)</td>
<td>491 (94.42)</td>
<td>72.75</td>
<td>76.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.61)</td>
<td>(43.39)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(97.17)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>(2.83)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>87,382,907</td>
<td>64,153,895</td>
<td>(93.72)</td>
<td>2,668 (97.00)</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>83 (3.00)</td>
<td>494 (95.37)</td>
<td>73.30</td>
<td>77.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(57.66)</td>
<td>(42.34)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(97.17)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>(2.83)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>109,609,940</td>
<td>84,653,975</td>
<td>(96.68)</td>
<td>2,369 (97.13)</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>70 (2.87)</td>
<td>523 (96.49)</td>
<td>72.07</td>
<td>75.77</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(43.58)</td>
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<td>(97.17)</td>
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<td>(2.83)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>115,357,604</td>
<td>93,955,124</td>
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<td>4,487 (96.93)</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>142 (3.07)</td>
<td>501 (94.71)</td>
<td>73.85</td>
<td>77.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.90)</td>
<td>(43.10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(97.17)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>(2.83)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984-</td>
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<td>5,320 (96.85)</td>
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<td>(97.13)</td>
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<td>(2.87)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>173,290,798</td>
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<td>5,962 (97.00)</td>
<td>8.55</td>
<td>198 (3.21)</td>
<td>501 (94.71)</td>
<td>73.85</td>
<td>77.10</td>
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<td>(43.93)</td>
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<td>(97.17)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>(2.83)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-</td>
<td>163,132,537</td>
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<td>(97.24)</td>
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<td>12.08</td>
<td>329 (3.76)</td>
<td>495 (92.70)</td>
<td>73.16</td>
<td>77.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>92</td>
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<td>(42.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(97.17)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>(2.83)</td>
<td>(94.42)</td>
<td>/7.10</td>
<td>(6.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>151,028,333</td>
<td>(97.71)</td>
<td>13,353 (95.71)</td>
<td>19.15</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>495 (92.52)</td>
<td>71.26</td>
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<td>(95.71)</td>
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<td>(4.29)</td>
<td>(92.52)</td>
<td>/7.16</td>
<td>(7.48)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
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<td>(96.24)</td>
<td>4,476 (94.23)</td>
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<td>274 (5.77)</td>
<td>505 (92.15)</td>
<td>73.30</td>
<td>77.10</td>
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<td>12.08</td>
<td>(5.77)</td>
<td>(92.15)</td>
<td>/7.30</td>
<td>(7.48)</td>
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<td>207,130,100</td>
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<td>(97.39)</td>
<td>4,364 (93.89)</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>284 (6.11)</td>
<td>497 (91.03)</td>
<td>73.76</td>
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<td>6.26</td>
<td>(6.11)</td>
<td>(91.03)</td>
<td>/7.19</td>
<td>(8.97)</td>
</tr>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>216,628,138</td>
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<td>5,080 (93.47)</td>
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<td>355 (6.53)</td>
<td>500 (92.08)</td>
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<td>(6.53)</td>
<td>(92.08)</td>
<td>/7.23</td>
<td>(7.92)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>191,028,997</td>
<td>225,765,026</td>
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<td>7,514 (93.11)</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>556 (6.53)</td>
<td>484 (89.13)</td>
<td>72.76</td>
<td>77.10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(93.11)</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>(6.53)</td>
<td>(89.13)</td>
<td>/7.00</td>
<td>(10.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19,59,039,919</td>
<td>1,602,237,890</td>
<td>(95.56)</td>
<td>69,725 (95.56)</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>3,241 (4.44)</td>
<td>6,914 (93.22)</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>70.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India.

Note *For 1957 data is taken from Ramashray Roy and Paul Wallace (eds), India's 2004 Elections: Grass-roots and National Perspectives (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007), pp., 17.36 and 37. Percentages in Parenthesis are from Row (same year). Percentage in Italic are from Column(all year's total).
The turn-out in percentage of women participation and share of total voters has also been increasing. In 1962, 41.38% of women voted. By the 21st century, this rose to 59%. Male participation of total eligible males was much higher at 70% but the female presence in the electoral process has increased significantly. As a vote bank, women are in a position to influence the selection of the party governing the country. Massive participation of women has put to rest the contentious history of women’s right to vote in the country.

The presence of women in Rajya Sabha has been only slightly higher, probably due to indirect elections and nominations of some women members. The representation of women in Rajya Sabha had reached a high of 11.5% in 1984. It increased to 15.5% in 1991, then it decreased to 6.1% in 1998 and it increased to 11.4% in 2004 and it decreased to 9.1% by 2009 (Table 1.3) Nonetheless, this representation does not come close to the 33% mark. The number of women contesting elections has always been low. It is interesting to note that the percentage of winners among has been consistently more than that of men.

Table 1.3
Women’s Representation in Rajya Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>No. of Women</th>
<th>% of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>18</td>
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Source: List of Members of Rajya Sabha, Rajya Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi.
Women in Panchayat

Lower participation ensures that women remain under represented in politics at all levels. Women are marginalized in politics at national and state levels. They are practically absent in village committees and gram panchayats. The initial legislation on panchayats in colonial period considered only the matter of elected vs. nominated members. Only the male residents who paid rent, land revenue or tax or had a stipulated annual income were eligible to contest elections. In keeping with the then dominant ideology, women were neither voters nor candidates for the panchayat elections even where these bodies had elected members. The Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1920, categorically stipulated that no person could become an elected member who was a female. In Bengal, UP too, the electorate was to consist of all adult males having residence within the Panchayat union. Hence there was no reference to male/ female eligibility to vote or to contest elections.

In the colonial period, the question of representation of different population groups in panchayats was not considered. The question of even getting the request from a local area for setting up village panchayats was limited to resident males. This shows the prevalent ideology which did not address the question of female voters or female elected representatives. Although Government of India Act 1919, provided that if the legislative council in any province passed a resolution in favour of women's franchise, they should be put in the electoral register of that province. But the statutory rules made under the Act of 1919 did not make women eligible for appointment as members of the legislative councils. The law was modified only later and powers were given to the councils to pass resolutions to allow qualified women to become members by election or nomination. Even when women got limited franchise for elections to the provincial legislatures, it was subject to conditions of property and educational qualifications.

After independence, the process of empowering panchayats gathered momentum. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the nation, while emphasizing on 'Gram Swaraj' strongly advocated that, "True democracy cannot function through twenty people sitting in the centre. It should be from basic level and by the people of..."
village". He emphasised that every village will be a republic or panchayat having complete powers. In 'Harajan' Gandhiji had defined his vision of village panchayat in the following words:

"The governance of village will be conducted by the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males and females, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense the panchayat will be legislative, judiciary combined to operate for a year in the office. Any village can become such a republic today without much interference even from the present Government where sole effective connection with the villages in the exaction of village revenue. Here there is the perfect democracy based upon indirect freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government."

Gandhi’s dream of every village being a republic was translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier panchayati raj system to enlist people’s participation in rural reconstruction. With the endeavour of Gandhi, panchayati raj system found an important place in the Constitution of India under the directive principle of state policy in Article 40, which read as "the state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government."

In independent India, the Constitution, after guaranteeing equality to women in all spheres, left their political representation to their own willingness. As far as the panchayats are concerned, the Constitution only provided in Article 40 that the states should endeavour to organise village panchayats and endow them with powers and authority as may be necessary for them to function as units of selfgovernment. The question of representation was left to the state legislatures. However, in accordance with the prevailing practice of national level consultation, deliberation and consensus, which was to be then reflected in the states legislation, the subject was discussed in various forum at the national level. Thus "the Central Council of Local Government in its third meeting held in Srinagar in 1957 recorded that the elected representatives,

28 Gandhi, Mahatma’s statement is quoted from Harijan Jan 18, 1948.
29 Gandhi, Mahatma’s views is quoted from Harijan Jan 18,1948.
about 20 in number in each block panchayat will co-opt two women who are interested in work among women and children.\textsuperscript{31}

"Panchayat to be a real representative body of the people should have women as about half the number of members. But the fourth meeting of the Central Council of Local Self Government in 1958 noted, it is imperative that we ensure adequate representation of women on the panchayats. Some states have reserved one seat for women but in practice, it is found that a solitary woman is unable to express herself freely on the aspects touching women's life in the villages. It is, therefore, felt that at least two seats must be reserved for women. Some states are revising their legislation and incorporating reservation of at least two seats for women. This step would go far in enabling panchayats to assess total needs of village development from a fuller angle.\textsuperscript{32}

It is surprising that with the realization of the inadequacy of one women representative, the council could visualise the need of only two women representatives. The state Acts in 1950's and early 1960's made rules, which either just provided for a grudging reservation of two seats or co-option/nomination of up to two women if no women came through election. All women panchayats at the village level are clearly an anomaly in a country where women have so little political power.

The importance of creating women's panchayats at the village level received formal recognition in the mid 1970's, when the Committee on the Status of Women in India recommended the establishment of statutory women's panchayats at the village level. It is worth mentioning that women in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra had begun contesting elections, occupying reserved positions and actively participating in panchayats. This was seen as a transitional measure to ensure greater participation by rural women in the political process. This recommendation coincided with the growing worldwide recognition of the need for women to participate in politics. Although the United Nations had adopted a convention on the political rights of women as early as 1952, this issue had received little real attention. In 1985, the Declaration at the World Conference of Women in Nairobi, noted that, for true equality to become a reality for women, the sharing of power on equal terms with men must be a major strategy. This gave some impetus to the critical issue of

\textsuperscript{31} Status of Panchayati Raj in India 2000, A Report, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{32} Status of Panchayati Raj in India 2000, A Report, p. 35.
women’s political participation. Prior to the 73rd Amendment, there was no significant presence of women in local government nor were they conspicuously present in legislative bodies at the state and federal levels. But current debate on panchayati raj seem to be revolving around is the participation of women in the panchayati raj institutions. Such a participation in turn, has been dealt with at two levels, namely the representation of women in the panchayati raj institutions either as members or as functionaries, and secondly the substance and effectiveness of such representations. Many parliamentary committees had made some suggestions regarding the integration of women into the polity. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee had recommended that besides the 20 members of Panchayati Samiti, there should be 2 women, “who are interested in work among women and children” as co-opted members. A similar provision was suggested with regard to the village panchayat. The Ashok Mehta committee recommended that two women securing the highest number of votes among the women candidates in the election could take the seats reserved for them. However, in these PRI, the seats reserved have been so low that women could hardly influence the political process. Only one or two women were co-opted in a group of 15 to 19 members. It is very sad to note that when PRI was introduced in 1959, very few women contested or got elected. Women were essentially show-pieces in the institutions whose voices could never be heard. On the other hand, the traditions and conservatism of rural areas, patriarchal nature of the family, the lack of education and access to information and media, the poor exposure to outside world etc. make the women of rural areas, even more powerless and unequipped. So the participation of women in political process remained marginalized because of various socio-economic and political factors, until their political empowerment was ensured through constitutional amendment bill 1994. But it was only with the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI 1971) that the demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up in a systematic way. The CSWI report towards equality (1974) was the major first attempt to review and evaluate not only the data on various aspects of women's status but also the changes in women's roles, rights and opportunities due to planned development, and women's political participation. It came up with the conclusions that the process of change was moving in a direction opposite to the goals of our society and its plans for development, As a result, national development strategies from the 1950’s onwards had emphasized the promotion of grassroot
women’s organizations (Mahila Mandals) for the delivery of the services and for income generating activities. The CSWI 1974, however observed that the purely voluntary and non-representative status of Mahila Mandals deprived their recognition from local statutory self Governing institutions and therefore recommended that statutory women's panchayats to set up at the village level as a transitional measure to ensure greater participation of women in the political process especially in development related decisions. The Committee recommended separate women's statutory panchayats at the village level but as part of the panchayat structure, keeping in view the ineffectiveness of the token representation of women in panchayats. The recommendation, however, was not implemented by state governments.

Although the policy of co-option or tokenism continued unquestioned from the 1960's till 1980, the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974, the Declaration of the International Women's Year 1975 and the UN Decade of Women 1975-85 and the women's movement made issues of women's development visible for public policy. These developments at the national and international level also led to initiatives in the 1980's for increasing women's presence in panchayats. Karnataka was the first state to enact a new panchayat law in 1983, which introduced 25% reservation for women in the panchayats. This dispensation along with the major changes in the devolution of powers and responsibilities to panchayat bodies in Karnataka was seen as a bold step and received national attention. The National perspective plan for women in 1988 and the conferences preparatory to the drafting of the 64th Constitutional Amendment bill in 1988 for constitutional recognition composition and strengthening of the panchayats spoke of 33% reservation for women. Finally the 73rd constitutional amendment was passed in 1992 and became a part of the Constitution of India in April 1993. It made a major contribution to deepening democracy by mandating a one third representation of women in the panchayats throughout the country. It was the first step towards women's ensured political participation. This amendment relates to the participation of women in panchayati raj institutions i.e. Village Panchayats, Block Samitis and Zila Parishads. The participation of women in panchayati raj institutions involve women as voters, women as members of political parties and women as candidates. Actually speaking the 73rd Amendment is a milestone for women coming to the leadership and decision making positions, as it has made such a role mandatory and universal in the whole of India.
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It is to mention here that a total of more than one million women got elected to the three tiers of panchayati raj system all over the country. This reservation of seats for women concerns not only members but also office bearers. Thus not only one third of elected members but also one third of sarpanches or chairpersons have also to be women in the country as a whole. There are 231630 gram panchayats. Over 77210 of them now have women as sarpanches. Thus in the country as a whole, about one million women occupy positions as members or heads in rural and urban local government bodies. This may be unique in the world. This process of participation of women in panchayats enabled them to re-examine their lives, recognize the sources and structures of power and their own subordination and initiate action to challenge the existing ideologies as well as infrastructure of power. It was also expected that this transformation would enhance their mobility and provide them an opportunity to decide about the various core issues. It will also assure them great autonomy and mobility by attending meetings, going to public offices without male escorts and most importantly from politically passive persons to active agents in the political process. As shown in the table most of the states maintained around 33% reservation of women in panchayati raj institutions.

**Rural Environment of Punjab**

Ancient Punjab formed part of the vast Indo-Iranian region. In later years, it saw the rise and fall of the Mauryas, Bactrians, Greeks, Sakas, Kushanas and Guptas. Medieval Punjab saw the supremacy of the Muslims. Ghaznavi was followed by the Ghoris, the Slaves, the Khiljis, the Tughlaks, the Lodhis and the Mughals. Fifteenth and sixteenth centuries marked a period of watershed in the history of Punjab. Through teachings of Guru Nanak, Bhakti movement received a great impetus. Sikhism began as a socio-religious movement, which was more interested in fighting evils in religion and society. It was Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, who transformed the Sikhs into the Khalsa. They rose to challenge tyranny and after centuries of servitude, established a humane Punjabi Raj based on secularism and patriotism. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in the works of a Persian writer, changed Punjab from Madam Kada to Bagh-Bahist (from the abode of sorrow to the garden of paradise). But soon after his death, the entire edifice collapsed due to internal
intrigues and British machinations. After two abortive Anglo-Sikh wars, Punjab was finally annexed to the British Empire in 1849.

The fight against the British rule had begun long before Mahatma Gandhi’s arrival on the scene. The revolt found expression through the movement of a revivalist or reformist character. First, it was the Namdhari sect, which believed in self-discipline and self-rule. Later, it was Lala Lajpat Rai who played a leading role in the freedom movement. Punjab was in the vanguard of India’s freedom struggle on all fronts in India and abroad. Punjab’s hardships did not end with the independence. It had to face the misery of partition with large-scale bloodshed and migration. Besides their rehabilitation, there was the task of re-organization of the State.

Eight princely states of East Punjab were grouped together to form a single state called PEPSU (Patiala and the East Punjab States Union) with Patiala as its capital. PEPSU state was merged with Punjab in 1956. Later in 1966, Haryana was carved out of Punjab and during the same year the erstwhile capital of Punjab was shifted from Shimla to Chandigarh.

Situated in the north-western corner of the country, Punjab is bound on the west by Pakistan, on the north by Jammu and Kashmir, on the north-east by Himachal Pradesh and on the south by Haryana and Rajasthan. There are 13 Members of Parliament from Punjab and 117 Members of Legislature are elected to form the State Government.

Punjab has mainly been an agrarian economy. It has been making a good headway towards rural prosperity in the recent years since the middle of the decade of sixties with an increasing use of modern agriculture technologies by farmer. There is a good deal of enterprising and optimistic spirit among farmers of the state. Besides, the Green Revolution symbolizes a large quantum jump in agriculture production – several agro industries in rural areas and large number of small and medium industries (e.g. hosiery, textiles, sports goods, light engineering goods, etc.) in urban areas have been making a steady progress over the years. The state has the highest per capita income in the country at present Rs. 3,628 per capita at 1980/81 price level. However, there is large variation in size of landholding.
Nearly one fifth of landholdings are marginal and another one-fifth are small, a little more than half (55%) are medium or semi-medium and the rest are large (10 hectare or more). Rural poverty among the marginal farmers and agricultural workers accounts for 10 percent of rural population, the lowest in India. However, there is considerable underemployment in rural areas due to increasing mechanization of agriculture and rather slow growth of non agriculture sector of economy in these areas.

Over the years, beginning with 1983/84, the law and order situation was very much disturbed till very recently. Extensive political agitations by certain groups and rising groups of militancy and terrorist activities had been casting a dark shadow over the normal functioning of economy and polity in the state. Very recently, however, the law and order situation has improved considerably. This is contributing to increased normalcy in social life, political process and economic tempo in the state. The change in political-social environment over the years has been affecting the working of the panchyati raj institutions as of other institutions.

Profile of the Gurdaspur District

The study is focused on Gurdaspur district. This district falls in the submountainous zone from geographical point of view and culturally under Majha region. This area is also known as Kandi area located at the foot of Shivalik hills and covers the submountainous undulating plain. Due to denudation of upper hills resulting in over grazing and deforestation, there is high run-off water resulting from floods and heavy soil erosion.

Historically, Gurdaspur is very famous. In the decline and fall of the Mughal empire and rise of the Sikh power, this district saw, its most stirring scenes. Dera Baba Nanak, Kalanaur and Dinanagar in this district are more prominent places. In Dinanagar, Maharaja Ranjit Singh used to spend his summer time and Dera Baba Nanak is closely linked with Guru Nanak Dev ji.
Mughal Emperor Akbar's coronation took place in Kalanaur on Feb 14, 1556. Gurdaspur district is located in the northern most part of the Punjab state. It shares the boundary with Jammu & Kashmir state and Himachal Pradesh. It has a unique characteristic of sharing the international boundary with Pakistan and river Ravi is separating the district from Pakistan. It covers an area of 3513 sq.km and forms a part of Upper Bari Doab. It falls in the Jalandhar division and is sandwiched between rivers Ravi and Beas. The district lies between north-latitude 31°36' and 32°34' and east longitude 74°56' and 75°24' and shares common boundaries with Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir state in the north, Chamba and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh in the north-east, Hoshiarpur district in the south-east, Kapurthala district in the south, Amritsar district in the south west and Pakistan in the north west. See the map of Gurdaspur showing all the internal and external boundaries of national and international border on page 36.
Map showing the selected district Gurdaspur external and internal boundaries and area of study

Gurdaspur district consist of five subdivisions/Tehsil comprising 1546 inhabited villages. There are 6 sub Tehsils and 16 blocks in this district. See map of Gurdaspur on page 36. Total population of the district is 2,299,026 according to census 2011. Of this, male population consists of 1,212,995 and female population is 1,086,031. Total S.C. population is 520691.

Gurdaspur district has different geographical features, differ in population composition, women are more awakened comparatively and therefore more women legislative members from this area. Gurdaspur district has the highest number of panchayats in the state of Punjab. Another factor such as per capita income, marginal work participation, literacy level, density of population, cultural variation, water sanitation problem, religion, caste and order, development planning are unique features of this district.

The socio-economic condition of the women in the selected area is not good enough. The socio-economic problems of women resulting in sense of deprivation and negative feelings among women are the important reasons for lack of appropriate representation in participatory political institutions. The constraints and prospects of the development along the border and in kandi and hilly areas assume unique significance in the process of planning and development due to specific needs of women living in the stressed conditions. Punjab, one of the rich states of India has the lowest ratio of women to men (0.86). Female work participation and political participation was not good but 2009 election changed the whole scenario of Punjab. The state ranked first with highest women voters. Sense of negative feelings and deprivation among common people, criminalization of politics, lack of appropriate representation in the participatory political institutions and PRIs have affected political participation of women negatively at the grassroot.

The present study is an attempt to analyze the local governance system and understand the socio-economic condition, emerging pattern of leadership in villages and the impact of decade-long terrorism upon women. The rural elected women representatives of the selected blocks in Gurdaspur district in Punjab in the context of their political participation, lack of awareness about their rights, powers and duties as panchayat members along with lack of information about development/welfare
schemes of the government make them dependent upon the official and male counterparts. Women have social handicaps and constraints of various kinds in functioning effectively. The financial dependence of women elected representative on their male members of the family also causes major hurdle in functioning as elected representative. Illiteracy among the elected representatives is the major impediment in functioning effectively. Lack of transparency and accountability of elected women panchayat leaders, reluctance of the state government to transfer funds to PRIs, lack of co-ordination among PRIs, Government functionaries, NGOs and other sectors to upgrade skills of rural people, make the task more difficult.

When the state recognizes the deprived socially ascribed identities (in this case, women) and makes special provision for their inclusion, it takes the first step towards legitimizing the mobilization of their identity directed to get what the state promises. Simultaneously, there is an expectation from the wider society that it becomes tolerant of these acts of participation. However, seeking legitimacy is only a preliminary effort in the struggle for inclusion. The critical issue is how to compete as equals or to carve out a course of action, which is essentially between the powerful and the powerless. Main objective of this study was to examine the issue of participation of the elected women representatives of Gurdaspur district in the governance system of panchayati raj. Further, an attempt has been made to focus on the goals of reservation and to assess whether they have been achieved, in the spirit of 73rd Amendment to facilitate that the reservation for women is not an end but only a means of enabling them to emerge as equal partners in the process of development and progress. Prior to the 73rd Amendment, there was no significant presence of women in local government nor were they conspicuously present in legislative bodies at the state and federal levels. Under the 73rd Amendment, the new Punjab panchayat Act (1952) on 21 April 1994, new rules were framed under the provisions of this Act and the first elections to 138 Panchayat Samitis and 13 Zila Parishads were held in 1994. In June 1998, the first Gram Panchayat elections were held under this Act. In these elections a total of 31,053 women representatives were elected out of a total of 87,842 members. The total number of women sarpanches was 4,114 (33.23%) and out of this 2,854 belonged to the general category and 1260 (10.18%) belonged to the scheduled castes. The election of Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads were also held
in June 2002 in which 2845 members of Samitis and 281 members of Zila Parishads were elected from 140 Samitis and 17 Zila Parishads respectively.\(^{33}\)

Women have occupied only 35.1% seats in panchayats i.e. not more than what has been reserved for them. In 2004, 35.2% panches, out of the total 75,727 panches in the state represented women. Similarly, 35.5% village panchayats, out of the total 12,443 panchayats were headed by women sarpanches. Regarding their representation in the middle and the apex tiers, 32.8% of the present members of Panchayat Samitis in the state and 32.4% of Zila Parishads were women. It seems that the 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment Act which came into force on 24 April, 1993 marked a turning point in the realm of panchayati raj. It was described as a “giant step towards a participatory democracy.”

### Table 1.5

**Number of Women in Panchayats in Gurdaspur 2008 (Selected Blocks)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Sarpanch</th>
<th>Panches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dera Baba Nanak</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalanaur</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinanagar</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurdaspur</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathankot</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sujanpur</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>721</strong></td>
<td><strong>443</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source Punjab Government Panchayat Election Gazette July 9, 2008.*

Table 1.5 shows the numerical strength of sarpanches and panches in the year 2008 in Gurdaspur district, in specifically selected 6 blocks surveyed under the study i.e. Dera Baba Nanak, Kalanaur, Dinanagar, Gurdaspur, Pathankot and Sujanpur. The table indicates the number of women representing Panchayats two decades after the implementation of the 73\(^{rd}\) amendment. It is the impact of the reservation that the women participated in PRIs, so actively. Earlier, only a few women participated as

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co-opted members in the panchayat. It is heartening to see the rural section of women availing such a big opportunity.

Table 1.6 shows the blockwise panchayats and their membership structure in Gurdaspur district.

**Table 1.6**

**Blockwise Panchayat in Gurdaspur District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Name of Block</th>
<th>Total Gram Panchayats</th>
<th>Member of Gram Panchayats (Panch+ Sarpanch)</th>
<th>Member of Panchayat Samitis</th>
<th>Member of Zila Parishads</th>
<th>Functionaries of PRI</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Gurdaspur</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Kalanaur</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Dhariwal</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Dinanagar</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Kahnuwan</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Batala</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Fatehgarh Churian</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Pathankot</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Dhar Kalan</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Narot Jaimal Singh</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Bamial</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Sujanpur</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Dera Baba Nanak</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Sri Hargobindpur</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Qadian</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1594</td>
<td>10736</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>11485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: www.gurdaspur.nic.in*
Objectives of the Study:

The objective of the study is to analyse at micro level the participation of elected rural women in PRI’s in the context of empowerment of women at grassroot level democracy in India, with a focus on the state of Punjab but more particularly in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab.

- To analyse the role and participation of women in PRI’s before and after independence in Punjab generally but more especially in the district of Gurdaspur.
- To analyse the extent of power acquired by women through panchayats a decade after the 73rd Amendment.
- To study whether women members confine themselves to acting as women’s representatives and relate themselves only to the issues specifically oriented to women’s survival, freedom and rights or move beyond?
- Where women are in charge of panchayats, what kind of programmes they want to implement and if they are getting full co-operation from male panchayat members and panchayat secretaries?
- To analyse the impact of different kinds of problems (including the decade long terrorism in Punjab) women face while discharging their duties in panchayat related activities.
- To analyse whether the policy of reservation provides an opportunity to women to effectively participate in the functioning of the panchayats?
- To study whether women are consulted in financial matters i.e. planning budgeting and auditing?
- The study had the focus on the socio-economic conditions of women member of the panchayats and the factors that impelled them to contest elections of panchayats.
Methodology

The study relies exclusively of the combination of historical/empirical, comparative case-study methods. This study largely depends on the primary, secondary and field investigation resources. The study is confined to the Majha region of Punjab. Gurdaspur district has been identified for the purpose of this study from the different three regions: Majha, Malwa and Doaba of Punjab. Gurdaspur district has been chosen because it has different geographical features, which also differ in population composition. The study of Gurdaspur district is confined to the three geographical divisions i.e. the sub-mountainous, the plain and the border areas. For the present study random multistage sampling method is used. Data is collected from the villages representing the different regions of Gurdaspur district. The study is a micro level study.

Under the above said selection criteria based scientific sampling technique, a questionnaire based on various types (Open-ended questions, Close-ended questions, Contingency questions) was prepared to study the over-all functioning of the political participation of women in PRIs in Gurdaspur district of Punjab.

Questionnaire was used to collect information from all the selected panchyats and this questionnaire was got filled from the sarpanches and minimum three panches including one male, one female and one scheduled caste member. In addition to the above mentioned questionnaire, discussions were carried out with the members of Gram Sabha. The main points of discussion were noted down in the daily diary which was the part of the study.

Regarding the primary data, efforts were made to collect information from the state, district and blocks headquarters from the concerned department.

Besides this, interviews and informal discussions were carried out with the officials/leaders regarding the functioning of the panchayat focussing on women representative in the PRIs. Time to time, visits were made to the Universities and research institutions working on panchayat to understand the panchayati raj system and especially the role of women headed PRI’s in the present third tier democracy system.
The questionnaire was codified and fed in the computer and the data was tabulated and analysed. The complete study analysis of the primary data, secondary data and the deliberation of stakeholders collected in note book besides the theoretical inputs and hypothesis was made after tabulation of the data from the respondents.

Selection of District

The variables used for selecting the blocks were (a) population (b) literacy rate (c) distance from international border.

a) Population : It is assumed that the size of population is directly related to the economic and political activities in the blocks i.e. the larger the population size, economically and politically more active will be the people of that area;

b) Literacy Rate : Likewise, population, literacy is also directly related to political activities and modernization in rural development programmes. Gurdas District literacy rate is higher than the literacy rate of Punjab. It is therefore assumed that more the percentage of literacy, more will be the political activities modernization process in a block.

c) Distance from international border : It is assumed that lesser is the distance from an international border lower will be the extent of participation and modernization.

Selection of Respondents

To know elected women’s attitude and participation in PRI of Punjab especially Gurdaspur district, a sample of 50 respondents was taken from each block. Out of these 300 respondents 60 general category male, 120 general category female, 90 scheduled caste (S.C.) female and 30 S.C. male were taken from each block.

We tried to comprehend conception and assessment of male villagers regarding the nature of participation and efficacy of women panchayat members. Total 90 male members were interviewed (Panch and Sarpanch) and they were from geographical areas of women respondents. Women panchayat members were the unit of analysis of the study and women member were regarded as one separate category and their participation and performance was analyzed in the overall social and functional context of panchyats.
Table 1.7

Selection of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Panchayat headed by</th>
<th>Dinanagar/Gurdaspur</th>
<th>Kalanaur/Dera Baba Nanak</th>
<th>Sujanpur/Pathankot</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Male (General)</td>
<td>10x2</td>
<td>10x2</td>
<td>10x2</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Female (General)</td>
<td>20x2</td>
<td>20x2</td>
<td>20x2</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Male (SC)</td>
<td>5x2</td>
<td>5x2</td>
<td>5x2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Female (SC)</td>
<td>15x2</td>
<td>15x2</td>
<td>15x2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SC (Scheduled Caste)

Field Techniques and Sources of Data

Apart from the content analysis of the published literature on panchayati raj and especially related with the role of women in it, which comprised books, statutes and articles in the leading journals, and the reports of the various commissions, committees and study teams constituted by the Union and the State Governments and other non-statutory bodies, were one of the sources through which data was obtained for the study was interview schedule and information seeking schedule.

Interview Schedule

Comprehensive interview schedule was the primary technique to gather necessary information of women’s participation and performance. Women and male respondents formed the primary source of information. The true copy has been given in the Appendix. A special care was taken in framing questions in the schedule to make them as simple and clear as possible. Efforts were also made to avoid high sounding academic terms, and where necessary, in their places terms were used with which respondents were supposed to have familiarity. To make interview more simpler, the questions were translated in their mother tongue i.e. Punjabi. In order to extract the basic information from officials, non-officials and beneficiaries, investigation was conducted with the help of information seeking schedule. Further.
with a view to identify the magnitude of the problems faced and evolution of the role or functions, some of the information was collected from the district panchayat office and center for research in rural and industrial development (CRRID), state institute of rural development (SIRD), economic and statistical organization (EOS). To avoid incorrect and biased information, due emphasis was laid on observation, informal discussion and information gathered through other informal channels, responses and interactions with officials and non-officials engaged in formulation and implication of development programmes were initiated.

Informal Discussion

Apart from the schedule and observation techniques, the researcher extracted much information through informal conversation with local members of village about their involvement. By visiting the concerned field areas frequently, the researcher got sufficient opportunity to have frank informal conversations with the women concerned both individually and in group. This technique was very helpful in understanding the relationship pattern within the panchayati raj and some other problems of women which were not usually told during formal interview.

Scope of the Study

The multi stage/sampling technique using PPS (Probability, Proportion to Size) method was used for the selection of several gram panchayats at village level. Geographically Gurdaspur district can be divided into three zones. These are plain area, submountainous area or hilly area and the border area. Further, due to its proximity with international border the district has border upto (16 kilometer belt) and non border. According to the geographical conditions, the block wise categorisation may be as under.

I. Plain Area
   1. Dinanagar
   2. Gurdaspur

II. Sub Mountainous Area
   1. Pathankot
   2. Sujanpur
III. Border Area

1. Kalanaur
2. Dera Baba Nanak

Suitable statistical technique was used for processing and interpretation of data.

Under the above said technique two blocks were selected randomly from the plain areas and two blocks from the sub mountainous area. To make the study more significant on the basis of proximity to the border area, two blocks were taken from the border area purposefully. As per the random stratified method the blocks namely Dinanagar and Gurdaspur from the plain area, Kalanaur and Dera Baba Nanak from the border area and Sujanpur and Pathankot from the submountainous area were selected. Gurdaspur district has 1,596 Gram Panchayats which is 12.85% of the total 12,443 Gram Panchayats in Punjab in 2003. As per the sampling, the selected blocks of Dinanagar and Gurdaspur, Kalanaur and Dera Baba. Nanak, Sujanpur and Pathankot have 147 and 172, 101 and 139, 71 and 135 Gram Panchayats, respectively. The total membership of sarpanches are 765. The Zila Parishad, the district level of PRI’s in Gurdaspur district have 25 members and the second tier all blocks Samities of the district have 259 elected members and the total 1594 Gram Panchayats have 10,736 elected members which include 1,594 sarpanches and 9,142 panches. In the 6 selected blocks, the total number of schedule caste elected in the block samities was 111.

There were 765 sarpanches and 5,155 panches in the 1,596 gram panchayats in the selected blocks. This constituted 48% of the sarpanches and panches in the district. The district percentage of the gram panchayat is 17.56% of the state. Therefore, gram panchayat in the 6 blocks were selected randomly for the study. While selecting the gram panchayats, minimum five sarpanches/panches represented by females, 3 General and 2 S.C. were selected. While using random sampling techniques for the selection of panchayat if the above mentioned sarpanches and panches were not selected then the next panchayat represented by the category was selected. To make the study more appropriate and inconsonance with the 73rd constitutional amendment the selection was as following.
Relevance of the Study

An analysis of the available literature by the researcher reveals that there is hardly any comprehensive or in-depth study on the participation of women in panchayat in Punjab generally and more specially in Gurdaspur district after the 73rd amendment. Keeping in view the necessity and importance of women in these institutions, an attempt was made to examine the level of participation of women in the PRIs in Punjab. It is interesting to note that the role of women in the panchayati raj institutions in Punjab had not attracted attention of the political scientists and researcher and research institutions. This would mean an investigation into the working of these institutions and throw light on the actual role played by women in solving the local problems and their impact on the decision making process in panchayati raj institutions particularly in Gurdaspur district after the 73rd Amendment till 2005. The study attempted to focus upon various aspects of women’s functioning in the panchayati raj institutions and its impact on the overall development of women, especially in the rural society.

Earlier Studies

Many authors and academicians have developed literature on different aspects and problems related to women but their studies are confined to specific problems. No research has been confined to the border district of Punjab specially Gurdaspur. No doubt, contribution of few great researchers like Leelanla Devasia, Zenab Banu, N. Jayapalan, P. Manikyamba, Sarla Ranganathan and M. Koteswara Rao and few others on the role of rural and tribal women have enlightened the topic in their research works, but still the study on participation of rural women representatives and the problems of women of a border district like Gurdaspur, the panchayati raj system is fairly a virgin field and leaves ample scope for research. This study aimed to fill this gap. In the present changed scenario, when the expectation from the rural women at political level has increased, the present study assumes importance.

Review of Literature

Published material on panchayati raj is vast, varied and ever growing in volume. Considering their importance, some reputed leading national research
institutes like, the National Research Institute, the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad; The Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi; Indian Institute of Local Self Government, Mumbai; Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi; Raj foundation, New Delhi; and Madhya Pradesh Institute of Social Science Research, Ujjain have carried out a sizeable number of reports, surveys on PRIs and grassroots governance. A number of leading research journals such as the Indian Journal of Political Science, The Indian Journal of Public Administration, Journal of Rural Development, The Grassroot Governance Journal, Administrative Change, Economic and Political Weekly, Seminar, Kurukshetra, Mainstream and Punjab Journal of Politics have brought out special articles, reports, surveys, review with special reference to PRIs, grassroots democracy and allied areas. The Indian Council of Social Sciences and Research (ICSSR) has published a very popular Research Trend Report of panchayati raj. As a landmark in the field of ‘Political institution’ building a panchayati raj has attracted the attention of political leaders, bureaucrats, academicians and research practitioners.

Working Group Reports of Planning Commission; The Status Reports and Occasional Papers of the Union Ministry of Rural Development; Round-Table Meeting Reports of Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj; Consultation Papers of the National Commission to review the working of the constitution and other state level organizations publications have tremendously increased the literature on the subject of PRIs. The reasons for the popularity of this field as a subject of research during the last two decades are so many. panchayati raj has been hailed and applauded by many as a mighty experiment and as a revolutionary steps in the way of national development (B.S. Bhargava). Since the panchayati raj administration is a focus area in Indian governance and Policy, the problems of grassroots democratic institutions, district planning, local finance, good governance and other related issues have figured prominently in the literature of Indian Administration. Many individual research studies of intellectuals and senior academics have carried out to examine the multi-dimensional functions and power of the PRIs. Among them the notable works are by M.N. Srivinivas (1960), Jacob George (1967), N.R. Inamdar (1970), S.R. Mehta (1972), G.Ram Reddy (1977) K. Ranga Rao (1980), R.B. Jain (1981), D.S.

Most of the studies on panchayati raj are general in nature and do not throw light on the operational part of the existing administration in the context of delivery system. Different committees and commissions were set up for rural credit, cooperative and agricultural administration and rural development contributed towards planning the norms of administrative arrangement of decentralization and management. No sincere effort was made for improving the role of women with regard to rural development. In 1959, Balwant Rai Metha Committee made proposal for integrated system of rural local government.

A serious effort to decentralize planning process was started during the fourth five year plan. Before formation of fifth plan in the year 1972, Task Force on Rural Integrated Program, was constituted by planning commission under the chairmanship of B.S. Minhas. Working Group on Block Level Planning (1978), under the chairmanship of M.L. Danetvala, had recommended certain structure and institutional changes for strengthening the organization for rural poor. In 1977, the Government of India set up another commission under the chairmanship of Ashok Metha in order to strengthen Decentralized Planning and Development (Report of the Committee on PRIs (1977).

At the national level, based on the concept of integrated area planning, Planning Commission setup a working group of District Planning, under the
chairmanship of Hanumanth Rao in September 1982 to assess the situation in development plans/schemes, decentralization of planning, decision-making and evolving a methodology for local level planning and operationalization. The Report of Economic Advisory Council set up by Prime Minister in February 1983 under the chairmanship of Sukhmoy Chakravorty, recommended that decentralization of planning and implementation, within the state should be taken in the form of devolution of specified functions to Divisional development authorities and through them to Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti.

After tracing the growth of development of panchayati raj organisation, the Singhvi Committee (1988) wanted to vest panchayat with constitutional status and establishment of Nyaya Panchayat for the cluster of villages. Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations (1988) did not favour the idea of Singhvi Committee to confer constitutional status to the panchayati raj institutions. Accordingly, constitutional 64th Amendment Bill on panchayati raj was introduced by the Late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on May 15, 1989. The Seventh fourth Amendment Bill in 1989 was brought by Janta Party with the enactment of the CSIA Act 1992, which had come into force with effect from 20 April 1993, State Government prepared comprehensive State Acts on panchayati raj for commitment of social justice in the country. But after so many efforts, made by Central and State Governments, the devolution of powers for decision-making at local level remained ignored. Though provisions have been made in the Constitution for planning at the grassroots, to what extent steps are being taken at the state level and at the panchayat level to plan for development at the grassroots is a question to be probed. Further, at which level initiatives gained momentum and to what extent planning is initiated from below by the panchayats with the participation of the people particularly the women. The government position on micro-level planning could be evaluated from the steps taken by the government.

It is undisputable fact that the successful working of the PRIs depends on the political, social and economic development of the millions residing in the rural India. The fact that about 70% people live in villages and their destiny to be moulded and guided to the great extent by PRIs, makes it more important a field for studies and
research and the significance of studying the problem of the role of women in PRI as a sub-area for research in the field of PRIs can not be denied. As a matter of fact the role of women has an import bearing on the working of PRIs. It is more evident when one takes into account the emerging controversy on the role of women and reservation issue. Most of the studies on PRIs are of general nature and do not throw light on the operational part of the existing administration in the context of the delivery system. No sincere effort has so far been made for improving the role of women with regard to rural development.

In order to pursue the goals of participation of women at grassroot level in the wake of post constitutional amendment implications of provision of the 73rd Amendment in respect of PRI and analyses the factors to evolve a mechanism to promote women’s participation and evaluates the emerging pattern of leadership and dimensions of political participation particularly in the Gurdaspur district and further explore the possible avenues in using information technology in PR administration for speedy delivery of public services at the grass-root through governance.

Scholars believe that through the 73rd Amendment the country has passed from democracy by consent to democracy by participation in the state governance where in people had no say. Gram Sabha, a lowest unit in PRIs comprising not more than 1,000 people, by face to face communication and active participation of all the adult members enabled them to participate directly in decision making process and gave “voice to voiceless people living in the villages of India (Participatory Democracy and Role of GSS in Decentralization of Governance: An overview of Andhra Pradesh Experience) writes Sunder Ram.

This will also safeguard that the ideal of “power to the people” does not degenerate, into the “power to the powerful”. This participatory democracy of “institution of self-government” restores power to the people to whom it belongs as dreamt by Lord Ripon and Gandhi. Accountability to the people at the lower levels is naturally higher because of the watchful eyes of the people. V.K. Gaikwad suggested changes in the administrative arrangement in the rural area and laid

emphasis on evaluation of organizational improvement, coordination and securing people’s participation. Vina Mazumdar analysed that a few women who have emerged significantly into political prominence are those who are economically well off, and who belong to the upper strata of society. A few references to women in panchayati raj institutions state that statutory provision has been made for their representation in those states where no such provision existed before. She also examines that the majority of women are found to be nominated and hardly any woman stands for election. This study is confined to political aspect and it ignores all other aspects.

Kaushik, Susheela’s study provides an introduction to the state of PRIs with special reference to various dimensions of women’s participation. She emphasized that socio-political and educational action groups should play a catalytic role to mobilize the women and help in resolving their political dilemmas. She highlighted that the electoral operations did not permeate to the women of the rural areas due to the very nature of electioneering, which has become an exercise of political manipulation rather than providing political education to the masses. She explored that the 73rd amendment act may prove to be a revolutionary step provided the basic objective of women’s participation at the ground level is achieved through proper strategies, education and training.

Kumar Ashok included in his study status of women and emancipation of women. He emphasized that inferior status of women was established right from the birth. His study highlighted that political participation of women is influenced by inter-related factors like the social status of women, their economic position and cultural norms.

Duke, Lois Lovelace focuses on women equality and feminist theory, women and politics including woman as participants, women and political parties, women and their role as policy makers in political institutions.

Verma, Kumar, Rajnesh\textsuperscript{40} highlighted in his article that political empowerment of women through local bodies would depend on organizational and policy changes for revitalization of panchayati raj institution, election reforms, sustained drive for political education, gender sensitization campaign, enlargement of employment opportunities for rural women, availability of supportive services and above all, the enlightenment about the importance of gender equality and justice.

Roy, Anupama\textsuperscript{41} explained in her article that articulation of women as citizen in India was imbricated within a web of discourses of liberation and equality, which made the national-political and religious cultural communities the primary and often contesting sources of a person’s identity as citizens.

G. Palanithurai’s\textsuperscript{42} study focused on functioning of panchayati raj from different perspectives. He explained that the unique feature of the present panchayati system has been mandatory reservation for membership and chairpersonship for women. In this study, it is found that the elected women representatives in panchayat faced problems due to illiteracy and lack of formal knowledge in procedure and statecraft, resistance from dominant political and bureaucratic structure and existing social power equation in rural area. He explained that despite all the bottlenecks, the process of empowerment has started and women representatives are gaining a lot of confidence in the art of the governance.

Menon Nivedita\textsuperscript{43} discussed the challenge for feminist politics was the working out of a different space for a radical politics of culture, one that was differentiated from both right and left being articulations of cultural and economic nationalism, as well as from the libertarian and celebratory responses to globalization from the consuming elites.

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Chattopadhayay Raghbendra and Esther Orflo\textsuperscript{44} study concludes that the evidence given is that Panchayat leaders make a difference and that bringing women and scheduled caste (S.C.) into politics may help in improving the welfare. Reduced fertility may be achieved by increasing women’s bargaining power in the family and democracy with adequate women’s representation may be more effective at achieving it than regulation that takes away from women and SC’s what the 73\textsuperscript{rd} amendment guarantees them.

Menon, Nivedita\textsuperscript{45} presents a view of feminist theory and politics in India in the form of debates within the movement on key issues. She presents a picture of Indian politics in broad strokes, a view of feminist theory and politics in India by identifying some key issues in terms of opposing or at least differing positions on them from within the movement, issues on environment and gender, debate on structural adjustment and its deliberating impact on women.

Jain, L.C\textsuperscript{46} in his study reviews the strengths and weakness of panchyati raj institutions as per the 73\textsuperscript{rd} constitutional amendment, through a broad canvas of multi perspective and inter disciplinary presentations. It offers a comprehensive account of development and governance at the grassroots.

There are various studies at grossroot level which confirm the low level of participation of women members. In the study conducted in Bangalore rural district in the state of Karnataka,\textsuperscript{47} the analysis revealed that though the numerical strength of women members had increased, they had not been able to effect decision-making substantially. In Himachal Pradesh,\textsuperscript{48} women participated heavily in voting activity but as the complexity of the political activity increased such as campaigning, contesting elections and unconventional political activities, their participation level decreased.

\textsuperscript{44} Chattopadhyay, Raghbendra, Esther, Duflo (Feb. 28, 2004) Impact of Reservation in Panchayati Raj: Evidence From A Nationwide Randomized Experiment, \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, 39(9)

\textsuperscript{45} Menon, Nivedita (ed.) (2005) Gender and Politics in India, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.


\textsuperscript{48} Jharta, Bhavana (1997) Women and Politics in India, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publication,
In Jalandhar district of Punjab more than 80% of women members at grass root level reported low level of political participation. Women respondents had reported variety of constraints in their effective functioning like socio-cultural norms of society, negative reactions of men, illiteracy, lack of interest and awareness.

A study focusing on women’s leadership in Gram Panchyats in Punjab revealed that women lacked political awareness and hardly attended the meeting and participated in it’s deliberations. Similar observations were made in a study conducted in Maharashtra at the Zila Parishad level.

Kahlon’s article is confined to the study of the problems and functioning of PRIs in Punjab with special reference to the participation of women in Punjab. The participation of women at the grassroot level is not limited only to their involvement in the decision making but also in development process of the village. This article highlights the various aspects of the 73rd amendment, socio economic conditions and political profile of rural women leaders. Author also assessed certain constraints and problems faced by women. The conclusion of this study establishes that the participation of women in panchayats has had an impact on their real life. Their performance is seeking recognition, respect, status, mobility and exposure.

M. Koteswara Rao believes that Indian women have a multifaceted personality. Woman is the pivot around whom the whole household revolves. Woman has an important contribution to the economy through working in both the formal and informal sectors. Development planners and policy makers all over the world have often failed to consider women’s needs and their viewpoint in designing the programmes for their development. Rural women are in the worst position in the labour market in terms of employment status and wages. Lack of education is a potential hindrance for the socio-economic development of women. Author identifies

many other problems such as low participation of women, disparity in the wage structure between male and female unskilled workers, execution of works by contractors, inappropriate timing, corruption, ad-hocism in project implementation, delayed and power participation of the people in all these programmes. Women’s movements advocate structural and cultural transformation of the society, thereby creating more egalitarian relationship between men and women. For this, employment of women is the most essential condition.\footnote{Rao, M. Koteswara (2005) “Women Empowerment: A Theoretical Perspective” in Empowerment of Women in India, New Delhi, Discovery Publications.}

Mahi Pal analyzes the main objectives of the 73rd Amendment, which was to give certainty, continuity and strength to the panchayats. The experiences of the functioning of the panchayats revealed that while elections have been held regularly, barring a few states, the states have been slow in devolving power to the panchayat bodies. He argues that elections have been held in a number of states for the second time and some state finance commissions have also submitted the second reports on panchayat finances to the state governments. An assessment of the implementation of the act and the functioning of the panchayats is in order. This study concluded that the demand side of the panchayati raj in terms of asking for more power by the panchayats is badly lacking. Until the political parties are prepared to accept effective decentralization as one of the issues in the election manifestos, the panchayats will remain at the mercy of the central and state governments even after another amendment.\footnote{Pal, Mahi (2004), “Panchayati Raj and Rural Governance: Experience of a Decade”, Economic and Political Weekly, No. 39(a) January, 2004.}

Poona Vats’ study is about women participating in democratic processes of the country, spread of education and advent of new mass media techniques. The womenfolk are aware of the political scenario of the country amid its ramifications. He desired the overall change in attitudes and perception of the people. Further, it is most desirable and essential to make women educated because it develops the personality
and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions thereby improving their socio-economic status.\textsuperscript{55}

The study conducted by Manikyamba entitled ‘Women in Panchayati Raj Structures’ is an examination of the working of panchayati raj in general, the role of women as beneficiaries and benefactors in the socioeconomic and political processes of development besides assessing the role of women presiding officers of the panchayati raj. The sample includes one Zila Parishad, two Panchayat Samithies, five Mandals and five Gram Panchayats in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The sample interface of 88 women members covered the period from 1956 to 1989 looked into the socio-economic background. Among other findings, the study revealed that education and participation are inter-related. Economic status gives a sense of confidence and encouragement to the participants. Caste plays an important role in selecting members. Although this study covers a long period i.e. from 1956 to 1989, it leaves many other important researchable aspects untouched.\textsuperscript{56}

Hazel, D’Lima deals with the role of women in panchayati raj institutions, particularly in local bodies of Maharashtra covering four divisions viz, Vidharbha, Marathwada, Pune and Bombay. Attention has been focused on the role of women in the higher tiers namely, Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti. The study traces the social emergence of women in the country, socio-economic and political background of women members in the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. She has covered the perception of officials and non officials towards the role of women members in panchayati raj and participation of the women members in these institutions. Her attention has been only on women member’s social background, social awareness and their outlook.\textsuperscript{57}

Zenab Banu’s study is refreshingly a new visit to the issue of empowerment to women. The author takes a departure from the ethnographic studies of the tribals as are traditionally given by anthropologists. The approach taken in the present study is

\textsuperscript{55} Vats, Poona (2004), Political Participation and Attitudinal Transformation of Rural Women, New Delhi, Abhijeet Publications.
to analyze the status of tribal women in the light of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The amendment has empowered tribal women in panchayat raj institutions. Basically the problem of social stratification in terms of gender relations has been taken up by the author. Her argument is simple. She says that people should be equal but they are different. The logic is that when we differentiate women against men we do it on the basis of hierarchy. We put value on men and women. It is the difference in value which creates gender problem. Her logic is that women have been given power, they control the affairs of the Panchayat Samiti. This puts them higher in the stratification hierarchy. This study examines that the 73rd amendment has made difference between male members and female members. How this difference has laid the tribals to the path of development and how the gender hierarchy of women has been elevated, is the focus of author’s enquiry. Some of her findings are exciting for political workers, legislators and development administrator women in panchayati raj. But this study failed to cover the limitations, compulsions and problems which are faced by the tribal women.58

Santosh Sandal’s article reflects on strategies for women’s empowerment in the light of the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, in 1992. It begins with the assumption that women’s empowerment implies progressive elimination of gender disparities at the grassroot level. As such, a perspective on women’s empowerment differs from ideas about women’s development is primarily a socio-economic concept. The author offers suggestions for increasing women’s effectiveness in local government and closes with an evaluation of the last ten years of the manifestations of the constitutional amendment as a case study of Haryana. It is a very meaningful study and covers all the aspects and author gave a lot of fruitful suggestions for this institution at the grassroot level.59

K.C. Vidya focuses on political empowerment of women in panchayati Raj institutions. Author explained that reserving seats for women in the political

institutions will provide them an opportunity to raise their grievances and other related social and economic problems in formal manner. An attempt is made by author to study the role and importance of women members in panchayati raj with particular reference to Karnataka State. This study tends to prove certain pertinent issues such as, how panchayati raj institutions can serve the cause of women development and how to make the role of women effective in these institutions. He also analyzed the structural and functional aspects of Zila Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis and Mandal Panchayats, socio-economic and political background of the women members of Gram Panchayat, the emerging pattern of women leadership, its nature and determinants. Author examined the role of women in the process of decentralized planning and development, and how the women members involved themselves in the working of these institutions from the participation perspective. In the conclusion part, author attempts to examine critically the recent ‘panchayati raj reform’ in Karnataka falling in line with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1993 and gave few suggestions to improve upon the role and positions of the members in the panchayati raj institution.60

The key research issues, which the study intended to explore and analyses the role of elected women in PRI’s in the context of participatory democracy, especially after the 73rd amendment, more particularly in the Gurdaspur district and generally in Punjab were as under:

1. To analyse the change in the behaviour or attitude of the rural women after their entry into panchayati raj institutions and whether they participate in the process of decision making’ independently?

2. To analyse the say or voice of women in PRI’s on important issues related to their welfare and development?

3. What has been the role of women members for improving the functioning of the PRI’s?

4. Whether the women representatives are exercising their powers without fear and interference?

5. How far or to what extent have the statutory reservation resulted in women merely becoming proxies of the men?

6. Can they cope with the double burden of domestic and public duties and responsibilities without either of these functions sufferings?

7. What role do they perceive for themselves in sustainable development?

8. How far are women’s representation and women’s development interrelated?

9. What obstacles and challenges have they faced in functioning effectively as the political leaders and decision makers, even during the decade long terrorism in Punjab.

10. What are the perceptions of male members of community and officials about the role of women members at Gram Panchavat level?

11. What is the emerging pattern of women leadership?

12. What has been the impact of their newly emergent position and role on their own status and quality of life?

13. What type of expectations did they arouse, particularly among the women and to what extent have they been able to fulfill the same?

14. Have they been able to act as a role model or beacon of light to bring about better status and respect for other women of rural India?