Chapter II

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Political Status of women implies the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and the value given by the society to women with regard to their role in politics. Indian constitution guarantees political equality through adult franchise. Article 14 provides equality substantive as well as procedural. Article 16(2) forbids discrimination in respect of any employment of office under the state on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and decent place of residence. This normatively ensures a significant position and status to Indian women.

The Directive Principles of State Policy enunciated in chapter IV of the constitution which embody the major policy goals of welfare state, also concern women, those which concern women directly and have a special bearing on their status include Article 39(a) eight to an adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally Article 39(d) equal pay for equal work for both men and women Article 39(e) protection of the health and strength of workers men, women and children from abuse and entry into a vocation unsuited to their age and strength and Article 42 ensure just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief these provisions and the chapter on fundamental rights envision a new socio political order based on the principles of equality and equity.
Mazumdar and Sharma (1979:119) state that the early sociological studies tend to describe the status and role of women beginning from Vedic times, extolling the emancipated position of women at that time, as compared with the decadence of the long medieval period, the social reform movement and the entry of women in to the struggle for independence was publications.

Baig (1958:76) who reflected the high aspirations of women at the time, written by an elite class of women and as such contain the concerns of that class of society. Entering the phase of development after Independence, the writings centre largely on women's participation in the work-force with repercussions on her social role, these studies cover a wide spectrum of women in the work force of urban areas. In the march towards development women's economic participation has assumed greater importance.

The report of the committee (1974) on the status of women in India entitled "Towards Equality" is the first major attempt to review and evaluate data on women's role, rights and opportunities in the wake of planned development.

Mazumdar (1979:116) there has been a substantial coverage of women in urban and rural areas, the committee on the status of women does not favour special reservation of seats at the state and National levels but strongly recommends the provisions of special opportunities for representation at the local Government level.
The report of the committee on Panchayat Raj Institutions (1978:141) suggests having an institutional arrangement through a committee with all women members of the Mandal Panchayat represented. This body is meant to ensure that decisions are made by women themselves on priorities and choices in welfare and development programmes specifically for women and children.

Muni (1979 : 42) A few references to women in Panchayat Raj Institutions state that statutory provision has been made for their representation in those states where no such provision had been made. The overwhelming majority of women are found to be nominated but hardly any women stand for elections. The exceptions being found mainly at the gram Panchayat level where there are several examples of women becoming “Sarpanchas” (Head of the Gram Panchayat).

The recommendations of the committee on the status of women as well as the report of the committee on Panchayat Raj institutions reflect a concern to have all women’s bodies, thus making women more responsible for their own development. It is necessary, before one reaches the stage of making suggestions, to study the actual composition, thinking and participation of women on these bodies in order to assess the realistic possibilities inherent in the situation.

Singh (1975:217) while commenting on methodology regarding studies of women in India finds that the studies have not had sufficient reference to actual behaviour and careful delineation of the relevance of important social/cultural variables such as religion caste, region, family
structures or systems of kinship and marriage. She goes on to point out that such knowledge is essential for the understanding of the special problems of women in Indian society and would seem to be a prerequisite for arriving at solutions and polity decisions meant to alleviate these problems and to create an atmosphere of great equality.

A study done by Padhya and Choudhury (1980: 33) among the students in Orissa revealed that higher the grade and age, greater the political awareness. Boys are more politically aware than girls and higher the socio-economic status of the family greater is the political awareness.

Agnew’s (1979) Women in Indian Politics explains the background of women’s movement and participation of women in nationalist movement, suffrage movement and women’s organizations.

Jain (1979:42) Concludes that in spite of their limitations, Mahila Mandals have played an important part in helping rural women to come out of their homes and interact with the forces of social change by participation in community affairs. These social contacts have increased women’s self confidence that a sole women in a difficulty being heard. When this percentage rises to 25 to 30 per cent or above. They become a critical mass and can intervene and benefit from the support of women colleagues in what was up till this time a male dominated body. The question of quotas in order to increase women’s presence in political life was being discussed in Denmark and was applied in Norway in regard to public commission. Where in order to promote a more balanced
representation of women and men organizations, represented in the public commissions were required to submit two possible and qualified candidates one male and one female in social functioning and have there by helped to build up their own social status.

The report of the committee on status of women (1976) was the first and till today the most important document on the women's participation in the socio-economic and apolitical life of the country. As a pioneering venture, it put together under one cover data analysis on different aspects of women's lives and social participation. This was done after considerable research. Many field visits and personal interviews though outdated in terms of figures and some of its recommendations, the report is still valid in terms of its analysis particular significance is its stress on the values of equality and justice in the context of the Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitutions.

Degler's (1965: 204) argument is that women's right extended not as a result of political activity but as a consequence of economic changes, the women now know the management of their own money. The excitement of life out side the home and the exhilaration of financial independence, could not be treated as a hopeless dependent; for this reason American Feminism is non-ideological, that is incapable of creating a rationale for political participation. When American women obtained the right to vote they simply did not use it ideologically. They voted not as women but as individuals.
Almond and Powell (1966:103) while defining the role of participants say that participants are those individuals who are oriented to the input structure and processes and engage in or view themselves as potentially engaging in the articulation of demands and the making of decisions. Political participation can be defined as the involvement of members of the society in the decision making process of the system.

Some of the studies on leadership Ray and Jayalakshmi (1987:26) show that owing to reservation polity, women belonging to SCs and STs enjoyed access to Panchayat Raj Institutions. Yet, they didn’t occupy seats of power such as the positions of pradhan in Mandal Panchayats and President in ZP as members of the dominant communities had wrested these positions by their sheer dominance in the rural society.

The government appointed a committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) in (1974) to undertake a comprehensive examination of all the questions relating to the rights and status of women. It had commented on the failure of an earlier policy to induct women into local government bodies, through reservation of a few seats, as a form of tokenism and recommended the establishment of statutory women’s Panchayats at the village level to ensure greater participation in the political process. The publications of the report of the committee on the status of women. The observance of international women’s year in 1975, the formulation of a National plan of action for women setting up of a national committee with the Prime Minister as the head, proved the concern for women. Since then scholars and policy makers diverted
their attention to the issues of women which culminated in establishing
national commission for women in the year 1992.

The national perspective plan for women 1988-2000(A.D) has
recommended that the voluntary organizations should play a
significant role in the process of empowering women to articulate their
needs. The NGO's should work as pressure groups to press for
providing support to the elected women representatives.

In the one-day seminar on Panchayat Raj and women organized
by the centre for women's development studies in 1989 to examine the
socio-political implications of the expansion of the women's political
role. Some important suggestions had emerged. One of the suggestions
was that women's participation in decision making should not be
limited to social and family welfare and women and child development
considering the stake of rural women in all aspects of development.
They should not be ignored while formulating strategies in the areas of
drinking water, animal husbandry, dairying, poverty alleviation,
maintenance of community assets, land reforms, finance. Soil
conservation, forestry and other vital issues. It was also suggested that a
curriculum should be formulated indicating women's rights, law
procedures in Panchayat Raj Institution. To impart training, women's
organization and women's studies /development centres should be
involved in designing the curriculum. This would ensure fruitful
participation of the poor rural women in administration of local units
and area growth.
Jaquette (1974:92) women in politics in this work, the author explains political participation of women and their political life in freedom movement in the erstwhile Bombay state as also in Gujarat.

Milbrath (1977:53) opines that, it is a tradition in almost all societies that politics is mainly an affair of men and that women should fall in line with them politically. Men tend to be more psychologically involved in politics than women.

Campbell (1967:39) found the average American women to be lower in political efficacy. Lower in political involvement and less in political concept formation than the average male.

Gabriele Dietrich (1984:67) points out that the politico-legal framework in India is much favourable as for as women’s opportunities are concerned. However, women’s participation in the parliamentary process does not contribute significantly to improve the position of women in society.

Anuradha Bhoite (1988:109) finds a wide chasm between de jure and de facto enjoyment of political rights by women in India. On one hand women cast their votes in large numbers take part in agitational political activities. But on the other hand they lag behind in enjoying power position stand occupying prestigious political offices.

Rounak Jahan (1987:210) two contradictory images come to mind whenever one thinks of women in politics in South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Srilanka). One is that of powerful women
leaders (Indira Gandhi, Srimao Bhandarnaike, Benazir Bhutto, Hasina Wazed Khaleda Zia) surrounded by party leaders addressing huge public meetings enthusiastically attended mainly by men. Another image is that of female masses who are poor, illiterate and often veiled.

Sakina Yusuf Khan (1991:78) points out that on an average, there have been only three women to every hundred men contestants in the past elections. Due to social conditions and the double work, women can seldom make the time to participate in electoral politics. Often, a women is fielded simply as a compromise candidate between warring aspirants and are taken mostly from prominent political families.

Bhavani and Jyothi (1990:175) opine that “active political participation implies discussion of public affairs, participation to participate. But this total involvement would come only when women have enough time and social acceptance to do the same.

Vijay Agnew (1986:96) a review of the political History of women in modern era reveals that women took to politics when they were supported by male family members and which in no way disturbed the traditional male-female relationship of sex-based division of labour, women politicians perceived their participation in politics as being supportive of the activity of their male family members and involved in nationalist activity with their consent.

Venkatarangaih and Pattabhiram (1969:199) Having opposed the existing system of responsible government at the grassroots level, the minister proposed reforms, which marked a departure from the
recommendations made by earlier committees and commissions to rejuvenate the system of local self-government. Mishra proposed a scheme in which decentralization of administration was the main approach. He suggested a three-tier system of local government with district as the formation of popular Ministries in 1937 and they undertook legislations to make the local bodies truly representatives of the people, unfortunately, however, the initial zeal of the ministries to make these institutions popular was jeopardized with the outbreak of second world was in 1939 the period between 1939 has been looked as a 'dark period' in the history of local government.

Shiviah (1976: 35) "In spite of adverse developments in the arena of the local government the idea of Panchayat remained as a vital factor and as strategy of mobilization in the struggle for independence. Mahatma Gandhi viewed the Panchayats as a "swadeshi" institution and argued that village organization meant the organization of the whole of India as much as India predominantly is rural".

With such a conception of the place of panchayats in our political system. The main question which came up after India for independence was whether this institution should have a place in the new constitution unfortunately the republic constitution did not mention the Panchayat of the Ghandian notion.

Granville Austin (1972: 34) writes "the minutes of the committee meetings contain no mention of the Gandhian constitution or of Panchayat or indirect government, a Gandhian constitution seems not
to have been given a moment's thought" the constituent assembly debates reflect the dual picture of the importance of Panchayat in the constitution those who favoured had considered panchayats as schools of democracy and as instruments of village uplift and those who opposed it displayed contempt for our villages and village democracy, ultimately the overall feeling of the members was for the inclusion of village panchayats in article 40 under the Directive Principles of the constitution, the directive principles were only persuasive and did not compel the state to take steps to promote panchayats, the Article reads, the state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local self government" commenting on the importance of panchayats in the constitution.

Henry Maddick (1962:204) observes that the Panchayat development under the constitution has had three main aims to foster the involvement of individuals throughout the nation in the process of democratic government, to gain the village participation in national development from the village level upwards and to lessen the burden of state administration through decentralization.

Rude Dahlerup (1986:126) has developed a theory of "Critical Mass", applied to the case of women in Scandinavian countries and maintain that once a women managed to enter the political system, she had as a female politician a stronger position. When two factors were present – support from an active women's movement outside the
system, and reaching a critical Mass", of women present within the system.

Dutta (1989:82) The concept of Panchayat Raj has been considered differently by different academics and policy makers such as units of local government, as an agency of state government for carrying out governmental functions and implementation of developmental programmes at the local level and also as a means to realize participatory democracy at the rural level.

Iqbal Narain (1969:119) discusses the concept both from the normative and empirical view points and finally develops a syncratic conceptual image and considers Panchayat Raj as a system of local Government, a mechanism for rural development and also as an agency of a state Government for specific activities. Its objectives are being considered as modernization, democratization and politicization tied to each other in a system of inter connections and interaction, and indeed it is with the introduction of Panchayat Raj that the process of politicization has begun on a massive scale for the first time in the rural society in India. He further has called it an institutional mechanism for decentralization,

Prasad (1968: 8) discusses village Panchayats, the base unit of Panchayat Raj from three approaches (i) as an institution of Local Self Government (ii) as and agency of higher unit of Government expected to carry out certain tasks on their behalf, and (iii) as an idea to realize democracy at the village level. However, the author has accepted the first two approaches in his democracy and development.
Maheshwari (1979:112) Panchayat Raj in India has three broad images (i) as an instrument for the realization of the ends of the community development, (ii) as an organ of the state Government to execute Community Development programmes and other schemes and (iii) as an idea to realize democracy at the village level.

Khan (1969:58) considers Panchayat Raj essentially as Local Self Government institutions the idea of which is to bring the decision making authorities nearer to the people. It is also said that the term Panchayat Raj literally implies Government of the people’s representative leader and thus develop the feeling of self-government among rural masses.

Dasgupta (1969: 37 & 38) discusses the concept (i) as an administrative tool (as viewed by the bureaucrats), (ii) as an agency of Local Self-Government (as viewed by some others) and (iii) as Gram Swaraj as viewed by Jayaprakash Narayan as well as by All India Panchayat Parishad) Dasgupta also discusses the public image of Panchayat Raj. According to this author, Public viewed it as an effort to put back the clock of progress, with regard to its operational image, rural elite and weaker sections of the community are the three parties concerned with it. To the first Panchayat Raj is an instrument for the implementation of the Community Development Programme and to the second. It provides opportunity for increasing participation with the village government and also for attaining position of political stability and to the last, its is yet to develop as a concept of its own its operation image from the three parties concerned is far from being satisfactory.
Dubey (1972: 254 & 269) considers three basic rational for the creation of Panchayat Raj (i) to make Community Development Programme relevant to the needs of and problems of the people (ii) to realize the values of participatory democracy so development and democracy are considered as the two purposes of Panchayat Raj development in modernizing rural main to respond to modern technology and democracy in associating people with process of decision making.

Khan (1969:113) discusses the concept from the viewpoints of officials, firstly that it is an institution, which provides them certain amenities like construction of roads, educational facilities, drinking water etc, secondly he describes it as an institution for carrying out village welfare and developmental functions, while thirdly, he states that it is an institution of democratic decentralization, an autonomous body capable of deciding its own affairs and as an institution for implementing local developmental programmes.

Sirsikar (1974:.211) discusses that the Panchayat Raj has also provided opportunities for the emergence of local leadership and the success of the Panchayats is dependent on the quality of this leadership and it is further assumed that Panchayat Raj leaders provide opportunities to the ruling party in strengthening its position in the rural area and thus become 'Vote banks', during the time of election.

Vijay Kumar, (1984: 32 & 33) opines that Panchayat Raj is unquestionably Indian in origin Panchayat Raj bodies, which are
genuine and effective democratic decentralized institutions, provide ample opportunities for a large number of rural people to take genuine and effective participation in the development and democratic decision making process and to infuse in the minds of the rural people a spirit of self-help, self-dependence and self-reliance and to obtain the experience in the art of local self government. The concept of Panchayat Raj, since its inception faced various interpretations both from its protagonists and antagonists. On the one hand, the emphasis was on maximum local autonomy and minimization of supervision and control by the higher authorities, especially the state Government, on the other hand, some considered it to be ruination for the country. In this light, the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Panchayat Raj Act 1992 has provided a new dimension to the concept of participation of the people should be considered as an ideological commitment and therefore what is needed is legislative and structural measures to give legitimacy to people's participation.

According to Desai (1990: 3). The Panchayat Raj system is really an effective instrument of participation in order to make the Panchayats an edifice of democracy. They should be given more powers, more autonomy and financial resources. It also means to overcome the prevalent socio-economic deficiencies in the rural society. The Panchayat Raj Institutions are statutorily elected bodies at the village, block and district levels with powers of local Government, there are village Panchayats at the village level, Panchayat Samithis at the district
level, the primary objective of Panchayat Raj is to strengthen the base of democracy at the grass roots and to enable the people of each village to achieve intensive and continuous development in the interests of the entire population, irrespective of the caste, class and creed or religion, the Panchayat Raj is different from all other government as a whole, is not an administrative arm of the government but a part of the whole government. Its great potentialities lie in the fact that, under the guidance and supervision of the state government, the final responsibility for carrying out rural development will fall more and more on the people themselves through their elected local representatives. The greatest stress and attention must therefore, be put on the village Panchayats and Gram Sabhas for periodic elections, evolution and proper local planning.

Further Desai, (1990:4) states that the Panchayat Raj, like democracy at the national and state levels, is both an end and a means. As an end, it is an inevitable extension of democracy, as a means it would continue to be responsible for discharging obligations entrusted to it by the people. As edifice of democracy it forms the base of the democratic pyramid in the country, altogether both as an end and as a means, Panchayat Raj contributes to the philosophy as well as practice of a rich rewarding life in rural India Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized that “Panchayats should be given greater power, for we want the villager to have a measure of real Swaraj in his own village. He should have power and does not have to refer every thing to big officials, we do not want
the officials to interfere too much in the life of the village. We want to build Swaraj right from the village up”.

Dohama (1993:4) states that Panchayat Raj or Local Self-Government is an exercise in democratic decentralization of administrative authority. The system is based on the following principles

(i) There should be a three-tier structure of local-self governing bodies from village to district level with an organic link from the lower to the higher ones.

(ii) There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies.

(iii) Adequate financial resource should be transferred to those bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibility.

(iv) All development programmes at these levels should be channeled through these bodies.

(v) The system evolved should be such as to facilitate further decentralization of power and responsibility in the future.