Chapter – IV

Review of Literature
Review of literature helps to identify the present trends, find the changing patterns and identify the running threads. In this chapter, it is proposed to give details of some findings relating to the role of women in Panchayati Raj. There is a plethora of literature is available on Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), their structures and functioning in the country. These studies serve as the background material for a researcher to understand the Panchayati Raj System as a whole.

The literature available on women in rural local government after the implementation of 73rd Constitutional Amendment is quite sizeable. This includes Government reports, reports of team investigations and studies conducted by interested public citizens, research scholars, bureaucrats and academicians.

The Government of India report (1974) ‘Towards Equality’, the first major attempt to review and evaluate data on women’s role, rights and opportunities in the wake of planned development mentions that a majority of women are very far from enjoying rights and opportunities guaranteed by the Constitution. In general the report stressed on the need for political participation and representation of women in political institution. As noted, the committee recommended the establishment of statutory women’s panchayats at the village level with autonomy and resources to manage and execute welfare and development programmes for women and children. The committee recommended it as a transition measure to break traditional attitudes that inhibit women from articulating their problems and to participate actively in local bodies.¹

panchayats and certain percentage of women chief executives of panchayati raj bodies at all levels and also certain percentage of women exclusive constituencies at lower levels of panchayati raj. The committee suggested to the political parties to ensure at least 30 percent of women representation in elections.\(^2\)

Haxel D’ Lima’s (1983) study in Maharashtra State focuses on the role of women in Zilla parishad and Panchayati Samities. She focused on the social background, social awareness and their outlook of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. She points out that majority of them were there because of their husbands and not because of their merit. She also points out that majority of them were illiterate and were unable to read the agenda items. She noticed that feeling of inferiority among women members of panchayats initially. Pointing out of their economic background she points out 70 percent of women members belonged to a large land-holding class owning 15 acres of land and more. In conclusion she says that by the end of the term a majority of women gained self-confidence and social awareness because of issues discussed in the meetings.\(^3\)

Prabhat Dutta (1997) examines the problems and prospects of political empowerment of rural women through participation in panchayats. He says that women’s empowerment in Panchayats depends upon the breaking of feudal–patriarchal structure in the villages. He suggests sustained campaign and vigorous efforts for creating awareness of rights and duties of women representatives. He concludes by saying that reservation to women members in panchayats is not end but a means to an end.\(^4\)

Manikyamba (1989) examines the working of Panchayati Raj in general and the role of women as beneficiaries and benefactors in the socio-economic and political
processes of development in particular. Studying all three tiers in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, she finds that their education and participation are interrelated. The other findings are economic status gives a sense of confidence and encouragement for participation in PRIs and caste is a vital element in selecting members. She is of the opinion that given the opportunity, talented and interested women could play very effective leadership role in politics. Moreover, women could play very effective leadership role in politics.

Manikyamba (2003) in one of her recent writings says that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment is an achievement of Indian Women’s Movement. The Amendment is expected to provide bigger and better share to women in political process and a space for women in the male dominated public sphere and bring simple women in the task of governance. Though since the inception of Panchayati Raj, women’s representation is recognised, the dilemma relating to the representation to women and the manner of recruitment continued for a long time.

Manikyamba mentions a few success stories of women Sarpanches. The successful women Sarpanches include Sudha Patel, Sarpanch of Changa village in Gujarat state, Koeli, Sarpanch of Nimuchana village in Rajasthan is a daring Sarpanch and Fathima Bhi, Sarpanch of Kalva village, Orvakal Mandal of Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh State. Fathima Bhi received UNDP Fight Against Poverty Award from the hands of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. This is a great achievement of women in Panchayats.

Manikyamba points out that women in Panchayats took up social issues. Suramanjari President of Panchayat Union of Katpadi, Vellore district in Tamil Nadu State facilitated inter-caste marriages and widow marriages. She was honoured as Outstanding Woman Panchayat Leader Award by the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi.
Regarding the negative impact of the amendment, she says, women in panchayats are facing threats and violence and humiliation by the men with active cooperation from the officials. Mainly the upper caste men were not able to adjust to the condition of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes women becoming the Sarpanches of Gram Panchayats. Poolwathi, Sarpanch of Brmari Gram Panchayat in Hosanagabad district of Madhya Pradesh State belongs to the Scheduled Caste. The Rajputs, the upper caste people of that village put her in exile because ‘her presence in the village is a discomfort to them and hence forced her to sell her house and leave the village. The Upa Sarpanch assures her saying that ‘every thing will be O. K. provided you don’t enter the village’.9

Manikyamba is optimistic about the future of women in Panchayats. She says ‘women in Panchayats have moved from the innocence to strength, from reluctant entry to assertion and from passive to active role performance’.10

Bhargava and Subha (1995) studied the participation of women in PRIs in pre and post 73rd Constitutional Amendment Period in Karnataka State. In the pre 73rd Constitutional Amendment era, 25 percent of reservation was provided to women. So a large number of women made an entry into political arena hither to untouched to a great extent. The study points that the problems were enormous. At the Mandal and Village levels, the political parties found difficult to locate women for contest. But the political parties were not prepared for this mobilisation. As a result, the influential and dominant castes inducted their women into the Panchayats and few women asserted their position and participated in decision making.11

Regarding the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the study says statutory representation is the first step in the promotion of political participation and the
amendment is the greatest event for women’s empowerment. In the post amendment ear, response of women in some places is overwhelming and kidnaps, forced withdrawal of the nomination of women by men during elections are seen. Exceptional women fought and won the seats. The other findings are women members were accompanied by male members of the family and in some cases participated in deliberations. Discomfort of women members to sit on the chair in front of village elders is noted. The study recommends the training to improve women’s participation in PRIs.¹²

Jayalakshmi (1995) applying clinical sociological theory says, ‘empowered women make meaningful commitments and undertake effective, goal-oriented activities that they choose for themselves’. She points out that Aristotle and other classical political writers articulated that women are incompetent to engage in political activities and made a place for males and she mentions that conceptual framework of contemporary western political thought is gender-myopic. She advises to women saying that women should act on their strength of being women and make women’s visibility in politics. Women should be politically visible, she adds.¹³ Pointing out the failure of women to organise themselves, she says that the women from weaker sections are hierarchical and stratified and unorganised and for this reason, they fail to articulate their interests and fail to participate actively in decision making process. Referring to the various studies on PRIs she points out the domination of dominant castes in panchayats. Regarding Seventy – Third Constitutional Amendment she says, ‘a silent revolution and a phase of liberation, freedom and equity in women’s political participation’.¹⁴

Ilaben Jani (1995) identifying the differences between boys and girls points out that female children are secondary children and she mentions many factors contributed towards
gender inequality in India. She says provision of reservation in Seventy – Third Constitutional Amendment brought recognition to the role of women in decision – making process in national development. She feels that the amendment brings gender equity in the new panchayat system but only steadily.  

Roshini (1996) examines the strategies for women’s development to increase their participation in decision making and in various developmental programmes. Regarding the participation of women in PRIs, she says, gender equality strengthens the structure of grassroots democracy and brings feminine perspective to the processes of planning, policy formulation and execution of Rural Development Programmes. She points out that to achieve the objectives of Panchayati Raj, more realistic and effective legislative measures are necessary. She concludes that by providing powers to the people and women at grassroots level, it is possible to implement Rural Development Programmes effectively.

Susheela Kaushik (1996) points out that reserving seats for women and Scheduled Castes and Tribes has sent waves of enthusiasm and hopes among the weaker sections of Indian society. Focussing on women, she mentions that women are gearing up for challenge to enter in politics in the spirit of self-governance as committed citizens. She says that training to women members is needed to fulfil the gaps on issues like local government, functions, the intricacies of planning and management and the resolution of public and private challenges and tensions. Training should be imparted before and after the elections, she suggests.

Vaidya (1997) examines the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in women’s development for effective participation in decision-making process and for change in behaviour and attitudes of rural women after their entry into panchayats. The study finds
that women take a longer time to prove equally capable as men. The study points out that the policy of reservation for women is not an end but a step forward in promoting women's participation in the grassroots democracy.\textsuperscript{18}

Susheela Kaushik (1998) focuses on the background and experience of women representatives in Panchayats in six states i.e., Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. A majority (74 percent) is from the age group of 20-40 and female candidates were put up by the villagers or by family members or the political parties or political persons. In the first term, the female candidates experienced character assassination, insults and mental cruelty from the family members and community. Some chairpersons faced violent consequences like sexual harassment from the male members and bureaucracy and male members. The women were looked at first as women and later, representatives. Mentioning the positive aspects of one-third representation, she says that ‘all caste women worked together although in some instances upper caste women didn’t cooperate with lower caste women’. She notes that according to women representatives in panchayats, ‘reservation is the only the way women can enter and sustain themselves in politics’.\textsuperscript{19}

Poornima and Vyasulu (1999) explain the hurdles in political participation of women in PRIs resulting from their limited mobility, domestic responsibilities and historical prejudices. Referring to the six case studies, they point out the positive attitude exhibited by the women members by overcoming humiliation and discrimination by the male members in Panchayats. They are optimistic about the future and say that the women in Panchayati Raj participate more in decision making and bring changes in decentralised governance.\textsuperscript{20}
Nirmala Buch (2000) focuses on women in Panchayats in the colonial period and after Independence i.e., pre and post Seventy – Third Constitutional Amendment. Focussing on women in Panchayats in the colonial period, she says that women were given neither voting nor candidature in panchayats. After Independence, women were given token representation. This trend continued till the implementation of the Seventy – Third Constitutional Amendment except in a few states.²¹

Nirmala Buch points out that in the post Seventy – Third Constitutional Amendment era, a majority of women were illiterate and a large percentage is from lower socio-economic strata. They are comparatively younger and predominantly first-generation entrants to political life. Referring to studies on Seventy – Third Constitutional Amendment, she points out that despite negative incidents, women improved in their perceptions, recognition, respect, status, confidence, levels of mobility, exposure and increased their political aspirations. Pointing out negative aspects, she says, rotation deprives women who performed better in panchayats. She urges civil society and women’s movements to support women’s emerging leadership in rural local bodies.²²

Buch Nirmala (2000) focuses on the positive implications of 73rd Constitutional Amendment. She says that the 73rd Amendment is a watershed in providing opportunity to women to participate in political process. But there are prejudices and reservations about women’s political participation and mindset has not changed. She mentions that beyond one-third, reservation to women was not extended by any state.²³ Referring to 73rd Amendment she says, it provided opportunity to wider representation to women of different socio-economic background and have sensitive to the needs and concerns of the poor. She says, ‘wider representation and participation of women from poorer sections and
those who have hitherto remained marginalised in the public sphere bring a qualitative change in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions'.

Nirmala Buch mentions that ability to transform the nature of power and political institutions depends on commitment, enthusiasm and resources available to them. At present, the obstacles are illiteracy, lack of information networks or previous experience of running these institutions. She suggests training as an important aspect to empowerment. She is of the opinion that absence of training results in their dis empowerment and not empowerment. The principal goal of the new Panchayati Raj is poverty eradication and representation to women in Panchayats is a step towards to eradicate poverty.

Nirmala Buch (2003) focuses on participation and the levels of participation particularly in the context of one-third representation provided in the 73rd Amendment. She speaks of traditional Panchayats and the evolution of the institution of panchayats after independence from Balwantaray Mehta Committee's report of 1957 till the passing of 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Referring to 73rd Constitutional Amendment, she says, it broadened the scope of political participation at grassroots level by providing a space for politically marginalised sections, women and weaker sections. Women’s seclusion, lack of independent mobility, social practices and family ideology are the four constraints to women’s effective participation to her. Referring to studies on participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, she points out that women have shown tremendous leadership in participation and in management of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the interest of the local community. There are also experiments where associations of members and chairpersons of Panchayats have been developed to explore common issues for their effective participation.
Rama Devi (2000) former Governor of Karnataka State who was involved in the drafting of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment is a strong supporter of reservations for women in Panchayats. She says that the great social engineering of the century, providing 33 percent reservation for women in panchayats is a positive aspect. She expresses that the husbands or brothers or father-in-laws accompanying the women Panches is a temporary phenomenon and men themselves will withdraw when women start working independently.  

Regarding women's problems in panchayats, Rama Devi referred to one instance when a woman Pradhan was asked about the problems in Panchayats. The Pradhan replied “women face problems because they are women”. She was the Pradhan and the Upa Pradhan was a man. The Upa Pradhan believed that he was at a higher level than her because he was a man and that his voice should prevail on hers. Thus, men try to bully women even though, constitutionally men are supposed to take orders from women if women are in senior positions to men. On the contrary, men, even in junior positions, try to order women around. She says that these are the results of prejudices and patriarchal attitudes.  

Rama Devi feels that when women realises power and taste it, they control decision-making. She stresses on training women representatives to articulate their thoughts in a systematic manner. She feels that this is a golden era for representative democratic local governance at the grassroots level to eradicate poverty. She concludes by saying that democracy should reach up to the family i.e., equal participation and equal partnership of men and women in every sphere of life.
Shabana Azmi (2000) points out that political empowerment of women is necessary because women work at home and outside the home and become knowledgeable about challenges at home and outside. Women in political process at higher level have come into power because of their family affiliation with politics or some women came with dalit agenda. So their mindset was not attuned with women’s agenda and have no concern for women’s needs. So real political empowerment requires empowering women who have concern for women’s agenda and women’s needs. Aingeal O’ Donoghue (2000) focuses on equality. She says that women across the globe face many difficult challenges and struggles, which can take many different forms’. She mentions that ‘equal participation in decision making is a central concern of women in the globe’. In India, women in Panchayats are in the forefront of this struggle i.e., equal participation in political decision-making process.

Premajam (2000) focuses on the implications of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. She says that these amendments are revolution of great significance. She mentions that although the Constitution guaranteed political equality, there is discrimination between men and women on the basis of sex and political empowerment remained elusive. To her, even after four decades of Independence, it became imperative that reservations was accepted as a starting point to bring women into the mainstream of political activity and women’s organizations have fought relentlessly to achieve representation in Panchgaysats.

According to the Premajam, poverty, male domination over decision making, taking women for granted, confining them for domestic chores, absence of recognition of women’s role are among the hindering factors for women upright. This situation makes it
imperative that women should participate in decision making. She suggests training to women representatives to help them in improving their performance in Panchayats.34

Mohanty (2000), focussing on one-third representation to women in panchayats refers to empirical studies in the states of Orissa, West Bengal and Maharashtra. He says that elected women representatives are more concerned with the supply of drinking water, electricity and construction of roads which enhance the quality of life in villages. But he regrets that the percentage of women involved in development process is not very significant due to constraints like absence of exposure to public life, illiteracy and complex language of schemes and bitter attitude of the officials.35

Referring to participation of women representatives, Mohanty says, ‘in Gram Sabha meetings, the women sarpanches and ward members either sit silently or when they talk nobody takes them seriously’. He suggests simplification of procedures, delegation of powers, sensitization and capacity building of women representatives to perform better.36

Pande (2001), examining the political participation of women in Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh, says that awareness of rights and duties and participation are higher at the district level than at the village level. The suggestions of Pande are training, incentives to outstanding women, honorarium and Travelling Allowance to women members for attending meetings.37

Ramesh Kumar (2001) points out that woman contests because she is somebody’s wife, sister or daughter. After election, woman becomes a proxy candidate and depends upon the man who set her up for election. The women Sarpanches from weaker sections face more problems like non-co-operation of bureaucracy at the village level and functioning of bureaucracy according to the whims of Ex-Sarpanches. He says, ‘the Ex-
Sarpanches who fail to become Sarpanches due to reservation give more problems to the women Sarpanches'. Kumar recommends training and capacity building to women in Panchayati Raj to perform better.\(^{38}\)

Stephen's (2001) study argues that the staggering presence of women alters the relations in family, community, market and the state and contributes to their overall empowerment in society. To him, empowerment leads to transformation of existing political culture, which is deeply entrenched in corruption, criminalisation and patriarchal values'. But women from marginalised sections face gender, caste and class constraints leading to their dummy roles. Stephen also mentions that offering favours for withdrawal of nominations and instigating husband to discourage aspiring women contestants and upper caste influence on dalit women.\(^{39}\)

Stephen says, “it is only when threats to women’s survival are reduced that they start prioritizing their strategic gender interests, such as by exercising political power until fighting the multifaceted oppression arising out of caste, class, ethnicity and gender. Even when women do get elected, they require basic information on the functioning of the panchayat to perform to their fullest capacity, especially in an environment that may not be quite supportive. They also need to be sensitized to class, caste and gender divisions, which marginalise the poor, and especially women. Balancing the tension between their roles and responsibilities in the panchayat and within their families is another area wherein they may require help”.\(^{40}\)

Stephen mentions that training helped the women members to perform better. The post training interactions with women revealed many positive aspects. The women became independent members in functioning, selection of beneficiaries for anti-poverty
Programmes became just and fair and prevented illegal activities of the upper caste men. The main point is that they enhanced their self image and esteem, particularly changing their dress from common clothes to ceremonial functions clothes and asserted their rights on par with men.\textsuperscript{41}

Ammu Joseph (2001) discusses the use of modern technology in empowering the grassroots women. She says that 'first-time participants requires inputs in the form of both information and political consciousness in order to fulfil their responsibilities as elected representatives of their rural communities. Women found themselves handicapped by their domestic responsibilities, low esteem, poor social status, inexperience with leadership and in many cases, non-cooperatin or even outright hostility from family members and fellow elected representatives'.\textsuperscript{42} 

Ammu Joseph says low status, relative powerlessness of women in society, ignorance about the political system, inexperience are among the stumbling blocks for women’s active roles in politics. Imparting training through modern technology is a step forward in empowering the women in political process i.e., providing meaning to the reservation provided to the women in Panchayats'.\textsuperscript{43}

An NIRD study (2002) points out that a majority of women are still very far from enjoying the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the Constitution because of their inability to produce an impact on the political process. This is due to inadequate attention to political education and mobilisation by political parties and women’s organisations. The failure to mobilise women is because political parties tend to see women as appendages of males and women’s leadership is diffused and confused with inequalities that affect the status of women in social, economic and political spheres. This
shows that constitutional equality is still a distant objective. The study notes that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment empowered women politically. Regarding participation of women in new Panchayats the study presents positive and negative impact of the implementation of the amendment.\(^{44}\)

On the positive side women are performing their responsibilities and work with great courage by overcoming socio-cultural factors that obstruct them. The negative impact is intimidation of women representatives by their male colleagues, village elders and their own family members. In many cases, women representatives are accompanied by husbands and male relatives. Women from Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes or other weaker sections have remained as untouchables and hurdles to attain socially acceptable positions continue. The study is optimistic about women’s political empowerment and says that it brings radical changes through the capacity building of women representatives to enhance their participation in development process.\(^{45}\)

Saxena (2002) argues that the Panchayats are searching for a role model, where all members men and women participate in decision making i.e., action and responsibility. Regarding women’s empowerment, he emphasises that authorities should evince interest in women’s participation. For this, he suggests that to empower rural women, the land should be recorded in the name of farmer women. Otherwise, the women who feed the world go themselves hungry. Saxena suggests that change in laws in favour of women and empowering them in decision making improves their status.\(^{46}\)

Mathew (2002) says that women in Panchayats are facing atrocities. He refers to three case studies. Gundiyabhai, Sarpanch of Pipra village in Tikamgarh district (Madhya Pradesh) was from Chamar Caste (Scheduled Caste). She was attacked by the upper caste
men on her way back home after hoisting the national flag. In Orissa, a woman Sarpanch was stripped off the robes by her own panchayat members because she refused to part with Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) funds for Dussehra celebrations. In Tamil Nadu, Leelavathy, the Madurai Municipal Councillor was hacked to death for bringing pipe water to her constituency, thus causing serious loss to the contractors who supplied drinking water by tankers. Mathew says that not a day passes without stories of atrocities on women elected members.47

Mathew mentioning about the positive impact of the 73rd amendment says, women members, when convinced of the common good, stand up to be counted and courageously act without caring for the consequences. He says, Fatima Bi, Sarpanch of Kalva Gram Panchayat in Orvakal Mandal of Kurnool district receiving the UNDP award for “Race Against Poverty” is an achievement against several odds. He points out that failures are far more than successes. But women have become a big force in local bodies and can contribute for ensuring food security i.e., production, distribution and all other aspects.48

Palanithurai (2002) says that training helps in getting awareness of roles and responsibilities and dealing with officials of PRIs. Pointing out men’s perceptions of women in PRIs, he says, ‘men of local bodies consider the women leaders as incompetent and inefficient’. Pointing out men’s behaviour, he says that in the meetings, men leaders never bother about decorum, decency and etiquette and use freely unparliamentary words without minding the presence of women members and wherever the female members are weak, the male members dominate the proceedings’.49

Palanithurai, mentioning about women’s perceptions of men in Panchayati Raj Institutions says that male leaders mislead women members. So women are forced to
depend on male members of the family. The officials, he says, while dealing unethical things (corrupt practices), prefer the male members of the women leaders. Due to this, the male family members of women participate in the meetings. Regarding male family members’ perception of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, he says that whatever be the qualification of the women member though highly educated, men of the family think that women are not having enough skills to tackle the crisis situation and hence and the male members have a role to play. Wherever the seats are reserved for women and the husbands are denied and in these cases, husband gives directions to the wife. He finds that women with high socio-economic background and little educational qualification, having self-esteem, deal better with officials, but these are few in rural local bodies. He says that trained women are fearless, articulate and active and come out from the shackles of the male members and performs better.

Purohit, Arun Chaturvedi and Sanjay Lodha (2002) mention that ‘due to large number of women representatives, new power centres had emerged in the State of Rajasthan’. Most of these women representatives are first time holders of public power and have improved in terms of their performance and understanding of wider social and political issues. Women PR representatives, who have family linkages in PR institutions, have better understanding of issues involved in administrative matters as compared to those who have no such linkages. Similarly, women functionaries who have active association with NGOs of the area, have better understanding of the social, political and economic issues.

Women at the lower levels i.e., at Gram Panchayat level face serious problems and suffer for being women. At this level, interference of family members and others in the
functioning of Gram Panchayats at the Gram Sabha level are more than that at higher levels. The study points out that ‘this is a gender bias and will not go easily in a traditional society of Rajasthan where the vestiges of feudal society still exist’. Yet some women Panchayati Raj functionaries have shown courage and capabilities while discharging their responsibilities.\textsuperscript{53}

Referring to performance, the above mentioned study points out that ‘the performance of women Pradhans at Panchayat Samiti level is better than at the Gram Panchayat level’. Better educational qualifications enhanced their performance and provided opportunity to enter higher levels of politics. ‘Women Zilla Pramukhs are more efficient than their male counterparts’. Two women Zilla Pramukhs belonging to tribal groups in Udaipur division soon developed confidence after some time in office and amply demonstrated that they had good understanding of Panchayat matters’. The study suggests intensive training to provide better results.\textsuperscript{54}

Sisodia’s (2002) empirical study conducted in the state of Madhya Pradesh notes that ‘the women were considered backward class because of their negligible representation in political process and it is generally believed about rural women that their responsibilities are confirmed merely to kitchen and farms’. This prolonged myth is changed as a result of a big number of women joining the Panchayat elections. The study points out that most of the women representatives have entered in the political process for the first time. But many of them in general, including Other Backward Castes category belonged to families, which had traditional political base. Poor performance of women could be attributed to the backwardness, long political isolation interference of male members of their families,
absence of required exposure, lack of experience and non co-operative attitude of other Panchayati Raj representatives and government officials.\textsuperscript{55}

The study points out that in some cases, the interference is gradually declining and with the passage of time women's leadership became more assertive and independent. Sisodia suggests promotion of literacy, removal of complex feelings, change in the attitude of males and officials to strengthen women's participation and performance.\textsuperscript{56}

Radha and Chowdhury's (2002) empirical study in Kerala State focuses on the background and participation of women. They points out that women above fifty years of age have more time to work in Panchayats because by fifties, many of their burdens are relieved. So these women utilise their leisure time in Panchayats. Linking education with participation they say, more educated women participation and performance is better in Panchayats. Referring to social background, higher caste women's participation is higher than that of the lower caste women.\textsuperscript{57}

Regarding political background, women with political experience are having more awareness and better participation than first time entrants. In general, women members are influenced by the opinion of male members, Even in a group of five members in which four are women, man shapes the general opinion of group' they say. Women are yet to display self-confidence in Panchayats except in rare cases. Representation in Panchayats is not luck but continuity in women's empowerment process. They suggest capacity building, interaction among women members across Panchayats in district and state to enhance their awareness and political participation.\textsuperscript{58}

Anjali (2002) focuses on the status of dalit women in Panchayats. She refers to two instances from Betul district of Madhya Pradesh State. She points out that 'dalit women in
panchayats face violence and rape just because they are untouchables. One woman was paraded naked with bells tied around her neck on the allegation that she had relationship with a man. But nothing was done to the men who raped her. A Dalit woman is raped because she has contested and won an election to a Panchayat defeating an upper caste rival. So she points out that ‘reservations in Panchayats has not brought any change in the social status of women’.

Sandip Das (2002) refers to several case studies in Himachal Pradesh. Women in Panchayats are less educated and more disadvantaged women, but exposed the social stigmas relating to women’s ability in exercising power. The impediments in exercising the power are lack of knowledge and awareness of roles, duties and responsibilities. Sandip suggests awareness generation and capacity building to women in PRIs to perform better.

Arun Mehta (2003) correlates low level of representation in political institutions to the high number of women in poverty. Quoting from UNDP’s 1995 Human Development Report, Mehta says that “social access is a major investment to human development and equal access by women and men to health and education contributes to shaping democratic practices and the well being of society”.

He says that ‘largely men are elected to the executive and legislative branches of government and hold the key to decision making and in deciding development priorities. The challenges that women face in the 21st century are related to mainstreaming of women, fixing priorities into development budget allocations, facilitating of women’s voice in development arena by the planners and politicians, achieving the status from de jure to de facto and providing good governance through women’s participation.”
According to the report of Hunger Project (2003) the 73rd Amendment is a threat to monopoly of power enjoyed by social and political elite’s in Panchayats by bringing the most powerless members into the Panchayats. Women are found to be changing the nature of leadership by incorporating the values such as honesty, openness, patience, collective support, inclusion and accountability and have become key change agents for a new future for India.  

Kripa and Ganesh Prasad (2003) say that women in Panchayats face three problems, low literacy and domination by the elites and the prevalence of patriarchal values. To overcome these problems and to bring and awareness an action-oriented research project was taken. As a part of the project, they broadcasted 13 episode of a Kannada serial titled ‘Namage Naave Wodeyaru” (We are our own masters). They conclude that this programme had an impact to develop positive attitude among women in Panchayats.  

UNDP (2003) emphasizes on Special Training for Panchayat Women Members. Training should be need based, gender sensitive and should be taken as a campaign mode according to the UNDP.  

Angana Parekh (2003), commenting on two-child norm policy in the states of Haryana, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, he says that now the environment is discouraging women to participate in political process. About men Parekh says ‘men use several means. They deny the number of children in the house, give wrong birth certificates, desert or send away the pregnant wife, divorce and allege infidelity to avoid disqualification’. The ‘two’ child norm discourages people at the bottom of the pyramid i.e., the women and poor and weaker sections. But women suffer
more consequences and the norm discourages the women with independent minds, courage and ambition. This policy hampers the very objectives of the Panchayati Raj which hopes to bring i.e., giving the power to the women and weaker sections.  

Deepak Tewari (2003) says that 'once shunned women with the 33 percent reservation making all the difference in Panchayats'. He points out that the new leadership of women representatives faces different problems like hostile bureaucracy and the high handed upper caste M.L.As from whom the power is slipping. Tewari quoted the instances of a Panchayat Secretary slapping a woman Sarpanch, when she came to hoist the national flag. Undemocratic removal of the same woman Sarpanch and the reinstatement of the secretary also took place.  

Vimal Ahirwar, president of Tikamgarh district panchayat faced a threat from 'three Thakur Ministers' and a no-confidence motion. The officials and ministers are in hand-in-glove and politicians and officials have become two monsters of male domination. A woman Janapad President of Damoh district took bribe for signing documents. After election to Panchayats, women developed positive attitude of openness and also have become important because the decisions taken in the village meeting in the absence of women members are not valid.  

Bharat Dogra (2003) provides several case studies from different states. Pushpa Rani, Pradhan of Atakfarm Panchayat in Dehradun district is known to resisting the demand of officials of their commission in developmental works. Sojar Bai of Ramtek Panchayat (Harda District of Madhya Pradesh) got suspended corrupt officials from their job. So women members are found to be more honest in managing the village funds. The women could successfully solve the disputes and also involve in developmental works.
Rajjo, a woman Sarpanch of Changa village of Anand district of Gujarat State is a dalit, illiterate and poor and also a blind. But the work done with the help of her friend adorned the entire village. Dogra's study confirmed that reservation makes difference and provides security to women from powerful vested interests that try to harm and harass them in various ways.  

Perm Gopalam (2003) points out that the amendment is an impetus for women to enter formal political spaces and for providing tremendous opportunity for grassroots women's participation in planning and development. But despite large numbers of women in local governing bodies, gender issues were not addressed and women continue to be marginalised in local decision-making processes. She points out that women's participation and leadership with the support of women's collectives is changing the face of local governance. She concludes that, training and capacity building makes women 'gatekeepers of good governance'.  

Shilpa Jain (2003) focuses on the reasons for reservations for women in political process. She says elected women serve as role models to young and old women and encourage them to participate in politics. It is matters of justice as women constitute fifty percent of the population and should not be absent from spheres of power. Elected women bring 'women's interests' to political sphere because men do not understand women's interests and male dominated political institutions either leave them off of the agenda or they act in a manner that indirectly or directly damages women's position. Elected women transform the culture of politics. The assumption is that women are more caring and cooperative individuals and less prone to factionalism and corruption. So women transform dirty politics into a more equitable and participatory politics.
Shilpa argues that throughout the world’s representative democracies, despite the fact that across the board few women are present in formal political institutions, quotas for political representation are rare, if not non-existent. The political parties, who approved the 73rd Amendment in record time, argue that they are motivated by noble intentions i.e., “strengthen the position of the poor and weaker sections in rural India”. But Jain argues that ‘a majority (if not all) of political parties supported quotas for women, because they did not expect women’s participation to be empowering. Instead, they assumed that women would take on a passive subdued role in the formal political sector and that women’s weak presence would enable parties to easily dominate and forward their own agendas’. 74

Shilpa refers to descriptive representation (symbolic effect of quotas for women’s representation), substantive representation (influence or impact of one’s presence), transformative representation (impact of one’s identity, meaning making systems one’s world). She says descriptive and substantive representations are essentially external and personal transformative representation is internal. She points out that it is neglected by theorists and academics and rarely enters the vocabulary of political science’. 75

Shilpa refers to structural and socio-cultural constraints. The structural constraints are present in the laws themselves, in the mechanism of elections and in the processes. The rotation process is another constraint. In the socio-cultural constraints, negative stereotypes of women in rural areas and the hierarchical political party system affect women’s representation. Incompetence and lack of merit are correlated with levels of literacy. Shilpa says that in Kerala State the party structure stifled women’s political participation. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) acknowledge the need for the
presence of women in decision-making process, taking leadership roles with vocal participants.\textsuperscript{76}

Referring to the bright spots of women’s representation she says that in one Panchayat in Rajasthan State, women expressed that ‘they gained knowledge of public affairs and they realized that they too could do public work’. In Kerala State a majority of women representatives attend the Gram Sabha and saw themselves as community role models. She says that these small examples promote change in society.\textsuperscript{77}

Sara and Susanne’s (2003) empirical study focuses on the obstacles to women to enter political sphere and decision-making in Gram Panchayats in Kerala State. They point out that political participation as a democratic right for women does not mean that they have same possibilities of entering the political field, as do men. Referring to Kerala model of development, they say ‘high human development provided high social status to women but this has not been transformed into political empowerment’. The male-dominated society creates obstacles for women as men set rules and norms in the public arena.\textsuperscript{78}

As for the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment, they say that it is a step towards democratization at a grassroots level and has helped about one million women to enter into the public life. Referring to the positive impact of women’s representation, they say ‘women saw a new recognition and respect from family, neighbours and at the government office and family and neighbours are consulting them in various issues and problems. Women got invitations to weddings and most importantly their identity as some ones wife or daughter changed into an identity of their own person and name’. Referring to obstacles for participation of women in Gram Panchayats, they point out that men are an obstacle to
equal participation because they were afraid that women would getting positions in higher levels decreases male dominance. Men also realised that women were competent enough and this created jealousy among men. The male domination still persists because the norms of the society are set up by men. The cultural norms of society overshadow the newly acquired awareness of political rights.\textsuperscript{79}

The electoral system i.e., rotation of reserved seats decreases women’s chance to become re-elected. To Sara and Sussanne another obstacle is lack of support from political parties because political parties prefers men for open seats. Referring to the positive impact of the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment, they say ‘women’s representation unpacked the gender relations and transformed the quality of local self-government and political arena in Kerala State. Women’s entry created change in the process and institutions of governance that affect policies and development of the state.\textsuperscript{80}

Women’s Environment Development Organisation Programme (2003), focusing on women’s participation in the political process points out that women’s participation enables prioritization of women’s issues and implementation of women related programmes. The countries with more representation of women in the political process have benefited the women in their countries.\textsuperscript{81}

Ranjit’s (2003) study in Dehradun district of Uttarkhand State focuses on the positive implications of one-third representation provided to women by the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment. According to this study, women whether literate or illiterate or semi literate are gaining confidence to work in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Ranjit refers two cases where women exhibited confidence. Pushpa Rani, Sarpanch of Attock Farm Gram Panchayat got cancelled the police station posted in their village. She directed
the people of the village that all disputes should be settled in Gram Panchayat only. To the
police she informed that cases relating to the village should be redirected to the Village
Panchayat.\textsuperscript{82}

Nathu Begum, Sarpanch of Enfield Grant Panchayat, got applause from even male
members of Gram Panchayat for her sincerity, honesty and commitment. A local NGO,
Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK) is providing training to women members
with support of UNDP and MORD Project known as Community Based Pro – Poor
Initiatives (CBPPI). The training focuses on the rights, duties and methods of interacting
with officials, public speaking, planning and implementation of Rural Development
Programmes. Ranjit concludes by saying that ‘representation should accompany
certainty building measures to articulate their concerns and make their voices heard in
the centres of power’.\textsuperscript{83}

Devaki Jain (2003) says that one-third representation is an act of positive
discrimination and exposed the political parties’ perception of women’s limited capacity
for public office. Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions gained a sense of empowerment
by asserting control over resources, officials and more importantly by challenging men.
The Panchayati Raj Institutions have helped to change women’s perceptions of themselves
and greater understanding of the working of politics in particular and importance of the
political parties.\textsuperscript{84}

Women are changing governance by tackling issues of water, alcohol abuse,
education, health and domestic violence and women are always in proximity to solve
problems. The obstacles to women in Panchayati Raj Institutions are inadequate
education, reproductive and productive roles, lack of self-confidence and cultural and
religious views. She suggests that women need information beyond technical training i.e., support to build solidarity amongst women and strengthening links between women’s organisations and elected bodies.\(^{85}\)

Jagat Mehta (2003) points out that trained women representatives exhibit self-confidence, capacity for articulation and assertiveness. The training was imparted to the 47 women Panchayat representatives from isolated areas. These women have seen the train for the first time when they came to attend the training. The training was organised by the Vidya Bhavan Institute of Local Self-Government and Responsible Citizenship. After the training, women Sarpanches exhibited confidence and said “we will try to put an end to corruption and land encroachment on our village common lands”. Few Gram Sarpanches said “we would not allow our husbands to guide us in discharging duties as Sarpanches”. Mehta concludes by saying that women will save democracy for social justice.\(^{86}\)

Biju (2003) points out that in spite of the United Nations Economic and Social Council’s endorsement that there should be 30 percent of women in all levels of decision making by 1995, globally women constitute only 10 percent in legislative bodies and less in Parliamentary positions. But he points out that the 73\(^{rd}\) Constitutional Amendment is the most significant land mark in the journey of women’s movement and he says that it facilitated the emergence of a young and talented leadership for active participation in the political process.\(^{87}\)

Biju says that for meaningful participation of women in the Panchayati Raj, the proportion of women’s representation should be equal to the proportion of women’s
population. He concludes by saying that women in Panchayati Raj have a sense of involvement and commitment on the issues related to women.

The above would suggest that the problems faced by dalit women in Panchayati Raj Institutions are more than those of other women. There is a continuous conflict between male domination and female assertion. Preventive measures have not stopped but are increasing in number as well as in seriousness. The officials are acting as supporters of males instead of as change agents. The implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment brought about a mixed bag of successes and failures. However, there is a clear indication of a march into the future.

***
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