CHAPTER - II
Local Governance and Dalit Women

2.1 Introduction

Dalits are a pan-Indian category. Heterogeneity is a marked feature of them. They belong to ‘the most oppressed bottom’ collectivities in the hierarchical society. They are part and parcel of village communities all over Indian subcontinent, except few north eastern states. They are found not only in India but they are found in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other neighbouring countries. They share common features across the country and states and even sometime they are found in more than one state known by synonyms such as Mahars and Holeyas or Chalwadis in Maharashtra and Karnataka respectively. Similarly the caste called Malas in Andhra Pradesh; Paraiyas in Tamil Nadu are one and the same as Holeyas and Chalwadis in Karnataka state. Madiga caste, another untouchable community, that exist by the same name in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh states and Mangs in Maharashtra is synonym of Madiga in Karnataka State. The matrimonial alliances take place between them across the state boundaries and it is very common in border areas of more than one state.

It has been a historical discourse that the study of Indian society was the study of Indian villages and any study barring the study of Indian villages is incomplete.

Indian villages have been perceived by the Sociologists and Social Anthropologists as an integral part of Indian civilization and without proper understanding of villages the study of Indian society is incomplete. Therefore, the study of village communities has been carried out by scholars across the
disciplines. Initially the study of Indian villages was commensurate with the study of caste / chaturvana, joint family and social hierarchy as an ideal type by Indologists and other Indian scholars mostly Dwijas. This was purely a ‘book view’ of Indian society. In contrast to this the field based empirical studies carried out by sociologists and social anthropologists have greater relevance in understanding inter and intra- caste relations, between various social categories, patron-client relation, organic solidarity based on agrarian social network, hegemonisation of certain castes despite resistance and coercion applied for strict compliance and so on. This interpretation of Indian society was the ‘field view’.

Mid- 1950’s and 60’s the orientation and outlook of sociologists changed drastically form ‘ideal types’ based on the ‘book view’ to more ‘pragmatic and empirical research’ based on the field view. The impact of Marxian and democratic egalitarian perspective played a pivotal role. Sociologist perceived the villages as breeding centers of communalism and casteism. Further the notion of ‘patria- potesta’, male dominance, led to the discrimination based on gender in Indian village communities.

The third category of research investigations were of recent origin which were popularized in the mid-1980. The affected collectivities try to locate themselves in the hierarchical social structure by conducting empirical studies on their own castes and their relation with others. This attempt was mainly to locate their position in the hierarchical society and assert for new identities in the contemporary Indian society.

Firstly, the village studies have described the agrarian relations and the problems and prospects of the peasantry. Series of studies have been undertaken by the sociologist and social anthropologist to study the agrarian social structure, political structure, economic relations, vis-a-vis organic solidarity
between the various castes and pace of social transformation. Srinivas (1955), Beteille (1974), Kroeber and Red Field (1965), Red Field (1965), Shanin (1987), etc., have tried to study the villages, joint family and caste system. Srinivas’s India’s villages (1955), M. Marriot ‘Villages in India, ‘Rural profiles’ by D.N.Majumadar (1955) and S.C Dube’s ‘Indian Villages’ are some of the important research works on Indian villages. As part of their studies, the location of untouchables and their relation with other communities, patron – client relations in the agrarian economy, their problems and over all life situations of Dalits have been focused by these scholars.

Secondly, another set of scholars have conducted research on Indian villages and produced the ‘monographs’. Dube (1955), Majumdar (1958), and Lewis (1958) are important. Further, studies on Indian village communities have identified the caste system as essentially a hierarchical order and the study of caste is important than the study of village communities (Dumont and Pocock). Majumdar (1958) pointed out the differential attitude, settlement patterns and lifestyle within the village communities despite living together. Beteille identified the element of unity in physical sense and not in social sense.

Thirdly, Lewis and Bailey have noticed that the element of conflict that exists in the caste system and organic solidarity is achieved due to the coercion by the landowning peasant communities despite resistance by the untouchables (Lewis 1958) and (Bailey, 1960).

Fourthly, these studies, however scientific in their approach, lack the consistency as the researchers belong to the upper strata and their inaccessibility with untouchable communities due to social restrictions and contempt have rendered their studies on the lower strata suffers the accuracy of data and later interpretation (Shah 1979). Majumudar (1958), Beteille (1996) and Mayer (1975) have had similar experiences. The upper caste bias is other
important limitations of village studies particularly with regard to the location and position of untouchables (Jodhka S, 1981). ‘... there is virtually no reference to the idea of the village being a site of exploitation in the village studies. It was only in the 1970’s and more importantly in 1980’s the caste began to be looked at from a Dalit perspective (Jodhka S., 1981).

Indeed ‘the book view’ sociology in India was and is excessively in favour of projecting the view from the above. To counter this, the ‘field view’ would have been greatly helpful if executed with care. But that was not to be. Almost all field studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology until recently were undertaken from the perspective of twice – born middle class Hindus. For example, there is hardly any study of village, a much celebrated theme in Indian Sociology, which views the village reality from the perspective of Cheri, Maharwada or Chamar Mohalla. And, in field studies, as in the texts those below the pollution line are designated as Chandalas, Mlecchas, Exterior castes, Untouchables etc., if they are referred to at all (Oomen, T.K. 2001).

Indeed whatever the characteristics of the Chandalas, Mlecchas, Swapachas, which described the Manu’s Dharmashtra resembles even in 21st century. British government identified them and enlisted them as Scheduled Castes. Narasimha Mehta’s ‘Harijan’ popularized by Gandhiji has once again stigmatized with contempt. Whatever the way you call and describe them, it is difficult to give away the contempt and stigma attached to it, the meaning is the same as ‘Untouchables’.


These studies have not focused the problems and life situations of Dalit women. The village and caste studies focused several aspects of village life and caste system and its impact on whole village community, but did not mention about Dalit women. Hence an attempt has been made in this study to locate Dalit women in Indian village community and their participation in the political structure in lieu of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act.

In view of this, 73rd Amendment is a inclusive policy which has provided the political space. This help Dalit women empower to participate in the decision making process as the partners of local governance and development at grass root level.

An attempt has been made to review the recent research works and publications on the issues of social mobility, empowerment of Dalit women, their role as members of PRI’s etc.
Anand Inbanathan (2002) in his work ‘Power, Patronage and Accountability in the Panchayats of Karnataka’ has discussed at length the interlinkage between power, patronage and accountability in the Panchayat Raj Institutions and a well organized minority, the rural elites, rules at the grass root level. Panchayats have provided the opportunity for the widest section of rural society to participate in local governance. Social conditions, proximity to the local leaders, linkage with political parties, mobilization capacity, economic stability etc., contribute to ensure only a section of the village people actually acquire and wield power. These power elites, a minority, have dominated the affairs of Panchayat activities and their influence is quite obvious. Though democratic process has taken place to ensure the participation of all classes, but in reality it is only the organized minority that rules the panchayats. Thus, local governance through the panchayats is not always manifestation of the highest forms of democratic functioning.

The study by Dunn, Dana (1993) on ‘Gender Inequality in Education and Employment’ of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes of India reveals that Dalit women are worst sufferers of discrimination on gender and caste leading to minimal subsistence. Dalit women strive not for equality but for their survival. Due to strong notion of patriarchal value system, Dalit women continue to be discriminated. The protection that has been ensured to these Scheduled Castes has not substantially improved their position in the hierarchical social system of Indian society.

Vijay Lakshmi V. and B.K. Chandrasekhar, (2000), have in their study on ‘Gender Inequality, Differences and Identities: Women and Local Governance in Karnataka’ analysed the process of decentralization and the impact of gender inequality on the process of empowerment of women due to quota system in the Panchayat Raj Institutions.
Social and Cultural exclusion from the political system resulted in women and other disadvantaged sections of the population being alienated from politics and governance. The reservation of seats in local governance has offered women new political space and an opportunity to participate in governance. Equality in opportunity, however, does not guarantee effective participation of women.

Non-participation of women in local governance is a consequence of many interrelated factors. Socio-cultural constraints manifested in the gender inequalities, and differences among women, resulted in the construction of a non-political identity. The multiple identities of women and the resulting dilemmas they faced, only contributed to limited participation.

Smitha K.C, (2007) in her work ‘Socio–Economic Determinants of Women Leadership at the Grass Roots’ critically analyze and evaluate the emergence of women leadership in Panchayat Raj Institutions particularly after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in Andhra Pradesh. This work has covered the socio-economic determinants of the elected women and its consequent influence on the emerging women leadership in Andhra Pradesh, examine how far socio-economic aspects have impaired or given opportunities to raise the issues and other social and economic problems in a formal forum and thereby adequately ensure the improvement in all spheres of life. This analysis establishes the fact that many myths associated with the entry of women into leadership positions that would be hindered by socio-economic profile in terms of their age, occupation, family income, land holdings and education have been disproved.

In an edited volume entitled ‘Women and Society: The Developmental Perspective’ by Amit Kumar. Gupta, (1986) presents 14 articles written by various scholars. The contributors have identified a number of major issues such
as changing status of women in various fields, gender inequality, political socialization, women and urban poverty and also concerning women’s participation in the economic and social processes in Indian society which is undergoing rapid social transformation.

It has been emphasized that critical interventions ensure social recognition and support for women’s distinct contribution and needs. An attempt has been made by different scholars to critically examine the women’s movement. This volume combines empirical material with theoretical insights and discuss the real position of women in society. The relative position with opposite sex in society in response to changing economic and political conditions, are heightened with reference to a change they bring about and development they usher in.

Narendra Kumar and Manoj Rai, (2006) in their work on ‘Dalit Leadership in Panchayats: A Comparative Study of Four States’ have attempted to study the emerging patterns of rural leadership in relation to the Dalit leadership and how quota system has helped Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular to gain rational legal authority in local governance and what impaired them to participate effectively in it.

This study is based on the field survey carried out in four states of India on the emerging Dalit Leadership in Panchayats after the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. It concentrates on some of the issues like: what have been experiences so far of Dalit leaders in Panchayats? How do they perceive their new found role? What are enabling and inhibiting factors? What changes these affirmative actions have brought about at ground levels? What needs to be done to make Dalit leadership more effective so that it brings out positive changes in quality of life of its people?
The study has made an attempt to bring out the common factors across the states with regard to Dalit leadership enabling and inhibiting factors. Though, situations in different states vary but still there are certain common factors. While education, experience, family, community, economic independence and personal initiatives have been found to be enabling factors for the effectiveness of Dalit leadership. Caste practice is the most important inhibiting factor in all the states. But, like many other studies, this study has also recognized the potential of Dalit leadership in Panchayats. These local leaders have capacities to bring those irreversible positive changes in our social system, which could not be achieved by democratically elected state and union governments.

The study ‘Affirmative Action and Dalits: Political Representation in Panchayats’ by Inbanathan, Anand (2003) reveals that the political representation in terms of quota system in PRI’s is not effective in case of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular as they are weak collectivities in the rural political structure.

Even in the changing scenario the traditional rural elites, mostly economically powerful landed gentry continue to dominate the panchayats in their own fashion. He analyses how reservations of seats in panchayats have provided political space to Dalits. However, he mentions that this has not been translated into effective power, partly due to their recent entry into electoral politics, and the continuing dominance of individuals from groups higher in the social hierarchy. While overt discrimination is not often found, Dalits in Karnataka do not function as equals to representatives of higher castes. Likewise, in Kerala, caste as a factor in political relations though less overt but is significant. Reservations have given political representation to Dalits, but their participation is constrained by the existing social structure.
Vijay Laksmi V and B.K. Chandrasekhar (2003) in their work ‘Authority, Powerlessness and Dependence: Women and Political Participation’ analyzed that affirmative action has enabled the representation of women in panchayats and enhanced their political status in local government. While they now possess authority through being incumbents of elective positions, this has not been translated into power (i.e., the ability to actually affect outcomes). Gender and other social differences hinder the exercise of power by women representatives, and have reduced their effectiveness as political representatives. Thus what is required is an alternative conception of power which is centered not in the position but on the individual.

Prem Prashant, et al. (1996) in their work ‘Popular Participation in Rural Development’ has made an attempt to understand the pattern and nature of emerging leadership. They observed that the traditional leadership is being replaced as a result of the 73rd Amendment Act. This study notices that a large number of Panchyat Raj leaders are younger and hails from the weaker sections of the society. It further found that these leaders are having small landholding and low annual income. Thus, the authors argue that the new legislation is path breaking one as far as the participation of weaker section of the society have started enjoying fair deal in the development matters as a sizeable number of people from these communities are represented in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The study concludes that the Panchayat Raj legislation that has provided for the reservation of weaker sections like SC’s ST’s and women has widened the social base of the popular participation in the village decision making process.

Hazel D’lima (1983) conducted a study in Maharashtra on ‘The Role of Women in PRI’s particularly in Local Bodies of Maharashtra’. The study covers 4 divisions i.e. Vidarbha, Marathwada, Pune and Bombay. Priority has been
given to the role of women in the upper tiers namely Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti. Her study reveals the social emergence of women in the country, a movement which follows the ebb and elbow of socio-political events, socio-economic and political background of women members in the panchayat samitis and zilla parishads, social outlook and participatory pattern of women members. However D’Lima has studied only the social background, social awareness and outlook of women members.

Dilip K. Ghosh, (1997) in his study ‘Grass Root Women Leaders: Who are they? A Study in a West Bengal District’ makes an attempt to understand the socio-economic backgrounds of the women leaders of panchayats. The study tries to understand the profile of the panchayat women members by analyzing the caste pattern, age group distribution, marital status, educational attainment, family income and land holding of the families. The study reveals that a fair representation is ensured to the women members (61.76%) are of the age group up to 30 years. But only 4.42% members are above 45 year age group. This implies that though new generation women (younger age women) prefer to grab the scope provided by seventy third Amendment, elderly women are not so much interested to break the traditions, in other words, few of them feel the urge to evolve a new society where the existing gaps and discriminations are fought to be alleviated some of these elderly women expressed that the burden of family was so rigorous that they even had no time to think of change. For obvious reason, the political parties prefer younger women to become the agents of change. The analysis of the caste composition of the age groups shows that out of 118 members up to 25 years of the age about 40 percent from SC, 24 age group 16 percent from ST, Muslim community and the remaining 20 percent from other castes. Similarly the percentage of SC/ST members is very high in the age groups above 25-30 years and 30-45 years in comparison to other caste members. The reverse trend is visible in the case of age group above 45-50
years where more than 61 percent members belong to the upper castes. Ghosh observes that as all the members are new to the system, inclusion of younger people from SC/ST may lead to the biased interaction when the members of other castes influence the thought process of the weaker sections.

He opines that the younger women members of SC/ST community do not participate effectively in the deliberations of the gram panchayat meeting rather they remain as the salient spectators and listeners of the ongoing process.

C.K. Shymala and Pujar, (2000), ‘The Socio-Economic Profile of Women Members of Zilla Panchayats in Karnataka’. Data for this study were collected from 250 women zilla panchayat members belonging to all sections of communities from all districts (20) of Karnataka who came to the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore for training during 1995-96. The study reveals that the younger generation has shown keen interest in participating in local institutions of governance. This study also reveals that a majority of women members are inexperienced and are not exposed to politics.

Abdul Aziz (1998), in his work ‘An Outline of the Contours of Panchayat Raj’ discusses the working of Panchayats and nature of leadership in Panchayats before the introduction of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 and after its introduction. He observes that the Panchayat bodies had come to be dominated by the rural elites especially the landed gentry, who happened to be members of the dominant communities. Members of the weaker sections-SC’s ST’s and Other Backward Classes-hardly had access to Panchayat membership or authority in Panchayats was skewed in for of the strongest. This was not consistent with the participatory governance envisaged. He feels that the Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, sought to right these wrongs. It laid down guidelines for panchayat structure, composition, power and functions made the establishment of panchayat and the holding of panchayat elections with six
months of their dissolution mandatory; stipulated the appointment of State Finance Commission to recommend devolution of finances as also how funds are to be assigned to panchayats; and provided for reservation of seats and authority positions in favour of weaker sections like Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and women. The provisions have been landmarks in the history of local governance in our country.

Snehalata Panda (1997), in her work ‘Political Empowerment of Women: A Case of Orissa’ explores the rural socio-political situations and the performance of women representatives in PRI’s in Orissa with mandatory provisions of 33 percent reservation for women, provided by the new Panchayati Raj Act. The study focuses on the socio-economic background of the participants and the breaking barriers of traditional patriarchal society to enter into the political arena which gives true meaning to the grassroots democracy. Panda observes that women entered into the politics due to the mandatory provision of 33 per cent. Most of the women are having non-political background and entered politics due to persuasion by their family members or pressure from the village community or pressure from the political party and some members entered due to personal interests. The important aspect of the study is that the women who reluctantly entered into politics showed great maturity in outlook, enthusiasm, increasing political consciousness, and the increasing perception of their role and responsibilities in the later stage. The study found that mean age of women representatives was 48, which indicates that the ideal age for women to take up political office is after their relative freedom from familial responsibilities like reproduction and nursing children. The absence of younger women shows the hold of the traditional thinking about women’s role in rural areas. Even women representing PRI’s had strong reservation on entry of young women which may be due to their conditioning.
Vyasulu and Vyasulu (1999), in their study ‘The Structure of Panchayat Raj System in Karnataka and the Experiences of Women in it’ identify the barriers or impediments in the full participation of women in the political process. This study reveals that women in Karnataka have gained valuable political experience. Between the two rounds of (different) local government system, i.e., after the enactment of 73rd Amendment Act thousands have stood for elections. Hundreds have held elective office because of reservations in important position. Authors concluded that for fundamental changes in society, much more than PRIs are required, but that does not mean PRI’s are not important. If gender justice is to become the norm, much more will be needed and it will take time.

Mukta Banerjee (1998) in her work ‘Women in Local Governance: Macro Myths, Micro Realities’ present case studies of four women representatives of Karnataka Panchayats, studied as part of project sponsored by the Ford Foundation undertaken by the Institute of Social Studies Trust shortly after the seventy- third Amendments Act which provides reservation for women in Panchayats. The study talks about the story of Basamma who became the president of Karnataka’s only all women’s Panchayat in Mydolalu, Bhadravati taluk, Shimoga District. Basamma learnt the ropes from her male mentors and went on to be as Panchayat president. One of her project was a ban on the sale or consumption of country liquor in the three villages of the Panchayat. The village sanitation programme which provides a toilet in every home was another of Basamma’s project. Another case study of a women municipal councilor reveals that women leaders are work oriented and are unlike male counterparts never involve much in politics .In this case Gangavva, a women municipal councilor was committed to tackling the problem of water scarcity which affects the women more adversely and her other priorities were that of cleaning garbage and collections of taxes.
The one remaining study is that of Zubadabi, where in the analysis of the case reveals that the bureaucracy at the higher level is having cynical approach to meet and listen to the women Panchayat leaders from the villages. It is also found that women leaders lack the right approach to their problems and always feels that the development work depends upon the mercy of the bureaucratic people operating at the higher level.

George Mathew(1998), in his work ‘Restructuring the Polity with Pan’chayat Raj as a Cutting Edge: The Background, the Issues and the Ground Realities discusses some aspects of panchayats and the democratic issues involved in the village politics like elections and patterns of leadership. He opines that elections to panchayats in India have been an excellent barometer of functioning democracy. He quotes the studies done on the Panchayat election process in Karnataka in 1995 and Tamil Nadu in 1996 and observes that caste and religion, which had been playing a prominent role in deciding the outcome of the elections in the last fifty years, have shown signs of decline in Panchayat elections in some states. In Tamil Nadu, for example, during the 1996 Panchayat elections, a growing democratic consciousness among the people was clearly evident. Nearly 81 percent the respondents of the survey says that religious or caste leaders did not direct the people to exercise their voting right one way or the others. To a direct question of whether caste affinity was important in voting a candidate to power, an overwhelming majority of 73.6 percent of the respondents, the caste of candidate did not matter, 44.9 percent said they voted for a particular candidate because he or she was good person. He concludes that voters in local elections gives priority to welfare and development activities, and transcend caste or party politics, for the village voter, the track of the record of the candidates was more important. However, he raises concern about the panchayats themselves is being used as oppressive
instruments. Absence of land reforms, low level of literacy and patriarchal system are working against the interests of the weaker sections.

S.N.Chaudhary, (2004), in his work ‘Dalit and Tribal Leadership in Panchayats’ made an attempt to understand the nature and patterns of leadership among Dalits and Tribals in Madhya Pradesh. The study reveals that both Dalit and Tribal Panchayat leaders in Sehore and Betul Districts are in the age group of 25-44 years and are mostly illiterate engaged in agriculture activities. It is also found that most of them are wage workers and belonged to BPL group. The study concludes that lack of basic amenities is serious problem among these communities. Thus, the Dalit and Tribal leaders lack social capital to manage the Panchayat affairs meaningfully. Chaudhary feels that continuous training with regular interval should be conducted exclusively for Dalits and Tribal Panchayat representatives.

Shanti.K.(1998)(Ed),in her collection of articles ‘Empowerment of Women’ narrates about the existing empowerment strategies and their shortcomings. Six papers deals with case studies and rest of them deals with need for the social, legal and cultural empowerment of women. This volume discusses various issues such as socio- political, cultural and economic empowerment, reservation for women from Parliament to Panchayat, role of education in empowerment, employment as an important tool for Empowerment, and the role of government and Non-government organizations in the development and empowerment of women.

Jogdand P.G.,(1995) (ed), in his collection of articles ‘Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives’ has made an attempt to construct the theoretical perspective of Dalit women, their position and fundamental problems faced by
them as women and as Dalit women, who are subjected to deprivations and discriminations based on the caste and gender. This volume gives us insights into specific position of Dalit women’s, ‘bottom most oppressed’ in the hierarchical society. It also tries to explore the specificities of Dalit women in India.

Dalit women constitute a lower segment in Indian society and suffer from dual disadvantage: (a) of being Dalit, and (b) being women. These women suffer all deprivations which their caste group as a whole suffers. Besides, they have to undergo additional hardship because of their gender. The interconnection between gender and caste was not brought to the fore and category of Dalit women figured neither in women’s studies nor in caste studies. The problems of Dalit Women have not been focused by the mainstream feminists, as they are unable to grasp the basic problems of Dalit women, even if they did, they have failed to focus them because the feminist movement is urban oriented and middle class centered.

There is a general consensus among the contributors of this volume that Dalit women are a separate category and they have typical problems as compared to the other women in our society. This study not only highlights the basic problems of Dalit women, but also presents for the study of all India social reality of crucial issues concerning Dalit women.

‘Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance: Field Studies form Rural India’ is the outcome of continuous hard work put in by a group of dedicated scholars which focused on the issue of inclusion and exclusion. They addressed question of empowerment of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and women. Have they been empowered? If yes, then in what sense and to what extent? If not, why? Secondly, these questions have been explored not by using a quantitative or questionnaire methods but by using intensive interviewing and
observation, also called participant observation by Baviskar, B.S and George Mathew (2009). In this exhaustive field based collection of articles based on the field surveys this volume has produced quite interesting insights of success and failure of the empowerment of women. These case studies across the country revealed that the constitutional guarantees in terms of reservation for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions have produced paradoxical results leading to structural implications. The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution which provides 33 percentages of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions has produced uneven results. Empowerment of SC/ST and women has raised basic structural implications where traditionally dominant castes have resistance to accept new changes. The presence of these marginalized groups in panchayat system was resisted by traditionally dominant caste groups. Despite these resistances the new leadership is emerging from among SCs, STs and women. The constitutionalization of PRI’s will go a long way to create a political space and avenues for SCs, STs and women and it will have definite structural implications on Indian society. The marginalized groups which were excluded from political structure, with inclusive policy of reservation, have gained entry into the political structure, whether the dominant castes like it or not. These case studies have highlighted that mere political reservation will not help for the empowerment of marginalized groups in the absence of economic and social equality.

Rational legal authority which ensured to these marginalized groups through PRI’s has been being encountered by traditional, conservative and feudal authority. It means the political authority gained by these groups is challenged by caste, gender and patriarchy. These studies have made serious attempt to understand the caste conflicts and equation in the light of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act which has brought about radical changes. Therefore, it is quite interesting to note that these case studies highlighted the
inclusive policy of the constitution and paradoxical practices that exclude these marginalized groups from participation in decision making process.

Singla. Pamela, (2007), ‘Women’s Participation in Panchayat Raj: Nature and Effectiveness’ analysis the process of the political participation of the women in the light of 33 percentage reservation for women due to the 73rd Amendment Act. The landmark 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India has definitely empowered the women in terms of numbers. From the miniscule figure of 2/4 percentage in most of the Indian States, the Amendment has for the first time brought 33-40 percent rural women into the sphere of the decision making process. But, being in large numbers in not enough as reservation provides only the possibility of a voice for women, it does guarantee it. This is also because the backdrop in which the reservation has been introduced in the country is marked by such factors as illiteracy, male dominance, casteism, deep rooted cultural beliefs and values, which do not encourage women’s assertion but retain them in their traditional roles of dependent spouse, mother and housewife amidst such social and cultural constraints, it becomes important to study the nature and effectiveness with which the women members are able to participate in the PRI’s specifically their ability to address the women’s issues at the local level.

This work is based on the comprehensive study, which looks into the whole issue of Women’s participation in PRI’s in the North Indian State of Haryana which is characterized by an alarming sex ratio in favour of men. The participation is studied not only from the angle of the elected women members themselves but also the elected men members, the public and most importantly by attending the grama panchayat and Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad meetings.
Thus the focus of the study is to present the combination of both observational and empirical realities.

Joshi R.P and G.S. Narwani (2005), ‘Panchayat Raj in India: Emerging Trends Across the States’ is a well documented work that deals with various issues of Panchayat Raj Systems and its potential role in providing opportunities to the people to participate in the decision making process at grass root level. Authors have pointed out that the Panchayat Raj Institutions in a system of government which is most viable and proper mechanism of realization of democracy at grass root level. The current debate is not on its desirability but on strengthening it by identifying its weaknesses and taking care of the lacunae which are inbuilt despite the Constitutionalization of Panchayat Raj Institutions through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.

The broader issues such as a debate on the ‘district government’ and creation of the third tier of federal polity in India and its impact on the rural power structure due to the social inclusion of the SC’s, ST’s and the women in PRI’s. In fact, rural India today has become the embodiment of a new revolution which needs to provide a much needed direction to the polity and thereby making democracy and decentralization vibrant and feasible for those who deserve it most.

The authors have painstakingly highlighted the fundamental challenges that are faced by the women, SC’s and ST’s and also Dalit Women in their article ‘Social Justice through Panchayat Raj’. They have pointed out that the panchayat funds are mismanaged to appropriate for their own development by the upper castes and SC’s, ST’s and the women members have to witness, what is happening and they have been called as ‘rubber stamps’. They have quoted studies conducted in different states by other scholars pointed out that the reservation for Dalits, the women has not made remarkable inroads in realizing
the democratization of rural politics. The rural elites with their political clout, proximity to political parties and leaders, economic stability, mobilization capacity, caste preponderance play very effectively in the PRI’s. Whereas the women, SC’s and ST’s suffer the disabilities based on caste, gender and patriarchy and their participation is hindered because of illiteracy, ignorance of PRI system, poverty, economic dependence, lack of political socialization etc.

Further they have evaluated the challenges faced by the disadvantaged social groups, the women, SC’s and ST’s in exercising their power and authority at local governance. Marginalized groups face, firstly legal ambiguity in the power and functions given to panchayats, secondly, the caste and gender prejudices which keep the women, SC’s and ST’s away from functioning effectively as members or chairpersons of those bodies, thirdly, challenge relates to in adequate information about and exposure to their rights, roles and responsibilities and the attitude of apathy in local bureaucracy towards there representatives, fourthly, economic disability. Further, the authors have suggested that the new women and Dalit leadership needs not only support in terms of information and linkages for effective functioning in the panchayat, but also legitimacy.

Judge, Paramjit.S and Gurpreet Bal, (2009), in their work ‘Mapping Dalits’, is based on empirical investigation of rural and urban Punjab, which explores patterns of social mobility of Dalits. Four dimensions namely education, empowerment, emigration and entrepreneurship have been examined to map the changing character of Dalits. In comparison to other states Punjab is often considered free from acute caste based inequalities and atrocities though caste system exists and prevails in the structure of everyday life of the Punjabis.

The urban Dalits have undergone rapid change in their conditions, which they transformed into political empowerment at the local level. Despite the
changes, there are certain aspects of their social life, which have not undergone change. The authors have made observations that the Dalits have been under the influence of Bahujan Samaj Party politics which provides necessary inputs for the self sufficiency and realization of potentials of Dalits.

Dhaka, Sunita and Rajbir S. Dhaka, (2005) ‘Behind the Veil: Dalit Women in Panchayat Raj’ has identified the patterns and process of social mobility among Dalits and its impact on the political participations in the changing scenario after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. They have made attempts to identify the major issues of empowerment of the women, SC’s and ST’s and more so Dalit women in the light of 33 percent reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Despite the constitutional guarantees the Dalit women continue to be discriminated by caste, gender and patriarchy leading to the marginalization of them. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act is a revolutionary step in providing equal access to the women, SC’s and ST’s and more specifically Dalit women to the political structure. This has raised several questions. The problem of participatory management of welfare schemes can be solved only when the marginalized section come to play a major role in decision making.

The Scheduled Castes in general and Scheduled Caste women in particular, continue to lead a life of misery and deprivation. Even though seats have been reserved in favour of SC’s Women but very little has been changed at the ground level.

This book is an outcome of a study conducted in Haryana and focuses on the status and participate on of Scheduled Caste women in decision making institution at the local level i.e., Panchayat Raj Institutions. A number of factors have been identified by the authors who help in understanding the problems in a proper perspective. 33 percentage reservations for the women in general ad
Dalit women in particular and large number of them got elected to all three tier PRI’s and the reservation is only an enabling factor. Actually how far they are effective in decision making is a pertinent question and this work has made an attempt to evaluate how far the Dalit women participate in the Pachayat Raj Institutions in Haryana State.

Nagar.N.S, (2008) ‘Women and Politics’ deals with the political roles the women have played and continue to play in world politics. The body of politics is made dominant and the women have been sidelined as if this power play is not suitable to them. Within the structure for power play that politics, one group of people, however have been grossly under represented especially in proposition to their number in society: women. For the longest period of time, women have had to countend with their subordinate position with respect to men, excluded even from exercising the right to vote. Author explains the saga of the women who fought for the equal representation in politics. Further she makes it clear that this book is not a feminist manifesto, but is rather a manual on politics which takes a stance, endorsing the need for women to gain powerful position as members of political parties and contribute significantly and visibly to the changing needs and duties of politics.

Lastly, delineating women’s position within various global societies and what they are speaking for the political authority of women, this work also incorporates variables critical perspectives, fostering a greater understanding of the subject.

Thorat, Sukhdeo, (2009), ‘Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny’ is a comprehensive book which explores the status of Dalits in the country aiming at understanding their status with respect to important indicators of human development. It is a painstaking attempt of the author to provide the demographic profile, to the wide variety of readers, in terms of population
growth, their regional concentration, gender dimensions and pattern of urbanization.

The book provides in-depth analysis of the social and economic status of marginalized groups and an evaluation has been made with regard to occupational pattern, access to land and capital, magnitude and characteristics of rural SC labourers, employment and unemployment and employment rate in both rural and urban areas, and the incidence of poverty among them.

The analysis has also covered social development covering literacy and educational levels, health status and access to basic amenities such as housing, water and electricity. This work emphasizes social discrimination and atrocities. The study comprehensively brings out evidence of atrocities on SC’s and the prevalence of discrimination against them in various spheres of public life and suggests measures for all round uplift of SC’s in India.

This is first of its study that provides sources of data and statistics about SC’s which is quite useful for those interested in the study of SC’s in contemporary India. It is certainly a rich resource for researchers, policy makers and students, and all those concerned with issues related to poverty, social exclusion and marginality of Dalits.

The study of SC’s require an in-depth insight into the changing condition due to the constitutional guarantees and indeed this work lacks the study of social mobility among SC’s. The study of social mobility, emergence of middle classes among SC’s emergence of leaders and elites, alienation of middle classes from their communities etc have their relevance.

But for this lacunae, all aspects of SC’s have systematically been covered and the statistics on SC’s compiled in this volume is really a remarkable thing
which will help those concerned in the study of Dalits and their future in Indian Society.

Sather Krishna (1997) in his article ‘Women and Panchayat Raj: The Law, Programme and the Practices’ observe that the 73rd Amendment Act has ensured enough representation of women in the PRI’s. However, he feels that the quality of participation of women members in these PRI’s is not satisfactory. In the beginning of PRI experiment with reservation of seats for women in Karnataka, it was a common sight to find women occupying back seats during the panchayat meetings. Even in training programmes where members of the both sexes were present, women were seen sitting away from the front benches. Some panchayats members were however, bold enough to ‘reserve’ the front seats for the women. Over the years, the situation has gradually changed, though equality of treatment in such basic matters is still far from fully achieved. Another observation has been that the women members depend considerably on their men folk for decision-making. It is a common sight to find their male relatives not only hanging around the panchayat offices, but also taking active part in official activities. He attributes the following-factors responsible for this dismal situation. One reason is the social tradition, where all such matters had been assigned to men. Second is the legal tradition of inheritance of property by male progeny, to the exclusion of the married (some times even unmarried) daughters. Third is the lower literacy of women as compared to men.

Mishra Sweta (1997), in her articles ‘Women and 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act: A Critical Appraisal’ analyses the marginal position occupied by the Indian women in the society and also in the political process due to socio-economic constraints. It outlines the evolution of the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI’S). It then gives us a brief account of the position of women in the PRI’s before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Finally, it examines
the probable role of women in the context of the 73rd Amendment Act. It examines whether women will be able to exercise political power through this system, what hurdles are there on their way, and finally how they overcome these?

Shashi S. Narayana (1998), in her articles ‘Gender Equality through Reservation in Decision Making Bodies’ tried to discuss the need for political empowerment of women through reservation in its decision making bodies like The Parliament and State Legislatures in the same like as at Panchayat [village] level in India. The current economic and socio-political maladies along with increasing violence against women and children are attributed to the failure of male oriented polity. Representation of women in higher bodies of political authority has been considered a prerequisite for the success of democracy at the grass-root level. However the need for the accountability and sense of commitment on the part of the elected women representative is stressed. This requires higher degree of awareness among women regarding health, literacy, gender and other relevant social, economic and political issues.

Reddy, T.Chandra Mohan and U.R.Kaliappan (1987) in their article ‘Status of Scheduled Castes in Rural Power Structure: An Analysis’ have attempted to study the rural power structure from the stand point of Scheduled Castes. The Scheduled Castes in Indian society occupy unique position. As the bulk of their population is concentrated in rural areas and most of them being lagging behind when compared to other communities in terms of socio-economic and political development, their integration with the main stream of development is an urgent need. Without that egalitarianism in Indian Society cannot be achieved. In order to improve the conditions of these sections of population a great number of measures have been initiated by the Indian Government at different levels. This paper makes an attempt to ascertain their
position and participation in the rural power structure in the light of changes that have taken place in the recent past.

Mahi Pal, (2004) in his article ‘Caste and Patriarchy in Panchayats identified the inter link between caste and particularly and how both act as impediments for Dalit women to exercise their rational legal authority as elected representatives at PRI’s. The caste and patriarchy still exercise a stranglehold on Haryana’s Panchayat Institutions making a mockery of decentralized governance. The woman elected representatives need adequate support systems as well as education to make them effective leaders.

Jodhka,Suriender.S (2006) in his paper ‘Caste and Democracy: Assertion and Identify among the Dalits of Rural Punjab’ has attempted to study the relationship between caste and politics and caste related conflicts and Dalit assertions.

The existing formulation on ‘Caste and Politics’ have also been drawn largely from such analysis where the political experience of the so called middle level, land owing ‘dominant’ castes has been, the primary source of empirical data. Based on three case studies of caste-related conflicts and Dalit assertions in contemporary rural Punjab, this paper tries to show that, historically, politicization of caste identities varies significantly across different caste groups. The experience of being a member of a Dalit caste, for example, is very different from that of being a member of an ‘upper’ and dominant caste. This paper, therefore, tries to make micro-analyses of changing caste relations in contemporary India.

Yashoda, T (2007), in her article ‘Women Leadership in Grama Panchayats: A Field Analysis from Hassan District’ attempted to analyze the political empowerment due to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993.
The main focus of this empirical investigation has been to study or examine the knowledge of role performance of women leaders in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. Since the rural women for the first time were given opportunity to enter the local political institutions through the provision of the reservation policy introduced by the Karnataka State. The 73rd Amendment Act has provided reservation for women which have created political space. This presents women with unpredicted opportunities for political participation and decision making at the grass-roots level. In this context it is pertinent to examine the knowledge of statutory role, functions and duties of Grama Panchayats and awareness of local governance and precisely this paper made an attempt to assess social and political background of women leaders in Hassan District.

Sutar, Anil, S., (2007), in his article ‘Caste and Patriarchy in the emerging Women’s Leadership in Panchayats: A Study from Karnataka’ discusses the bearing of the primordial institutions of caste and patriarchy on the emerging women’s leadership in panchayats in Karnataka. The Karnataka State is a pioneer in introducing this Act and this has enabled larger participation of women and deprived sections of our society in the grass root level governance. However, the caste and patriarchy have larger implications in the emergence and performance of women leaders who hail from lower stratum of the society, are more democratic and people-centered, whereas those from the upper castes are more conservative and family-centered. The lower caste women leaders outnumber their male counter parts in the panchayats which provides an explanation for the presence of more than one third women elected members in panchayats.

Limbadri, R., (2007) in his article ‘Grass Roots Democracy: The Experience of Dalits in PRI’s’ has made an attempt to analyse the
empowerment of marginalized sections i.e., Dalits. This article is based on detailed field notes on the experience of Indira, a Dalit women president of Navipet Mandal, Nizamabad in Andhra Pradesh. It also, combining recorded evidences from other empirical studies, analyses how inadequate the space provided for Dalits, in spite of the constitutional guarantees in a caste ridden society.

Though several dimensions of PRI’s have been well researched and discussed, the most neglected area is its potential for the empowerment of marginalized sections particularly Dalits. This issue could be addressed through historical assessment of these institutions vis-à-vis Dalits.

Hazarika. Sujata D, (2008) in her article ‘Democracy and Leadership: The Gendered Voice in Politics’ has made an attempt to evaluate the empowerment of women due to the 73rd Amendment. In Assam, be it the Maomaria revolt, nationalist movement, or a more recent constitutional mandate for political participation, women have seldom transcended institutionalized patriarchy. Most often, voices of change come from agencies of male politics where the politics behind conventional definition of the ‘political’ is never questioned. A fuller grasp of women as political subjects or agents must, therefore, draw on a more complex conceptualization of the field of power than the routinely encountered today. In this article attempt made to evaluate the political empowerment of women in Assam after the implementation of the 73rd Amendment, which facilitate the representation of women in politics.

Sharma, Anjouri, (2010) ‘Dalit Women in India: Anatomy of Caste and Gender – Based Exclusion’ in this paper seeks to highlight the vulnerable position of the Dalits (the former untouchables) in India in general and the Dalit women, in particular, in a fastly globalizing world. Poor People in the developing countries are likely to suffer most. In India Dalit women are likely
to be more disadvantaged than their men folk because of their caste and gender based exclusion. It is suggested that they must assert their separate identity and launch their own self-emancipation movement apart from both the women’s rights movement dominated by the caste-Hindus women and the Dalit rights movement controlled by the Dalit males.

Jain, Nisha (2010) ‘Subjection of Women in India: A Theoretical Perspective on Patriarchy’. This paper explores the nature of patriarchy in India. Marginalization and powerlessness of women is deep-rooted in India’s patriarchal society. In India, an upsurge of interests in women’s issues had started with the publication of a report ‘Towards Equality’ by the Government of India’s Committee on the status of women in 1974, followed by the observation of the International Decade for women in 1975. While women continue to face oppression, the gender sensitivity which is essential to fight and eliminate such oppression has not developed properly. The liberal democratic framework of the Indian Constitution, the whole gamut of the progressive laws, and the opening up of educational awareness have not contributed to changing the lot of women who as a group remain marginalized. There is need for systematic analysis regarding women’s situation to understand the deep-rooted ness of women’s subjectivity.

Lieten, G K, (1988) ‘Panchayat Leaders in a West Bengal District’. This study of the socio-economic background of panchayat leaders in one of the blocks in Bhirbhun district confirms that a new type of leadership has come to dominate at the lower levels in the system of political devolution in West Bengal. Poor peasants and agricultural labourers and, therefore, also the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have very much come to the fore front. On the other hand, however there is still almost complete absence of women as candidates in the panchayat elections.
Mathew George and Ramesh C Nayak, (1996) ‘Panchayat at Work: What it means for the Oppressed’? The researches have highlighted the positive signs of the first step towards the awakening of Indian villages through the Panchayat Raj. It is clear from the life situations of Dalits that a panchayat is a micro-cosm of the society of which village forms a part. The noble ideals of ‘Institutions of self-government’ as expounded by the 73rd Constitution Amendment cannot be translated into reality in the present iniquitous society. The beautiful picture of panchayat raj cannot be drawn on the canvas of stringent caste system, feudal values, gender inequality, in human poverty conditions and the wide chasm existing between rich and the deprived.

These four case studies from Madhya Pradesh drive home the gruesome fact that despite 50 years of independence, the power structure at the village level remains oppressive. Dalit men are beaten, Dalit women are stripped naked which criminals are shielded by political parties and the state maintains a studied silence.

Gopal Guru (1995), ‘Dalit Women Talk Differently’ is an attempt to locate the issues of Dalit women in the discourse of feminism and according to the author Dalit Women, as a category of people, need a different and independent perspective. Social location which determines the perception of reality is a major factor (as we shall seen the context of argument made by Dalit women) make the representation of Dalit women issues by non-Dalit women less valid and less authentic. In view of this, the issues of representing Dalit women, both at the level of theory and politics, have erupted time and again in the discourse on dalit women. Dalit women justify the case for taking differently on the basis of external factors (non-Dalit forces homogenizing the issue of Dalit women) and internal factors (the patriarchal domination within the Dalits).
The independent and autonomous organization of Dalit women has potential to counter Dalit patriarchy from within and state-sponsored globalization from without.

The foregoing review of literature has been done in order to understand how the studies which have already done in the field of the empowerment of women in general and Dalit women in particular and their implications on rural power structure. These studies have also pointed out the emerging trends of leadership among marginalized groups, hitherto which were excluded socially and culturally and the factors that are encountered by them in exercising their constitutional authority as members of PRI’s. The present study is intended to focus how the Dalit women face challenges encountered by caste, gender and patriarchy in the participation in decision making process in the PRI’s. These studies have shown that rural leadership and power structure has drastically been changing to accommodate new entrants into the decision making process particularly in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

It is quite evident from the foregoing review of literature that most of these studies have come out with contradicting findings about the involvement of these marginalized groups in decision making process. It may be due to regional variations. The present study is intended to highlight the position of Dalit women and how does it affect their assertion as members of PRI’s.

These studies have also made an attempt to understand how the new political system, reservations for women in politics due to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, has given fillip to the women and other weaker sections to gain political space. Education, caste, family background, kinship, landed property etc., factors help in the process of decision making and obviously, Dalit women, economically poor, educationally backward, socially inferior and religiously pollutant, are less effective in decision making process.
In this context, precisely, this study is an attempt to understand the factors which affect differential participation of Dalit women in decision making process in comparison with other women.

Initially caste studies have not paid their attention to the flight of Dalit women. In the later stage even the feminist writings have not focused the problems of Dalit women. It may be because of specificity of Dalit women. Social and cultural exclusion has prevented them to have access to political participation. In this background the power structure may be analyzed with the perspective of Dalit women as they are deprived of political participation, first as women and as Dalit women.

Thus, it is in the earnestness to understand the socio-economic profile of Dalit women members of Gram Panchayat and the impact of these factors on their performance and working style the present study is taken up. These studies have already been conducted, barring few exceptions; have not focused the comprehensive nature and scope of the emergence of Dalit women leadership and their assertion for new identity. The present study has made an effort to fill up this gap.

2.2 Importance of Study

The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution is a step forward to ensure and provide empowerment of women in general and Dalit women in particular, and it has given fillip to create political space for them by being the partners of the development process at grass root level. The representation of women in the institutions of local government has been facilitated through affirmative action, where one third of the seats have been reserved for women. This raises issues related to the representation of gender interests and the constraints on such representation. Attempt has been made by Sociologists and Social
Anthropologists to focus on the complexities of political representation of interests. Lack of effective participation, multiplicity of identities, and the absence of the consolidation of gender specific concerns, prevent women’s interests from being an issue in their political representation which are central to the academic interests of social scientists in India.

The Amendment has brought about the transformation in the political structure of the village communities and the role of new leadership emerged among the women, marginalized collectivities hither to excluded from the political processes, is the new area for an in depth study on the social changes in rural India.

The plural connotations of Indian society has produced variations and differential participation in the local governance based on the age, sex, caste, class, gender and the patriarchy. It is also pertinent to note how these factors influence the participation of different social categories in the decision making processes. It is also quite interesting that the socially and politically excluded collectivities respond to the changing conditions and take up the challenges to find their new identities. In this process of identification of ‘images’ independent of caste, gender and patriarchy have caused holocaust leading to tensions and conflicts. The conflict of interests from traditional-conservative values with that of democratic egalitarian values is a major thrust of enquiry.

In this connection the study of Dalit women, ‘the bottom most oppressed’, marginalized, susceptible to deprivations and subjected to multiple discriminations is quite essential as they belong always to the other world outside the domain of the protection of caste and protection from the male counter-parts within the family. This helplessness and lack of self protection has rendered them subjugation and subordination. Dalit women, as feminists put it,
need a different perspective independent of other categories women because their problems are specific to them.

The structural interventions by the way of constitutionalisation of Panchayat Raj Institutions i.e., local governance, and one third reservation for women have certainly given new lease of life to the women in general and Dalit women in particular to air their grievances as the forerunners of political forum at grass root level. It is also necessary to record the perception and outlook of the rural elites, mostly constituted by the dominant upper castes and recently emerged economically powerful intermediary castes towards the decentralization of power and the inclusion of social categories hitherto kept out of the power structure, viz., the women of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Social and cultural exclusion from the political system resulted in women and other disadvantaged sections of the population being alienated from the politics and governance. The reservation of seats in local governments has offered women new political space and opportunity to participate in politics and governance. Equality in opportunity, however, does not guarantee the effective participation of women. Non-participation of women in local governance is a consequence of many inter-related factors. Socio-cultural constraints manifested in the gender inequalities and differences among women, resulted in the construction of a non-political identity.

Lastly, the political rights that the women gained are encountered by socio-cultural and other interrelated factors resulting in their less effective participation in the decision making process. Political democracy has no meaning until and unless it is commensurate with the social and economic democracy. Mere political authority to Dalit women never translates into power in the absence of social and economic progress. In this background, the study of
the role of Dalit women in decision making process at the last tier of The Panchayat Raj Institutions is relevant to evaluate the changes in the political status of the women in Indian society.

Several studies have been conducted on the issue of democratic decentralization, quota system for women, disadvantaged sections and marginalized groups, social inclusion policy, the political empowerment, the impact of caste, gender and patriarchy on the process of constitutionalization of Panchayat Raj Institutions and their impact on rural development.

The present study helps up to understand the patterns and process of rural power structure and the emerging trends of Dalit leadership in rural India. The findings of this study, especially about the role of Dalit women in decision making process at Gram Panchayat, as partners of the development process at grass roots etc would help the policy makers and planners to evolve strategies for better empowerment of the suggested categories of people.

‘Dalit women, ‘the bottom most oppressed’, must change the future India will change. If they continue to be in chains of caste, gender and patriarchy, the country will be in bondage. For better future for India, Dalit women must strive to break the chains of bondage’.

2.3 Limitations of the Study

The present study is an attempt to understand the process of political empowerment of the women in general and Dalit women in particular who are hitherto excluded culturally, socially and politically.

The inclusive policy of the state and constitutional guarantees to redress their inbuilt social iniquitous statuses are of greater relief to them. The impact of the social inclusion is felt in the social structure as they are provided political space
to operate as the members of PRI’s in the local governance and as the agents of the development process at the grass root level.

The political reservation alone will be of no use as their participation is limited because of the presence of the complex mechanism of control and constraints which results in the lack of access to political participation. These inbuilt iniquitous statuses normally lead to the ineffective participation and the representation of women in PRI’s is only symbolic. In this background, the present study, however, is based on the field data is not free from certain limitations.

1) Since Dalit women are illiterate and ignorant of the present PRI system, though they have completed the term of their office for five years, they could not be clear as to their role as members of GP’s and as such their replies to queries pertaining to their participation were worst ones.

2) The study has made an in depth analysis of the decentralization of power and the empowerment of women and its impact on the overall rural power structure and the focus is on the emerging trends of rural leadership among Dalit women. The major limitation of the study is that it has focused on Dalit women and naturally the outcome of the study cannot be generalized and applied to all regions within the state and outside the state.

3) The research study is primarily based upon the official information obtained from the various official records and every sincere effort has been made to collect the latest information. However, in some respect the researcher found it difficult to access to recent information. The primary data is collected from questionnaire – schedules canvassed to the selected GP members and the reliability and validity of the primary data depends upon the degree of honesty with which the responses are given by those interviewed. Wherever
the responses were inconsistent, no attempt was spared to double check them and establishes velocity of the responses, before arriving at the conclusions.

4) The present study is a micro level study. The primary data have been collected from the respondents of the respective GP’s which has certain specific unique socio-economic and political features. Therefore, findings of the study may not correspond, with findings of the similar studies conducted in other regions of the state and country with different socio-economic and political features.

5) Due to the traditional value system in the rural areas, it is not easy to interview elected women representatives let alone to convince them about the purpose of the study. The male members of the EWR’s were adamant and insisted that any such interviews be held in their presence. Moreover a large number of EWR’s are ignorant about their role in the PRI’s set up. They hardly attend meeting. The male members of the house appeared to be more active in Panchayat affairs than the EWR’s. Therefore, the male members were eager and willing to provide information to the researcher.

6) In spite of the limitations listed above, it is fondly hoped that the in-depth study of PRI’s on the selected issues concerning them in the study area, would certainly throw some useful light on the nature of decentralization of power, empowerment of the women, emerging trends of rural leadership and so on.