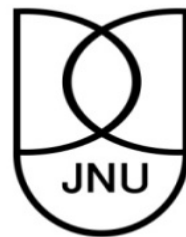


**Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A study of two
villages in Rajasthan**

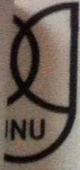
*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SWAPNIL SINGH



**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067
2017**



जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067

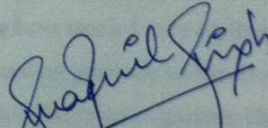
Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences

Tel: 26704408

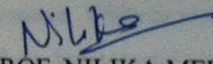
July 2017

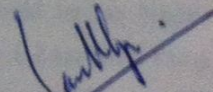
Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A study of two villages in Rajasthan**" submitted by Swapnil Singh to the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.


SWARNIL SINGH

We recommend that the thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


PROF. NILIKA MEHROTRA
CHAIRPERSON
CSSS
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067


Dr. L. LAM KHAN PIANG
Asstt. Professor
CSSS/SOS
SUPERVISOR
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is the time when I get to pen down my thoughts and identify how wonderful the journey of life has been throughout these years making me grow professionally as well as personally. Though I culminate my thesis writing and wind up to prepare myself for a professional period ahead, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize some people who played a crucial part in shaping my present being. These people from different walks of my life were not only of help in academics but also brought me together as a human being; inculcating in me various virtues required for arriving at peace and oneness within oneself.

A lot has been said and written about how parents play a role in shaping the psychology as well as future of a child. I have been lucky enough to witness my parents playing their character to bring up a girl child this way and letting her live life on her terms. A life time would not be sufficient to express my immense respect and love for them solely for the reason that they let me be me. I have never expressed loudly how much I owe to them; but today here stands a proud daughter who wants to convey her unending gratitude to her living Gods on this earth. There will be no dreams shattered if all the girls are daughters to parents like mine.

I must admit that destiny was kind to me when it gave me another set of parents in the form of my teachers who constantly challenged my limits as a researcher and made me push through the tough academic life very smoothly. I will never be able to express my admiration fully but I owe my continuous gratefulness to Prof. Anand Kumar who has been more than a mentor and a guide. The calmness on his face and constant encouragement to all students compels me to admire him more and more and if I could be half of what he is, it would be my biggest achievement. While he established a solid foundation for me to work on, Dr. L.Lam Khan Piang played an instrumental role and helped me compile my thesis in the best possible way. His constant scrutiny of my work during the writing period and immense kindness as a mentor churned my potential to come up with a work like this. Teachers like him give students a reason to love their work and polish it daily which certainly makes their survival in this competitive world easier and smoother.

I am thankful to this university for providing the research scholars with all the study material required through B.R. Ambedkar Central library. I am indebted to Institute of Social Science Library and CSSS office staff members for being supportive and helpful for the official help required throughout.

I would be literally hacked to pieces if I do not accept the fact that my friends kept my madness intact and pulled me out of storms; academic or individual with full power. They have always shown me the mirror and with each one contributing in his or her special manner, my vocabulary seems paralyzed to thank them enough.

My stay in this university would not have been memorable had it not been for the security guards who made sure we were taken care of; the canteen staff for serving us amazing yet pocket friendly food; the gardeners for making this university look lush green and beautiful; the cleaning staff for providing us all with clean premises; the office people at the university who helped us through at every level of academic formalities.

I would like to bundle up by thanking Almighty for conferring me with an amazing life and blessing me with such beautiful people who gave me lifetime memories to cultivate and keep them close to my existence. I wish to be the same human being as I have been crafted by my profession and person. Any change in it would be for the greater good of this society and my future endeavors. Life cannot be cruel when I have the strength resonating from those around me. It would be cruel of me if I do not thank “life” for conferring upon me all the great opportunities and love, helping me to overcome problems with great dignity and poise.

I must admit that I am not very expressive in my thoughts but any plan to write a book on my life in time to come would be titled as “A never ending beginning”. This title justifies that everyday learning on various fronts has taught me to never put a full stop at any moment of time and keep up with my own pace in life. Thank you so much for taking out time and reading my thesis and analyzing my thought process at every step.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction	1-51
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Directive to Mandatory: Institutionalization of PRI• Development of panchayats in Rajasthan• Women and PRIs• Statement of problem• Objectives and Research questions• Theoretical framework• Methodology• Study area• Chapterisation	
CHAPTER 2: Panchayati Raj Institutions and Democratic Decentralization in Rajasthan	57-75
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Structural Pattern of PRIs in Rajasthan• Status of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rajasthan• Local Self Governance: The Road Ahead	
CHAPTER 3: Indian Villages and Panchayats: Studies and Debates	77-122
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Studies on Indian villages• Constitutionalisation of PRIs• Rural Development and PRI: Devolution of Power and Functions• Village and PRIs in India• Initiative for Women Participation	

CHAPTER 4: Leadership and community participation in PRIs **123-156**

- Introduction
- Leadership and Empowerment
- Village Power Structure and Leadership: The Changing Pattern
- Community Participation in PRIs
- Women empowerment and representation: Experience from the field

CHAPTER 5: Women Representation and the Panchayati Raj Institutions **157-184**

- Introduction
- The Issue of Women's Representation in India
- Panchayati Raj and Empowerment of Women
- Significant Trends in Emerging Leadership
- Hindrances to the Initiatives of Women
- Women's Representation and its consequences

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion **185-202**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **203-219**

APPENDIX 1 **220**

APPENDIX 2 **221-223**

List of figures:

Figure 1.1: Map of Rajasthan

Figure 1.2: Map of Bikaner District

Figure 1.3: Map of Tonk District

Figure 4.1: Percentage of Electoral Participation (voting) in Panchayat Elections

Figure 4.2: Information about Gram Sabha meetings by Ward member

Figure 4.3: Attendance in Gram Sabha meetings

Figure 4.4: Percentage of Respondents according to the reason for not participating in Gram Sabha Meetings by Village

Figure 4.5: Percentage of Respondents according to the factors that influenced their voting behavior

Figure 4.6: Percentage of Respondents who were Aware of Gram Sabha Meetings Postponed due to Lack of Quorum by Village

Figure 4.7: Percentage of Respondents according to the awareness about Developmental programmes by village

Figure 5.1: Percentage of women MPs in various Lok Sabhas

List of tables:

Table 4.1: Profile of the two Select *Sarpanches*

Table 4.2: Demographic Profile of Nosera and Soda village

Table 4.3: Profile of Respondents

Table 4.4: Education Profile of Respondents

List of graphs:

Graph 4.1 and 4.2: Age Profile of Male and Female Respondents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Democratic decentralization refers to a delegation of authority and power at the grassroots is fundamental to the essence of democracy. Democracy would not be able to sustain itself, especially in a developing nation like India, if it is unsuccessful to build local institutions which are capable of providing democratic leadership at local levels. This study is about leadership offered at the grassroots level.

A leader is a representative of its community and has an important role to be played in decision making process. They provide encouragement and substance to political institutions and structures. Leadership influences the masses to organize for attainment of developmental goals. Therefore the role of leadership becomes even more important in a developing nation. A country like India, where 80 per cent of its population resides in the villages, depends majorly on the rural populace for accomplishment of the national plans. The growth and progress of the country directly rely upon the progress and development of its villages. Thereby, the rural leadership and the initiative in bringing about change in rural area is of great significance. Increasing political consciousness and economic and social changes have led to a profound transformation in the leadership pattern.

This study looks into the local self-government through the study of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as they have been evolving since the British Raj up to contemporary times, and its chief focus is on the significance, function, participation and contribution of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It also intends to inquire into the variance in the pattern of governance by the educated and uneducated woman *Sarpanches*, where one of them is from the 'dominant caste' while the other belongs to 'dalit' category. The study will also look at the broader view on empowerment of women that receives less attention in most of the earlier studies confining themselves to sheer presence in PRIs and stresses

on the role women play in and the subsequent changes which occur in their awareness level, attitude, knowledge and skills.

Panchayati Raj Institutions, as the institution for local government, is proclaimed as a means of economic and social changes in rural India. Successful and significant performance of these bodies of self-governance would be determined by active association, contribution and community participation of both female and male of the local communities. The institution is not new, rather it has been an important social institution at the local level or village level, which endured the changing of rulers from time to time since ancient time. Indeed, this institution has alongside attracted the interest and pushed the imagination of the distinguished observers of Indian social formation from Megasthenes in the third century B. C. to Lord Metcalfe a century ago and Sir Henry S. Maine in the mid Victorian era.

Women's leadership and efficient participation is increasingly evident on the development program of governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies, and nongovernmental organisations, as well as women's rights groups. This study demonstrates the significant role which women play as major actors and also as decision-makers in the development course across a wide array of sectors. In the political arena, specifically, there is growing impetus among governments to promote and ensure women's participation and guidance in governance structures. In India, "affirmative action" for women and underprivileged groups is enshrined into the constitution. The Constitution (73rd Amendment Act), 1992, calls for reservation of at least one-third of seats for women (both as members and also as chairpersons) within India's locally elected governing bodies generally referred to as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In 2009, the Government of India approved 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs; and subsequently states like Rajasthan and Odisha also passed similar legislations. This amendment also calls for PRIs to "prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice."

Panchayati raj is not a new notion. From the early *Vedic* period, Panchayats have been an important part of the rural conventional cultural heritage of India. The term 'panchayat' accurately means a congregation (*Ayat*) of five (*Panch*), (which are derived from Sanskrit

words *Panchen* and *Ayatanam*) judicious and respected elders preferred by the village society. The (*Sarpanches*) were considered as the manifestation of God (*Panch Parmeshwara*). The traditional form of Panchayats used to handle their local affairs all by themselves without any form of help by the state. *Sarpanches* were given powers, both judicial and executive and therefore even the King treated Panchayats with courtesy and reverence. The land distribution and the collection of taxes from the produce was also done by the village Panchayats and later on it use to pay government's due on behalf of the village members. In order to efficiently complete the works of public welfare and utility, groups of villages were constituted together as it was difficult for a single unit to complete these arduous tasks. The village Panchayats functions not only comprised the usual civic duties but all conceivable type of public affairs, commercial, industrial, religious, social, judicial, administrative and legislative. Their chief social responsibility was health, education, water supply, sanitation, and emergency measures during the time of famine, etc., along with the maintenance of public distributions. The village communities, during such times used to fulfill even such duties as internal defence and security (Majumdar and Singh, 1997: 38-45).

On 12th September 1907, the Royal Commission on Decentralization was constituted under the chairmanship of Sir H.W. Primrose. It was a 6 member committee including the Chairman and other 5 members. The committee was appointed so as to inquire into the relations which existed for administrative and financial purposes between the Government of India and the different Provincial Governments of India, and also between the authorities subordinate to them and the Provincial Governments in order to report whether, by means of decentralization or otherwise, those associations can be improved and simplified, and the organization of Government better adapted both of it to meet the requirements and encourage the welfare of the various provinces and, without improving its unity and strength, to bring about the executive power into closer association with local conditions. The Commission finally submitted its report in the year 1909 and it additionally elaborated the already mentioned principles in the Ripon Resolution. It recommended that;

“It is most desirable, alike in the interests of decentralization and in order to associate the people with the local tasks of administration that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village panchayats for the administration of local village affairs” (Malaviya, 1956).

Although the commission visualized certain difficulties in the success of such an effort, like ‘caste and religious disputes’ or the influence of the landlord with large estates which ‘may present free action by the tenant’, it agreed that these difficulties were ‘far from insurmountable’.

The Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, under the planned scheme of diarchy, which made local self-government as a ‘transferred subject’, which implied that the local self-government was to be brought under the domain of Indian ministers in the states. In order to make local self-government responsible and completely representative, reform had recommended that there should be maximum autonomy from outside control. Notwithstanding this objective of the Montague-Chelmsford scheme, the institution of Panchayats were not independent and democratic instruments of self-government at the level of the village, due to various constraints, both organizations and fiscal. Still, in most of the provinces and also in a number of native states, Acts were passed for the establishment of village panchayats. By the year 1925, 8 provinces had passed panchayati raj acts and by the year 1926, 6 native states had also passed panchayat laws.

An important phase in the progression of Panchayats in the country was the coming of Government of India Act, 1935 which upheld provincial autonomy. With traditionally elected governments, in the states, almost all state administration felt obligated to ratify legislations for additional democratization of local self-government institution, including the panchayats. Although the accepted governments in the states governed by the congress had to vacate office following the pronouncement of the World War II in 1939, but the position regarding local self-government remained unaffected till August 1947 when the country became independent.

A very significant influence over the years on government and public leaders with regard to development of rural local self-government has been of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of

the Indian nation. In his writings and statements, he drew the attention of the people and the government to the urgent need for rebuilding the 'village as self-sufficient and self-reliant entity' with the village Panchayats playing the central role in encouraging and supporting constructive and creative activities among the people. According to him, "greater the power of the Panchayats, the better for the people, as true democracy has to be worked from below by the people of every village" (Khanna, 1994:105).

M.K. Gandhi was fond of the concept of '*Gram Swarajya*' and '*Gram Vikas*' and he strongly encouraged the establishment of a village which was based on these doctrines. Gandhi had categorically defined his vision of village Panchayats as follows;

"My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus, every villager's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. The village will have a school, a public hall and its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. The govt. of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat...Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. It is only the village which can become the nurseries for rearing a new humanity in the practice of self-reliant, non-exploitative, truthful and healthy living. Gandhiji was so clear about the importance of villages that he declared "if the villages perish, India will perish too" (Gandhi, 1942: 76).

The whole idea of Panchayati Raj was developed on the Gandhian concept of *Gram Swaraj* where the village was the center for preparation and implementation of development accomplishments. The concept of Panchayati Raj, has been evolving, as such it faced various interpretations both from protagonists and antagonists. On the one hand, the emphasis was on maximum local self-sufficiency and minimization of regulation and control by the higher establishments, especially the state governments. But on the contrary, Ambedkar had different views about villages, he said in the constitutional assembly debate; "I hold that these village republics have been the

ruination of India. I am therefore surprised that those who condemn provincialism and communalism should come forward as champions of the village. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism?" (AVARD: 1962). Jawaharlal Nehru's views on the Indian village were also not different. In reply to a letter from Gandhi, Nehru was of the opinion; "I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent".

Dr. B.R Ambedkar had voiced his opinion on the Village Panchayat Bill as;

"If India has not succeeded in producing nationalism, if it has not succeeded in building up a national spirit, the chief reason for that in my opinion is the existence of the village system. It made all people saturated with local particularism, with local patriotism. It left no room for larger civic spirit. Under the ancient village panchayats, India, instead of being a country of united people, became a loose conglomeration of village communities with no common ties. I am satisfied that every self-governing institution has provisions in it which gives the depressed class's special representation in order to protect their rights" (Ambedkar, 1982:39).

In a sense, the reservations expressed by both Nehru and Ambedkar about marginalized and disadvantaged communities being able to take over the control of power were based in the social reality of Indian villages. Their basic concern was about the usefulness of creating such democratically elected and influential institutions in the villages and not creating the enabling conditions at the same time. The traditionally dominant section of the population in rural India would have throttled these institutions in their infancy. Such a fear was not without basis.

Dr. Ambedkar voiced his opinion on the status of untouchables in rural India and remarked that;

"The existing village system has the effect of making the Scheduled Castes in the village slaves of the caste Hindus...Under the village system the

Scheduled Castes are not allowed to live inside the village. They have to live on the outskirts...They have no independent means of livelihood. They own no land...They have to do forced labour, day in and day out on pain of being driven away from their quarters by the Hindu landlords. They have to live a life of degradation, dishonour and ignominy from generation to generation. It is a state of eternal perdition” (Ambedkar, 1989:39).

The other side of this argument is that if democracy grows and functions well at grassroots, it will in the long run create influential institutions, which would transform the hierarchical, unjust and discriminatory society into a modern one. After all, Gandhi had given a clarion call to; “Go to the villages that is India, therein lies the soul of India” which was showed as the way to move forward and it was precisely this hope that propelled Gandhi to promote *Gram Swaraj*.

Today the Panchayats are the agencies for the execution of developmental plans and programmes. The Panchayats’ new role in national development is made clear in the first, second, and third five year plans of India. Since its inception in 1952, the Community Development Programme (CDP) in India has been the subject of continuous debate and controversy. For those who appreciate, they refer the programme as 'silent revolution' taking place in the Indian country side, while its critics proclaim it as utter failure and also that the programme could not make any impression on rural India's problems. The political objectives of the CDP are part and parcel of those of economic planning in general. In one sense, the programme is potentially a more effective and widespread means for generating political support. It reaches out to vast number of people than most other economic development programmes.

The CDP was inaugurated on Oct.2, 1952 and 55 community projects were launched. The CDP was based on the fundamental idea to inspire the rural population to carry out self-reliantly community based strategy towards improvement of social and economic conditions of their life and surroundings. The government is anticipated to provide general direction and financial cum technical support for reinforcing the community promoted projects of activities on need basis. The new crucial administrative unit beneath the district level, known as development block, was formed in large number to

encompass most parts of the country. And at the grassroots level, Panchayats were given task for encouraging rural society based developmental activities and also for accomplishment of minor developmental scheme under these programmes. District Boards, on the other hand, were hardly given substantive role in the execution of these programmes.

Each scheme comprised of about three hundred villages, covering an area of 450-500 sq. miles, i.e. 1, 50, 000 acres with a population of about 2, 00, 000 persons. A Project area was divided into three Development Blocks of 100 villages, each with a population of about 65, 000 persons. Each block was divided into about twenty groups, each containing 5 villages. Each group of villages was being served by a *Gram Sevak*. Of the five villages, one generally became the headquarters of the *Gram Sevak*. This programme was extended to wider area (603 National Extension Service Blocks and 533 Community Development Blocks) at the end of the First Five Year Plan; covering 1, 57,000 villages and a population of 88.8 million persons was covered under it. Nearly, one out of every three villages in India was brought within the orbit of this programme.

During the first three years after the inception of CDP there was an increasing interest and even enthusiasm among the government departments and several sections of rural population regarding local planning; in coordinating and implementation of development programmes under it. But this enthusiasm was short lived and began to wither out in course of time. Often programmes began to get increasingly bureaucratized with elite domination and got excessively politicized. Corruption, malpractices, nepotism and wastage of funds began to mar its efficiency and its public image. But, it succeeded to an extent in promoting developmental psyche and developmental activity for the growing scope of progress among several sections of rural population, in an increasing number of villages.

Since independence, the government of India in conformity with constitutional goals of social justice, economic equality, liberty and fraternity, has initiated a process of planned socio-economic change. The implementation of such plans and schemes and eventually institutionalizing has resulted in industrialization, urbanization, universal education and political modernization. However, these far-reaching changes did not filter down to the

grass-root level automatically. Thus, Government of India constituted Balwant Rai Mehta Committee to study the possibilities of Panchayati Raj Institutions' involvement for better implementation of the government programmes at the grassroots level.

Directive to Mandatory: Institutionalization of PRI

The Parliament of India passed 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in April 1992 which provided constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and there was no discretion left with the State governments regarding several important issues concerning these institutions. The Article 40 of the Directive Principle states that, "take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with the powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as the units of self-government". But, it been realised that Directive principles is not enough to actually institutionalize Panchayats in India.

The institution of Panchayati Raj as indicated by the Directive Principles of the State Policy was not able to really evolve a uniform model at the States level, while some States had a two-tier system, some followed an arrangement of three tiers. Further, many of the States did not convened regular elections. Thus, the independence and fairness of the elections was seriously questionable. Moreover, there were no regular guidelines regarding the delegation of powers to such types of institutions.

For the democracy to reach the grassroots, these institutions of local self-governance were necessary. There was a vital urgency to empower the rural citizens in general and rural women in particular. In fact, the political power had always remained in the hands of few people coming from dominant section among the rural population who were economically and socially influential. This has reduced the participation of the rural population in decision-making in the issues that has affected them. Similar was the case of rural women also, whose proportion in the Parliament has till now remained between four to seven percent only even after independence. The Indian political policy makers then started to think about provisions of amendment to the Indian constitution to empower the populace in the rural areas, and especially the women, and to confer a constitutional status to the institution of Panchayati Raj, so as to have uniformity at the

level of local governance in the entire nation. The Constitutional Amendment Act was enacted in 1992 and all the State governments were then bounded by obligatory conditions to enact revised amendments as per the provisions of the constitution.

The constitution has provided for a term of five years for the elected representatives of a Gram Panchayat. The States are also empowered to allow PRIs to legislate and to levy, collect tolls and taxes. This provision will enable the Panchayats to generate financial resources at grassroots level and make expenditure in the preferred field as per locally-felt requirements. The State laws may put down the system to be followed, and also the limits of such levy and taxes. The State governments are also obligated to appoint State Finance Commission in order to review the financial arrangement of the Panchayats and make recommendations related to the allocation of net proceeds of taxes among the States and the PRIs. Another set of significant changes made in the Constitution relate to the conduct of elections to the PRIs. To ensure free and fair elections to these institutions, the Act provides for creating a State Election Commission in all the States and then the Governor appoints the State Election Commissioner. With a view to insure its independence, it is laid down that the procedure for removal of State Election Commissioner will be same as that of the Judge of a High Court.

As per Articles 243G and 243H, the Panchayati Raj Institutions are entrusted with the duty of preparing micro-strategy for economic development, beginning at the level of Panchayat. In reaction to this Bajpai has mentioned that:

“These institutions are also responsible for implementation of schemes aimed at socio-economic development and exercise powers delegated in respect of 29 developmental items as prescribed in 11th Schedule of the constitution. These items include land improvement, irrigation, animal husbandry, fisheries, education, women and child development, etc. Though reservation of seats for the SCs/STs is based on their actual proportion in the population, yet some States have also reserved seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). But there is no discretion with the States to reduce the reservation for women, which is prescribed to be not less than one-third of the total seats. The actual reservation for women in the PRIs ranges from 35 to 42 percent in various

States. As a result, people belonging to the backward and the vulnerable sections, including the women, have almost 50 per cent seats in the PRIs to themselves, which was expected to result in their actual empowerment. The PRIs have been made responsible for preparing District, Block and Panchayat level plans for ensuring economic development in their respective areas. With the power to levy several taxes at Panchayat level, these provisions of levying taxes would empower the PRIs financially and make them self-reliant. Most of the States have also taken necessary steps to enforce most of the provisions provided for in their own respective State Panchayati Raj Acts. But, there are serious problems in actual practice, even though in most of the States the PRIs are functioning as per the Constitutional provisions, yet it is seriously doubted whether the objective of empowerment of people at the grass root level has actually been achieved” (Bajpai, 1997: 245).

The empowerment of rural population was the main concern for which CDP and National Extension Service were started but unfortunately they could not bring about the desired results and hence the need for other committees came up such as; Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, Ashok Mehta Committee and G.V.K Rao Committee.

The recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta committee for the three tier structure of Panchayats has established the Gram panchayat at the village/ grassroots level, the Panchayat Samiti at the block or intermediate level, and the Zila Parishad at the district level. All these three units are organically linked, with the chairman of lower level bodies as the ex-office members of the higher levels (Report of Planning Commission, 1959). But these Panchayati Raj Institutions started collapsing due to lack of resources, lack of political support, bureaucratic corruption and domination of those sections of rural population which took advantage of all the available resources. In this way, in the development schemes, the Panchayat plays a secondary role in decision making and also in its implementation. In the process, these elements delegitimize the Panchayati Raj Institution.

The M.L. Dantwala Committee (1977) gave a concrete shape to the concept of decentralized planning which established the block level planning. The block plans were

expected to give priority to production programmes for the target groups, besides manpower planning and skill development, provision of basic minimum needs and a programme of institutional support (Edward, 1998). Also in 1977, the Janata Party government aroused to power and appointed another committee under Ashok Mehta in December 1977 to suggest a viable association of grassroots councils to mobilize the inclusive participation and active support of the masses. The Committee recommended the two-tier structure; at District and Mandal levels including a population of 15,000 to 20,000 persons. Its other suggestions were the open involvement of political parties in Panchayat elections and providing constitutional protection so as to further extend decentralization of power (Singh, 1994). The Chief Ministers Conference held in 1979 discarded the idea of two tier structure and favored the continuance of the three- tier system.

The government appointed G.V.K Rao committee in the year 1985 after the Ashok Mehta committee failed to bring about the desired results in order to review the administrative arrangements made for the rural development programmes and also for the poverty alleviation schemes. The new committee suggested that the district should be made the focal point of policy planning and also for programme implementation. It also recommended about the need of conducting regular elections to the panchayats. The 7th five-year plan suggested for strengthening of these local self-governing bodies through devolution of authority and resources to these institutions.

Further, the L.M Singhvi Committee was constituted in the year 1987 for evaluating the functioning of these local self-governing bodies and recommended reorganization of villages for organizing viable Gram Panchayats. It also strongly suggested that the greater financial resources must be made available to these PRIs. But unfortunately, the Sarkaria Committee constituted for recommendations on Centre-State association did not favor these institutions, although it did maintained that local self-governing institutions were not working proficiently due to irregular elections and the deferment and supersession of these institutions on flimsy grounds. But the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill 1989 was brought in for setting up of PRIs in every state at the grassroots/ village level, at the intermediate level and at the district level whose members must be directly elected once

in every five years. According to this Bill, it would assure the due representation in the Panchayats to such categories as the SCs /STs and women. The course and control of the elections to these Panchayats would rest on the shoulder of Election Commission. The intermediate level was not made obligatory in the states having a population of less than twenty lakhs. The Bill was passed in 1989 in the Lok Sabhabut could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha (S J & Edward, 1998).

However, later on second attempt was made in September 1990 to pass the bill in Parliament. The Bill was not even taken up for consideration. In September 1991, a fresh attempt on Panchayati Raj Bill was made by the Congress government under P.V Narsimha Rao, the then Prime Minister. It was passed in 1992 as the 73rd Amendment Act and finally came into force on 24th April 1993. It talked about reservations for SCs/STs and women.

The political decentralization up to the village level of self-governance with reservation of seats for women has been implemented, as a result number of women have been elected to the PRIs which are in fact a landmark in the history of evolution of decentralized democracy in India. But we also find that though women are politically empowered at the local village level governance, they are not equally economically empowered which makes them vulnerable even after political empowerment. Therefore, even though women are socially and politically empowered through the Panchayati Raj Institutions, they are yet to be empowered economically which will make them financially independent. The economic background and their role in economic transformation of the village people, as well as their weak standing in the economic decision-making process at the PRI level clearly reflect their economically weak and insignificant position in village societies and the grassroots political apparatus. Hence, the mission and objectives of democratic decentralization and empowerment of women through the legislative intervention by giving reservation at the village level after the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act (1992) is still to be critically evaluated.

Development of Panchayats in Rajasthan

The state of Rajasthan was inaugurated in 1948 comprising Mewar and other princely states, with its capital at Udaipur. In 1949, the states of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Bikaner, etc., were brought together to form Maha-Rajasthan with Jaipur as capital. A Chief Panchayat Officer had been appointed to work in the new setup. For lack of unified and effective Panchayat policy and legislation, the Panchayats of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner divisions spent more over administrative charges than over public utility works.

Panchayats in the state of Rajasthan are in existence since ancient times. Generally, the Panchayats then used to perform the functions of common defense from external danger, the maintenance of internal peace and security by managing all conflicts and the 'disposal and management' of land belonging to the whole community. And also used to be arbitrators in intra-village and, sometimes, inter-village level feuds as well as the main organizational forum for village level cultural functions.

The Panchayats existed in Rajasthan during the ancient period. These agencies were called *Panchkulas* (Committee of five) like village council and were semi government body, which worked under the president-ship of the *Mukhia* called *Mahant*. These *Panchkulas* were composed of village elders who were heads of various castes and religious groups of a village. This body came to be known as Panchayat in the 16th century. Besides, these, there were committees called *Goshthis* (guilds) which were a kind of corporations of professionals meant for looking after the local administration of the areas in which they furnished. According to A.S. Altekar (1927: 128) executive committees of Gram Sabha were in existence in Rajasthan during Gupta period. Under the Pratihara Dynasty during 600 A.D to 1027 A.D. there was despotic rule in western Rajasthan (Mishra, 1952:8). However, village remained autonomous units even under the Pratihara Dynasty. He says that *Gram* village was the last administrative unit having fixed sites and boundaries. The head of the *grama* was called *Gramapati* or *Gamagamika*. The *Gramapati* administered the village with the assistance of the village council composed of the village elders. The council exercised considerable jurisdiction over the village disputes.

In the early 19th century the British government concluded treaties with individual states under the Subsidiary Alliance System and it is in this context that James Tod (1829, 2-8) writes that village Panchayats existed in Rajputana during British regime. A.C Lyall, a British Chief Commissioner in Rajputana in the 1870s, in his work held that certain outward features of Rajput society bore a resemblance to feudal society, but the system had not become entirely feudal. He concludes that what Tod called Rajput feudalism was but an incomplete superstructure and Rajputana was in fact a group of "tribal suzerainties" rapidly passing into the classic feudal form, had not the British conquered India. The British had adopted an indifferent attitude towards this agency and in course of time the powers vested in them to punish defaulter were taken over by the judicial courts established by the British government. This resulted in the gradual decline of the panchayats.

Before Indian independence Rajasthan was comprised of a number of large and small princely states independent of each other, had traditional panchayats which were "hallowed by customs and traditions" as Iqbal Narain (1965, 456-466) has described them. Although their main function was to arbitrate in intra-village and sometimes inter-village disputes, they also very often served as an "organizational forum" for cultural function in the village. These Panchayats were not statutory bodies but the princely states recognised them and accepted their verdict. As such, they had a "historic-legal" profile with both "tradition and state recognition present in them". They undoubtedly had some built in limitations because of the hierarchical and feudal social order in which they operated. Still, they played a significant role in the administration of justice and management of village affairs.

Rajasthan has an important place in the history of Panchayati Raj in India. It was the first state to inaugurate Panchayati Raj after the Balwantrai Mehta Committee's recommendations. Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, inaugurated the new Panchayati Raj system on Gandhi Jayanti in 1959 and hailed it as "most revolutionary and historic step in the context of new India". Nehru had felt that democracy at the top would not be a success unless it was built from below. However, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the state after this impressive start, stagnated over long periods, testifying to the lack of

commitment to democratic principles of the political leadership which had, at various stages and in varying degrees, contributed to their decline. The leadership's failure to hold elections to the Panchayat bodies regularly and its propensity for super leading them for political reasons reduced these bodies to a mere caricature of democracy.

With the formation of Rajasthan in 1949 (United State of Greater Rajasthan), the necessity was felt to have a unified system of panchayats for the entire state. The introduction of the Community Development Programme (CDP) in the state in 1952 and the need to involve leaders also required building up local of a representative body at the village level. It was in pursuance of these objectives that the state legislative assembly passed the Rajasthan Panchayat Raj Act in 1953, which came into force in January of the following year. It provided for a gram panchayat for a village or group of villages having a population between 3,000 and 8,000. The gram panchayat was to have a Sarpanch, directly elected from the Panchayat area, and five to twenty ward Panches elected from the wards. The number of wards was to be determined by the collector of the district or any other gazetted officer authorized by him. Initially, the term of the gram panchayat was five years with the state government empowered to extend it by another year. There were 2,943 panchayats functioning in the state when the Act of 1953 came into force.

In 1959, following the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee's report, the state government decided to establish a three tier Panchayati Raj system with Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad added to the Gram Panchayats at the village level. For this purpose, the state legislature enacted in 1959 the Rajasthan Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act. This act empowered the state government to abolish the then existing district boards and establish Zila Parishads at district level besides Panchayat Samitis at the block level.

Under the act of 1959 the Panchayat Samiti was to be the key institution to it. The Zila Parishad was only a supervisory body with no executive function. It was expected to coordinate the activities of the Panchayat Samiti and to play an advisory role. The other function of the Zila Parishad was to advise the state government on all matters concerning the activities of the panchayats and the Panchayat Samitis, those relating to implementation especially within the district of the various schemes under the five year plan. India's National Development Council was a bold experiment in democratic

decentralization whose adoption was expected to affect the entire system of local self-government in India. The scheme was launched on Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary in 1959 when two states, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, legislatively enacted the recommendation of the report. While other states later adopted various alternative schemes for democratic decentralization, only Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh closely followed the framework recommended by the report.

Therefore, the study of Panchayati Raj Institutions as they are functioning today in the state of Rajasthan becomes prime importance. The reservations given to the women through the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 has no doubt helped in bringing a certain level of consciousness and awareness among the rural women, but it has not completely transformed their lives. The deeply embedded social structures of caste and patriarchy still play an important role in the societies. Therefore, with this background, the study was done to compare the women leadership coming from different castes; 'dominant caste' and 'dalit'. Women is not a homogenous category, rather it is further stratified on the basis of caste, class, religion and region. The problem at hand is the real implementation of welfare schemes and to encourage the percolation of reservation benefits to the targeted rural population for the empowerment of the masses.

Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions

Women's participation in political arena was not at all a new phenomenon, as the Indian independence struggle had already seen their contribution as equal stakeholder of the society. The political position of women hinges on the amount of freedom and equality they are sharing. The recognition and acknowledgement of women's right of political and social equality in the framework of the constitution of India was a retreat, not only from the conventional notions about the position of women citizens but also from existing views of women's rights greatly dominant in the developed and advanced nations. The two major imperatives which performed as the catalysts in achieving the political equality of women were predominantly the National Movement as well as the leadership offered by Mahatma Gandhi. The women citizens of India have been deprived of their legitimate share in decision making organizations, although there are obviously some very

noticeable exceptions. Being segregated within the four walls of their households for centuries, women barely come out to participate in the public activities.

However, with the advent of women's suffrage, all women activists have been hugely concerned in increasing the active participation of women in leadership coming from all kinds of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and other dimensions of political life. Women all over the world, can now, vote in almost equal proportion of men, but at the same time they do not represent in equal proportion in political office. It was during the United Nations Decade of Women (year 1975), when numerous recommendations were drafted to rectify this gender imbalance. In the Report of the World Conference of the U.N Decade for Women, which was held in Nairobi in 1985, several resolutions were passed focusing on the need for all political parties to nominate women members to various important political offices.

Women, constituting half of the population are being relegated to subordination all over and one of those marginalized areas for them is electoral politics. The situation of women in Indian society cannot be understood simply, so, in order to comprehend the nature of constraints and disabilities that impact women in the fulfillment of their various roles in the society, the polity and the economy, it is important to view, not as a single homogeneous group, but must be seen as members from different groups of population according to the differences in their class, caste and community status.

In the Indian constitution, social revolution has been contemplated as an instrument of social change brought about through the legitimate use of law. One of the critical and specific objectives was the attainment of gender equality which is quite implicit in the Preamble to the constitution, Directive Principles of the state policy and Fundamental Rights. In order to make assessment of these constitutional provisions, one has to take into account the legal and administrative steps taken there. The status of women in our country is substantially determined by omnipresent traditional norms of caste and community.

After the attainment of independence followed by the formation of republic in 1950s, it had brought to women the equality of opportunity in the sphere of adult franchise.

Furthermore, national development would be more effective if each and every citizen irrespective of their gender, participate actively in all the activities.

The Committee vis-a-vis the Status of Women was also appointed by the Indian government in 1971 to appraise the changes that had happened in the status of women as a consequence of constitutional, legal and administrative measures taken up since independence. It was also to evaluate the impact of the many complex processes of social change on different sections of Indian women, especially rural women.

The Panchayati Raj had been entirely revived through the 73rd Amendment which was basically an exercise in democratic decentralization despite lopsided development in functioning and organising of Panchayats in India. This move has apparently strengthening democracy by bringing to the fore democratically elected government structures of village to intermediate and district levels through the electoral mandate in our constitution, at the same time, the elected legislatures are just at the national and state levels in the framework of the Indian Constitution. It has also included 2.38 million democratically elected representatives to 2,46,690 Panchayats. These incorporated 1.26 million women, which amounted to 44.52 percent of the total number of elected representatives. Rajiv Gandhi in his speech on 15th May 1989 while explaining the rationale for the mandate in keeping Panchayats within the constitution also pointed out the rationale for “securing reservations for women so as to fully involve them in the management of community affairs”.

Soon after the amendment and with the first time Panchayat elections were held, women were given legal and constitutional entry in the newly amended panchayats which led to umpteen numbers of analysis, studies and comments. Undoubtedly with such developments, the women’s entry in the politics and the political institutions could not be disregarded on the one hand but on the other hand, it was grappled with scepticism and misgivings about any major impact in the real sense at the ground level. The rule and control of the male family members was always a very serious issue for trying to function and work on their behalf as proxies. There were widespread misconceptions about women’s passivity and disenchantment in politics. The wrong perception that only well to do women with prior political family background will enter and contest in these bodies

and that, therefore, they would be only 'namesake' and rubberstamp members and proxies at the hand of their male kin to a very large extent hogged headlines in media and as well as in quick micro studies in various parts of India. But, with the onset of women's entry and their socio-economic contour confronted these stereotypes and prejudices. After making changes at the grassroots level politics for women, by enabling to ease access, the next task of paramount importance was ensuring the participation of women in electoral politics as contestants in elections and presiding over crucial decision making positions in the state and central legislative bodies. There is a slow and steady but immense increase of women's active participation in mainstream politics worldwide.

The provisions and framework laid down in the constitution of India vis-à-vis all women guarantees for them the fundamental right to equal representation in politics of India. The constitutional framework recognizes and talks about the political entitlements of women without any kind of discrimination, distinction and qualification to understand the critical decision making processes at all levels. The important aspects of Indian democratic political system is the active participation of electorate irrespective of any kind of discrimination based on gender, caste, class, religion. Looking meticulously at women's enthusiastic and committed participation in electoral system over the last four decades , it substantiates the hopes which were shown in Indian constitution by the founding fathers. The situation of Indian women's participation in electorate system is comparatively higher than in many other countries in the world. At the same time, this participation has been by and large constantly expanding over the years. Lastly, the gulf between men and women turnout at the time of election to cast their votes is drastically getting narrowed down over the past several years. Amidst all these discourse and debate it is also pertinent to underline that the number of women getting elected to representative bodies has been growing steadily since independence. Notwithstanding the turnout, growth trajectory at polling booth to cast their votes in elections, it is ironical that the number of women candidates contesting in the elections is alarming and is still abysmally low to the great extent in the overall candidates tally. Although women have reservations in Panchayats but still they do not show so much enthusiasm in fighting to take part in elections as contestant. The reason for such reluctance is orthodox and traditionally deep rooted patriarchal mindset of the society.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 initiated a new epoch in the history women in India and it has been watershed moment in so far as the rights of women are concerned in electoral democracy of India. Indian women were fortunate enough that they were not deprived of their fundamental rights of getting their franchise just after India became independent. However, this constitutionally granted fundamental right of casting votes did bring about desired results above their existing status quo of the Indian women in the society to a great extent. But with the coming of Panchayati Raj Act into existence, it gave them an opportunity to wield more power, when the Act came into effect on April 24th 1993, which has a progressive and forward looking provision for not less than 1/3rd of the elected members being women and not less than 1/3rd being chairpersons. This indicates that almost 20 lakhs women would be fighting elections, out of which 8 lakhs women would be elected for members and 80,000 would be designated as chairpersons. Women, particularly rural women because of all this could easily have their say and representation in decision making which has been so far remained a far cry for women. The power enshrined in the Act has provided them with constitutional rights to deliberate upon serious issues, thereby, debate and decide crucial policy matters which largely concern the day to day life of the general masses.

With the advent of this Act, women could assertively stake their just claim in the process of policy making and execution of programmes and funds allotment meant for the development of the rural India. At the same time, laws can be made and amended for development programmes.

The 73rd Amendment of the Indian constitution provided a whole host of opportunities to women to empower them in the direction of realising their significance, thereby making them independent and self-reliance. One of the significant features of this Act was that it acknowledged that although women had got access to politics long back, but real power was still elusive for them. The 73rd Amendment predominantly tries to plug in this loophole and in a sense challenge the erroneous women's status quo and thereby to ensure that women not only have access to politics and participate in politics, but they are on crucial positions to wield power.

Statement of Problem

A new facet of women in politics has been witnessed in recent years throughout the world. Women have now been increasingly coming into politics. Progressive welfare policies had been forged and reinforced women's old customary, long established position as merely wives and mothers. By challenging erroneous assumptions vis-à-vis roles of women traditionally determined and fixed by the patriarchal, male-dominated mindset of the society for several decades. Women have strived over issues impacting them, especially their rights to vote and property in the 19th century and to equal pay, nursery provision and abortion in the 20th century. Traditionally, women were nowhere in decision making political bodies for instance PRIs in India as the politics has always been essentially neglected and marginalized in the political domain. While reform movement pre and post independence in India has enormously helped women to wield some clout in politics as well. An unprecedented political breakthrough has happened post independence in terms of seats reservation for them in panchayats and other public bodies. Despite the fact that there has been tectonic shift with the intervention by policy makers through legislation, which provides affirmative action such as giving 33% reservation to women in Parliament that has emboldened few state assemblies to go beyond 33% and now they are giving even 50% reservation to them. But the fact of the matter is that the male dominance is prevalent in the society which can be witnessed quite often in the way, how positions reserved for women are being held and controlled by male members of their families. Many of the female Sarpanches are merely reduced to 'titular' head. In the Indian backdrop, the caste also plays a major factor, where the plight of a dalit woman who is triply oppressed in this patriarchal society is in vulnerable situation.

Women came up as a prominent interest group in the 19th century essentially because of the 17th and 18th century bourgeoisie democratic revolutions which had completely excluded women from its concept of equality in the West. From then on women were grappled with patriarchal mindset in the society for recognition of their rightful entitlements as a human being and for multilateral roles which they executed in the society i.e. as a wife, mother, house-wife, daughter and service provider for families in

the society. Notwithstanding the women's contribution to the society, development is undoubtedly equal to that of men, even then they experience slew of limitations that constraint them from comprehending their real potential for growth. It was against this backdrop that the governments, globally, realised the need to underline and prioritize their interests and at the same time, equally concern for the growth of women, thereby encouraging their participation at every stage of the development process. UN has categorically stated that 'Gender Equality and Women Empowerment' as one of the Millennium Development Goals which was to be accomplished by the year 2015. The definition of women's empowerment implies the potentiality of the women to take on her own all the important decisions without buckling under the pressure of opposite gender members of her family and society, throughout her lifespan that, in turn, will unambiguously ensure her success in all spheres of life.

Women throughout the world at each and every socio-political level are widely underrepresented in Parliament and wrongly far sidelined from higher decision making bodies. The factors that throttle or espouse women's active political involvement vary too much with level of socio-economic development, culture, geographical location, and the type of political system existing in that particular country. Women themselves are heterogonous group; there are colossal amount of differences between them based on race, caste, class, creed, cultural background, education and ethnicity. The elimination of women from decision making bodies sabotage the possibilities for inculcating the principles of democracy in a society, it rather hampers economic development and discourage the achievement of gender equality.

As stated in the Millennium Development Goals, equal participation of women with men in decision making and power sharing is an integral part of their fundamental rights to undertake in political life, and greater equality and women's empowerment at its core. Women have to actively participate in determining their developmental agendas. Women who desire to enter political arena quite often find that the political, social and cultural environments is mostly not congenial, unfriendly or even indifferent to them. Even a quick look at the present composition, in any region, of political decision makers provide

precarious evidence about current situation of women who still face criticism and obstacles in articulating, shaping and expressing their own interests.

There are several menaces such as patriarchy, illiteracy, poverty, cultural and religious practices which are unequivocally reinforcing the marginalisation of women worldwide. The 73rd Amendment Act is the affirmative action which provides 33 percent reservation to women in PRIs to safeguard women's representation in politics. This is an important much needed welcome step in democratizing local governance. Rajasthan state has shown keen interest in it, thereby amending the Act further and increased reservation for women in Panchayats to 50 percent. However, it does not necessarily guarantee large and effective participation or ensure that significant issues and critical misgivings pertaining to women and community will be resolved without conscious efforts by local governance structures. Therefore, it is imperative to have gender equality in political power sharing and this can be done by transferring power to women citizens so that it can lead to transformation of gender relation whereby women condition and potential can be recognized and social justice can be achieved. There is a dearth of access to quality education and training systems to impart leadership skills to women, and for orienting young women's mind to consider their career in mainstream politics. The political parties have tepid response to field women candidates to contest elections owing to many reasons, for instance, limited access to political networks, lesser financial support for women candidates, and more stern standards and qualifications applied for women.

Panchayati Raj Institutions in India adapted to promote effective local self government in the areas other than the scheduled and tribal areas. This is an institution which promotes democratic decentralization institutions by providing ample opportunities to the rural people and especially women to participate in development, democratic decision making process and grass roots governance. The rural population is also motivated to develop a spirit of self-reliance by obtaining the experience in the art of local self-governance. After independence, almost all states started working in this direction but slowly after 1969 this enthusiasm was weakened. In 1992, after the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, they once again came under discussion both from academia and other

interested groups as PRI were entrusted with the task of rural development and social transformation.

India is a nation of villages where 70 percent of the population resides in villages. The interesting feature is that every area of the country though connected with the cities now; however, still possesses its own peculiar traditional ethos. Also most of the rural communities are still devoid of basic facilities like educational infrastructure, electricity, proper drinking water, health care, ample transportation, etc. The present study will look into the changes brought about by female sarpanches in their respective villages in the context of PRIs. The issue of women empowerment through PRI leadership will be the main focus point which has to be looked into through this study. Therefore, the obvious questions which arises out of the above mentioned problems are what are the problems of rural women and the particular differences of having an literate/ educated (dominant caste) leader as a Sarpanch over an illiterate/ uneducated (dalit) Sarpanch in a village? And to gauge the level of participation of women in Gram Sabha?

Objectives

- To trace the evolution of Panchayati Raj institution in India (before and after independence).
- To understand the structure of the village Panchayat and various intellectual interrogations on its position in the Panchayati Raj setup.
- To see the difference between an educated and uneducated women leadership of a panchayat.
- To analyse the changing role of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India since independence.

Research Questions

- How the historical development of Panchayati Raj in India did take place?
- What were the various intellectual interrogations and debates on Indian villages?
- What are the specific differences of having an educated (dominant caste) female leader as a Sarpanch over an uneducated (dalit) female Sarpanch in a village?
- What is the level of participation of women in Gram Sabha?

Theoretical Framework

Leadership, the focus of this study, emanates from among the citizens who are well aware of their rights and duties and also with the nuances of polity of the nation. India being a democracy provides ample safeguards and also delegates power to its citizens in the form of decentralized government, through devolution of powers for the effective implementation of local self-governance. The public and private sphere becomes one while entering the political arena. This study deals with pattern of leadership provided by woman *Sarpanch* in the PRI. So, it is imperative to contextualise the concept of gender.

Gender is a status designation derived from the male and female physiological aspects to allow individuals to function within a social context. It is not determined biologically but is constructed socially. Gender is a central organising principle in society, i.e. in social, economic and political sphere. Gender is not about women but about relation between men and women. It is an approach that focuses on women and men and not on women in isolation. There are four main gender theories; functional theory, conflict theory, symbolic interactionist theory and feminist theory. My study will be adopting feminist theory which analyses the status of women and men in society with reference to access to resources, position and privileges. It questions the subordinate/inferior position attributed to women on basis of their ideology. It critically examines the intersections of multiple forms of stratification. Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical and philosophical discourse to understand nature of gender inequality. It was introduced by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1848. It supports the argument of men and women being equal economically, socially and politically. This theory also emphasizes on acceptance of the fact that gender and gender relations are fundamental to all social life, including the lives of men and women.

Feminist theory has several purposes; one of which is to comprehend the power differential between male and female citizens and also to understand women's subjugation, how it evolved, how it transforms over time, how it is associated with other types of oppression and how to conquer that oppression. There are basically five strands of feminist theories; cultural feminist theory, liberal feminist theory, Marxist feminist theory, Socialist feminist theory and Radical feminist theory. This study will be using

Socialist feminist theory. Socialist feminism arose in the latter half of 1960's. It grew out of the similar consciousness-raising groups which produced different forms of feminism. Socialist feminists also attempted to produce a creative combination of debates rampant in the feminist community in 1970's about the causes of the oppression and subjugation of women. At the bottom of socialist feminist deliberation is the understanding that not only just one system of subjugation is at the core of women's subordination; rather, a combination of systems interrelated to race, class, gender, nation and sexuality. From this perspective, dealing with just one of these without also and simultaneously dealing with the others, will not lead to liberation. As a result, socialist feminist focuses on a varied range of oppressions, not only the sex/gender system.

Feminist politics is concerned itself about understanding the ways and methods in which differential citizenship simply reproduces itself, so that it can no longer silence or marginalize women and safeguarding against abstraction, it involves not only reconstructing of the public private distinction. So that it can roll back its 'recurring power', but at the same time, take into consideration the differences that prevail among women on the basis of caste, class, religion, etc., which ascertain their definitive experiences of citizenship. It is always by understanding these major differences that the particularity of women's experiences can effectively come together in bigger political alliances, that are certainly not divided along the lines of political differences, nor forged based on their personal or political ideology, but rather on the basis of struggles that make them came together through action and involvement with precise and shared experiences of coercion, despotism, oppression and brutality. The alliance between feminism and politics of difference is specifically highlighted in Iris Young's 'differentiated citizenship' definition that would categorically take into account the differences of race, sex, sexuality, language, class or religion in order to ensure that all groups are comprehensively included and Nancy Fraser's study of tensions between these battles for recognition that are very tightly linked with identity politics and these conflicts of redistribution that came to the fore in the backdrop of traditional socialist politics. In both situations, feminism gives the tools with which one can easily deconstruct exclusionary notions of class defined preoccupations of previous struggles for social equality and social justice. It also gives the insights that explain the importance of

specific identities, but at the same time, questioning the solidity of these very identities. The problems that have been dealt with, are not merely identifying the notion of ‘women politics’ or on politics centering around the issues related to women, rather than as Phillips clearly points out, it holds out the assurance of transforming the ways and methods in which we feel about any type of politics at all (Phillips, 1998:16).

While transformative politics is essential to the feminist work, it does not effortlessly assume a unity of all women in a picture of unified feminist politics. Feminist such as Judith Butler has correctly argued that as a feminist politics or for that matter as a subject of politics, ‘women’ does not or may never exist. He argues that the ‘unity’ of women is neither desired nor pre-supposed, Butler says that it would be wrong to make an erroneous assumption in advance that a category of women is there that simply needs to fill in with many different components of class, age, sexuality, race and ethnicity, so that they become complete. Problematising the term ‘identity’ which is entirely premised in unity, fixidity and then its alliance with feminist politics, Butler mentions that identity is not unambiguous and might not be treated somewhat as a normative goal. Similarly, feminist politics also may not be viewed as something which is stemming necessarily from some sort of ‘unified, stable and decided upon identity’ and with this mandatory on expected lines of unified identity, feminist actions and works may “well get a shift beginning and seem much more like minded to a large number of women” (Butler, 1998:288).

The difficulties and problems in articulating women like a unified category, across the spectrum and cutting across the public-private and difference-equality divide and more importantly women’s interest become noticeable or certain where issues of representation of women in politics are concerned. But, as Butler points out herself, the purpose of the political task is certainly not to refute politics of representation-as if we could (Butler, 1998:277).

At the same time feminism comes out with a much needed counterbalance to the resulting and ongoing cynicism of apathy for politics, enabling and provoking us to think much more critically about the enormity of the exclusions even till date practised under the disguise of apparent inclusiveness, and also enables all of us for serious thought

provoking and to think more imaginatively and comprehensively about the many potential ways in which current politics can be positively transformed (Phillips, 1998: 20).

The effective and proper representation of all groups in general, women in particular and the subject and need of their inclusion-as both voters and representatives- has been central to both in theories and practice of democracy. The moot question here is 'fair representation' in particular which has been quite contentious issue, when looked at it in terms of equality or proportional representation in the matter of numbers or quota. The demand for equality of both men and women in politics had been based on biological differences among them, on the other hand, quota system which has been there due to significant rationale of women's historically marginalization in politics which has its effects on the political system (Siim, 2000:69; Hust; 2004: 23).

There is demonstration of supersedence of politics of ideas by politics of presence, in which certain influential part in feminist theory have underlined the imperativeness of women's presence in the area of public and political decision making bodies and positions in a 'critical mass'. While the whole notion of critical mass endorses that the presence of women in the role of 'critical mass' somehow would initiate a process that would engender and trigger politics, the explicit difference between presence in the role of a 'critical mass' and also 'critical action' was focused by others underlining the requirement of going beyond numbers in the realm of the transformative actions (Dahlerup, 2001:108).

Colossal amount of concerns about how to enable women's equal and smooth access to political process, and by offering technical help for the much needed reform in the electoral system and effective management of the whole election process, have emphasized on gender equality pertaining to: (i) blueprint of the electoral systems: study of the implications related to the representation of the women of various options in electoral systems (such as the number of seats, whether proportional representation is adopted, the size of electoral districts, etc.); (ii) registration of voter: provide supporting approaches to registration and proper training of officials to make sure that get on the list vis-à-vis men on an equal basis; (iii) easy access to the polls; promoting steps that bring

down risks to voting and thereby could increase women's participation; (iv) education of voter: ensuring that education reaches each and every women and men as well, and promotes respect and awareness in the community for women's just and equal rights to participation (Schalwyk and Woroniuk, 1998).

While questions about women representation in elected bodies, their direct and visibility in the political decision making have been drastically increased for a long time now, there have been questions in respect to the available options in electoral design and as well as their relative usefulness and success in assuming sufficient representation of women have started to be questioned in relatively recent times only. Various types of electoral designs and electoral and political processes have been subsequently emerged so that a system can be crafted which provides adequate women representation, facilitating and enabling their emergence in a role of critical mass. Among all these, the 'quota' some and also reservation of women seats in elected bodies, ensuring 'guaranteed outcome' instead of providing an equal opportunity or level playing field in terms of gender equality system for all political parties, has become one of the most contentious issue.

Historically and theoretically speaking, two different types of tracks have been taken into account for increasing and consolidating representation of women in elected bodies, viz., fast track as well as the incremental track. These two tracks are distinguished with two striking discourses. The incremental track pinpoints the existence social prejudices and biasness and the fact that women lack some political resources in comparison to their male counterparts. According to a linear view of development, it is believed that as the society progresses as well as with the increase in the resources of the society and also people's access to these resources, gradually and steadily, representation of women in decision making bodies and other public bodies will surely increase. The fast track strongly rejects gradualism and also the assumption that with the increase in resources might result into equal representation. It looks at discrimination and exclusion as the central problem and strongly believes that equality will apparently not come by itself rather it will have to be pushed.

The Indian situation stands poor in this context. The smaller and disproportionate representation of women in the lower house (Lok Sabha) is also replicated in the

legislative assemblies of the states. The total number of women legislators are low and in single digit in almost every state. Moreover, only 10 percent of the whole chunk of candidates nominated by the mainstream political parties is women and it is the same scenario across the ideology and party line in the country. Election data reflects that the success ratio of men and women contestants do not differ in a substantial way, while political parties have always seemingly doubted their winning ability to a large extent in justifying this disparity in distributing tickets more to male and lesser to female candidates countrywide across party line. As a result, this means that those who ever votes are not apprehensive of female candidates (Deshpande, 2004: 5433). The representation of Muslim women in particular has been remained abysmally low, while women in all communities are in general under-represented. The caste-class composition of female members of Parliament, moreover, reflect that class is one of the most prominent factor in the successful induction of women in decision making positions and for that matter in the political system of the country.

The matter in question is precisely of relation between power and political participation which has also been dealt with as a process coming out from 'citizenship', which is a social position that necessitates equality of access to sundry rights and powers in the current modern political system. Historically, the citizenship was limited to just small proportion of people from elite class, and to a large extent social development in states of Europe has comprised of the acceptance to citizenship of the newly developed strata of industrial society. As stated by T.H Marshall, the citizenship concept has mainly three entwined significant components- civil, social and political. At the time of the emergence of the bourgeoisie during 18th century the civil aspects of citizenship had been arisen and involve a specific set of individual rights, freedom of speech, liberty, right to own property and the equality before the law. Political rights refer to the reach to the process of decision making bodies through universal suffrage which came up in the 19th century and clearly suggest in part the fair and strong demands of the working class and also by women for the citizenship. And social rights- the welfare, education and security have become the key components in the citizenship definition in the 20th century. The theory of citizenship given by T.H Marshall discusses about how the citizenship is primarily a way of ensuring that each and everyone is treated and respected as an equal and full

member of the society and obviously the way to ensure this kind of membership is through giving a large number of citizenship rights for instance- civil, social and political rights. All these rights; social, political and civil, possible to guarantee in a democratic setup, that also involves the concept of decentralization. From a political vantage point, to have and promote good governance greater pluralism, transparency, accountability, citizen participation and development; decentralization is considered as a heart of a vibrant, functional democracy.

Administratively, decentralization is an indispensable process that permits decongestion of the central government as a consequence, it reduces the duties and responsibilities to manageable proportions. Traditionally, casting votes in elections alone used to be considered as the means of exercising their citizenship rights and ensuring citizen participation and accountability as well. Elected representatives used to take crucial decisions behind closed doors. This has been found sketchy and perfunctory at such a time when there is extensive recognition that local elections which are quite infrequent, need to be replaced by avenues for direct citizen involvement in decision-making, and this definitely can help in forging accountability. The presence of an efficacious mechanism of downward accountability must have as a precondition for the existence of functional and vibrant civil society.

There are multifarious meanings of grassroots, while organizations have their own interpretation of this term. Despite this, the term 'grassroots' widely used in women's studies implies 'women out there'. It includes these extremely marginalized and abject poor women who are struggling for their fundamental rights and gender equality in the society. Therefore, it makes the obvious distinction between elite and grassroots, rural and urban, poor and rich. Some CSOs, NGOs relate this term directly to decentralization of absolute power in institutions that constitute women in decision making processes. By challenging second wave of feminism in the 1990s, feminists of the third wave raised their voices for oppressed, marginalized and underprivileged women and for other identities as well. It is quite akin to grassroots citizenship, that being so, the third wave of feminism was more gender oriented than both the first and second wave of feminism.

Hence, grassroots citizenship in this context means the sections of the citizens at the local level in which women and all other marginalized and oppressed identities. Both gender equality and gender equity ought to be addressed with this grassroots citizenship. “Think globally and act locally” is, therefore, a well-known slogan worldwide in the feminist movement. This means transformations would not happen merely by thinking globally but at the same time needs to be translated in real, practical work at the grassroots level as well. Thus, those marginalized female citizens who live in far flung areas, and are oblivion about their citizenship rights owing to their lack of awareness which in the context of the citizenship can be recognised. Females were often neglected and kept on the periphery because of religious faith and different social and institutional beliefs.

One of the most pivotal purposes of 73rd Amendment Act was the democratic decentralization which was aimed at penetration of democracy to the grassroots level. The literature draws a distinction between three major types: deconcentration, devolution and delegation (Rondinelli 1999:2; Parker 1995:19ff). The deconcentration is the process in which the government at the centre disperses duties and responsibilities of certain services to its branch offices at the regional level without diluting any kind of authority to the government at the lower level (Litvack et al. 1998:4). This is often said to be the weakest type of decentralization (Rondinelli 1999:2). Delegation speaks about a situation where the central government shifts responsibility of decision making and also administration of public functions to governments at local level or to semi-autonomous organizations, that are not completely controlled by the government at the centre but are eventually accountable for it, while devolution takes place when the central government shifts its authority for the decision making, fund allocation and management to quasi autonomous units of local government. Devolution generally shifts responsibilities for services to municipalities which elect its own councils, mayors, raise revenues and investment decisions are taken by their own independent authority (Litvack et al. 1998:5-6). This type of decentralization resonates more with democracy, empowerment and popular participation.

The term ‘democratic decentralization’ focuses the link between the state and the masses, and as a result between participation and decentralization. It makes reference to the shift

of resources and powers representative of, and accountable to populace, and can be called as an institutionalized type of participatory development (Vedeld, 2003:160). Decentralization and participation, that is why, have a symbiotic relationship. Additionally, on one hand, success of decentralization primarily needs some amount of local participation to make sure the responsiveness of the local government to local requirements. Furthermore, the decentralization process can itself increase manifold the opportunities of participatory by placing and enhancing more power and recourses at the local level government which is mere close to the people and thereby influenced more easily. Therefore, participation is viewed both as a means and desired goal for successful, functional, democratic decentralization (Livtack and Seddon 1999:17).

In a nutshell, on the one hand, the likely advantages of decentralization can be as follows. First of all, it is considered that as political representatives came closer to citizens such proximity between masses and leader will apparently enable more efficient allocation of resources and a better mobilization at the local level. Secondly, decentralization may usher in much more innovative, responsive, and creative programmes by providing elbow room for local experimentation. Thirdly, it may present better opportunities for local citizens to participate in the decision making process (Rondinelli 1999:4-5; Litvack et al. 1998:5, 22; Frerks and Otto 1996:17; Azfar et al. 2001:6).

On the other hand, potential disadvantages include, first and foremost, that administrative responsibilities may be shifted to local levels without sufficient financial resources, making the adequate provisions or equitable distribution of services very difficult. This is somehow related to oversight by the central government. While the natural level government is responsible about setting basic standards and developing policy, the way in which it exercises its monitoring role can either sabotage or foster the effectiveness of sub-national governments. Furthermore, ironically, people whose political commitment and efforts are quite necessary to bring about these much needed administrative reforms often look at such distribution of power and manifold increase in participation as a serious political threat to themselves (Frerks and Otto 1996:19-21). Second, weak technical and administrative skills at local levels, consequently services may be delivered less effectively and efficiently than before. Thirdly, decentralization may again allow

benefits and functions to be taken over by local elites rather than increase in accountability at the local level (for instance, leading to corruption) and finally, perhaps most importantly, whatsoever the evidence indicated so far does not altogether convincingly establish any kind of link between poverty reduction and democratic decentralization (Sylvia Bergh, 2004: 780-790).

The decentralization process is a device of state reform consisted by a number of public policies which shift responsibilities, authority or resources from higher level to lower levels of government in the backdrop of a particular type of the state, vis-à-vis previous definitions, this one imposes four critical restrictions; first, decentralization is regarded as a process for reforms of public policy and not as any kind of description of the state and its politics or fiscal systems at any point in time. Second, government at the lower levels is the recipients of the shifted responsibilities, authority or resources. Reforms such as deregulation or privatization, which mainly target non-state actors, are not in the ambit of this definition (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983, 24:25). Third, as decentralization is all about state reform, a transition to a distinct type of state primarily implies the inception of a completely new decentralization sequence. All contents of decentralization policies and its interplay with the larger economic and political systems are heavily determined by which type of state they focus on the reform. Therefore, while comparing decentralization policies across countries partially as analytically equivalent process and the comparison of policies taking place must be within the similar type of state.

Decentralization concept is widely discussed vis-à-vis large range of closely related subjects such as public sector reform, political reform, democracy, participation, rural development, empowerment, fiscal and economic development, capacity building, and accountability. The democratic decentralization is the main focus of the present study. Discourse of decentralization is “fluid and flexible discourse that can be utilized by different ideological interests” (Mohan and Stokkes, 2000:250). While the discourse about decentralization evolved throughout the world in terms of reform of public administration and for making governance and development participatory thereby, bringing it close to the people. Gandhi’s endorsement of a decentralized order gave more legitimacy for such progressive initiatives in India. Decentralization is envisaged to bring

the whole process of decision making more close to the general masses. This way it definitely contributes to the deepening and strengthening of democracy (Gaventa, 2006). Decentralization reforms can provide the fresh impetus in order to develop the civil society and the expansion of the idea of citizenship. This will as a result, lead to the deepening and strengthening of democracy at both lower and local levels, empowerment of local leaders and particularly mobilization of the previously excluded classes. Samoff (1990: 519) explains us that for making sense of the different types of decentralization and their outcomes in particular contexts it is imperative to comprehend it as “a political initiative, as a fundamentally political process, and consequently as a site for political struggle”.

For a long period of time, the classification of Rondinelli and Nellis (1986; 6:10) who pointed out four major decentralization types, have ruled. They are namely deconcentration, delegation, privatization and devolution. Deconcentration amounted to a kind of administrative transfer of central offices to the regional levels. Delegation is “the transfer of managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions to organisations outside the regular bureaucratic structure”, oversight by the control authority remains intact. It is a temporary kind of arrangement and the central (specifically in Indian context, it is state) governments usually do not meddle with the functioning of all these organizations, consequently giving them some autonomy.

The devolution of power explicitly implies the elected local government formation with all the required statutory mandate and autonomy to function without having any undue control by the authority at the centre. Privatization does not imply inter-governmental shift means the handling to private and voluntary organizations over some of the governmental factors. Collins and Green (1994) had some apprehensions about the inclusion of privatization. According to them decentralization efficiently transfers functions, finances and powers to the regions and not only transfer of the public sectors to private sectors as usually happens in privatization. The present appeal of decentralization has been profoundly rooted in its possible benefits instead of any sentimentality. The benefits include: political equality; political education; training in political leadership; responsiveness; accountability; inter-organizational coordination and decision making;

political stability and promoting and creating competition among local governments (Smith 1985:18-30). Political stability is gained by involvement in formal politics that strengthens trust in government thereby; social harmony, political stability and community spirit are achieved. The selection of representatives, and also the nature of policies, budgets and plans in a democracy, training for political leadership are directed towards the development in skills vis-à-vis policy making, budget, political party operations heading towards the gradual progress of the local politicians as national politicians.

Democratic decentralization also shapes up a mechanism to prepare the population for the profound economic and social changes associated with development process. Political equality is the consequence of broad-based political participation which curtails the possibility of accumulation of power. Since authority is diffused, it gives voice to the poor and destitute as well. Accountability enhances as local representatives are continuously in contact with the masses and can be held accountable for their actions and policies. Voting in elections in local bodies becomes an instrument to record their approval or disagreement for the representative's act. Since local representatives know the requirements of the local masses better, they are likely to be more responsive and also make an effort to be in touch with them in a cost-effective manner. Better decision-making capacity and inter-organizational coordination exists since responsibilities and powers are vividly defined and allocated between central and local bodies. The promotion of competition is attained when demand and supply side benefits obtained from institutional pluralism, which consecutively leads to economic efficiency (Smith 1985:30-37).

This study deals with the leadership pattern of two sarpanches. Leadership is the ability to influence others to seek definite objectives. It is the human aspect which binds any community together and encourages it towards aims. In an effort to provide vision to the study and understand the intricate phenomenon of leadership, there have been propounded various perspectives, approaches and theories behavioural, classical, contingency, situational and emerging or contemporary theories and more. But while authors easily distinguish clearly between classical, behavioural/style and

situational approaches to the study of leadership, they often do not attempt to make clear the distinction between situational and contingency theories of leadership. The present study will be using situational and contingency theories of leadership as both the Sarpanches are adapting themselves according to the needs of the democratic system while at the same time they can be replaced by another Sarpanch after a fixed tenure if they are found to be unsuitable for the position of leadership.

In the present study also the guaranteeing of “rational-legal” authority by the constitution to the women to enhance their political participation through 73rd Amendment Act, relates it to Weber’s idea of deriving power from three different forms of authority. According to Max Weber, individuals exercise power and in this context, it has the involvement of choice, age and intention. Power may also involve resistance and conflict as it is exercised over other individuals. According to him, persons holding public offices are equipped with political authority i.e. legitimate power. The existing political system is the reason behind it. Weber goes into the permanent source from where power holder derives its legitimacy. He identifies three such sources. They are the rational-legal authority, the traditional authority and the charismatic authority. Legitimacy, according to rational-legal authority, is derived from an office held within a system where framed rules regulate right and duties. Obedience to authority, in such cases is not given to individual but to the legally established order. In the case of traditional authority, the right power derives from respect to the old established patterns of order. Charismatic authority is established by the ruler because of exceptional qualities which is also visible in the present study of both the villages where the women sarpanches are governing charismatically and leading their respective villages in the domain of women empowerment. Both the Sarpanches (Soda village and Samrda Nosera village) are bringing in inclusive development with special focus on marginalized section of our society.

In present study the methodology adopted is feminist methodology. Feminist research methodology came up during the 1960s and 1970s as a theoretical concept for the women's movement that commenced in the West. Feminist research wanted to transform women's lives and also the world of academics. Like Marxism, feminism believes in praxis, i.e., to not only to interpret the world but to change it (Mackinnon, 1982). 'Knowledge' creating space, like many other spaces, has been dominated by males; male social scientists have shaped conventional theoretical space and in the course they have systematically overlooked women's lived experiences and struggles. However, since the appearance of feminism an obvious pressure has been formed on the demography of academics. As has already been identified, feminists defy the process of knowledge creation and mention that the knowledge produced by the dominant academics is androcentric in nature. For these major reasons women's 'knowledge' has been assumed as irrational since male dominated theory dismissed it as coming out of intuition and was not through qualified scientific methods of investigation. It was presumed that women cannot obtain knowledge by the support of different ways and women cannot be an independent knower/knowledge seeker (Smith, 2004). Feminists identify a hidden political plan in this 'exclusion'. A dual standard is being supported by the mainstream where on one hand they acknowledge neutrality, while on the other they have imbibed within themselves to covert gender bias. Hesse-Biber et al., (2004:3) writes;

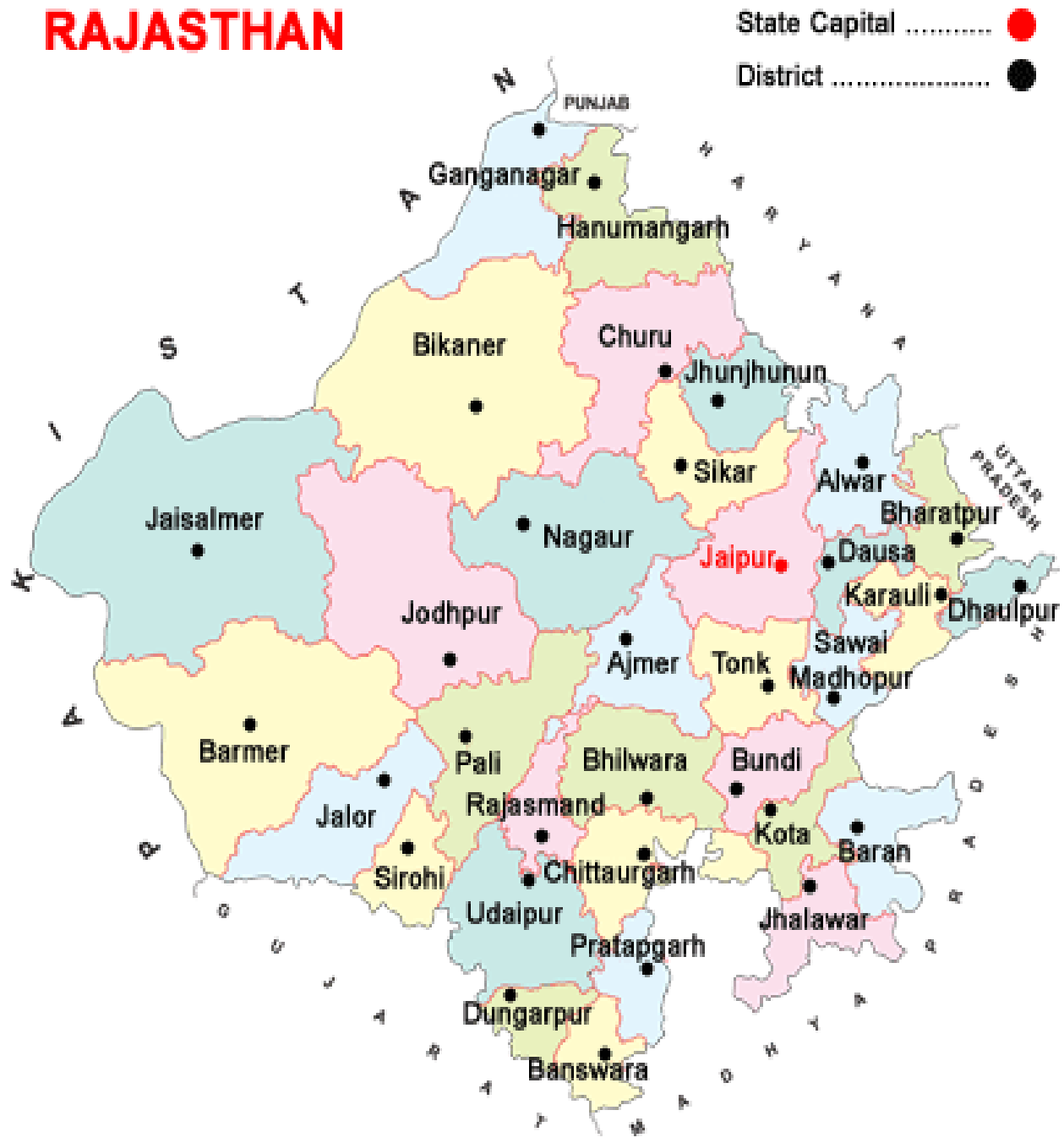
“Research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance to scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social justice”.

While feminist research questions not only the prevailing intellectual traditions and their traditions of conducting research, it is also continuously spontaneous about its own methods of research.

Thus, interview schedules were used for focus group interviews and in-depth interviews. The researcher tries to gather the necessary information through the interaction for the research. While conducting the interview, only the respondents who are available and willing to talk are interviewed. An important point is that interview can be utilized to gather qualitative as well as quantitative data. The sample size was 100 from each

village with 50 males and 50 females. The sample respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling method. Purposive sampling was done so that equal number of male and female respondents can be interviewed and snowball method was chosen as the villagers, mostly females were not ready to talk giving illiteracy as the reason. Therefore, there were equal numbers of male and female respondents from both the villages (Soda and Nosera).

Figure 1.1: Rajasthan Map



Study Area

The study area of my research is in the state of Rajasthan, which means “abode of rajas” and was formerly known as Rajputana. When India attained independence in 1947, it constituted of eighteen princely states and two chief-ships i.e. Ajmer and Marwar along with few parts of the territory outside the main boundary of the state. After 1947, the chief-ships and also the princely states were integrated into main land of India, but this integration took place in two stages and finally this state took the name ‘Rajasthan’. The present form of Rajasthan was first constituted on 1st November, 1956 with the recommendations of the States Reorganization Commission. The state is divided into two parts by the Aravalli ranges (world’s oldest mountain range). The northwest region of the state is known as the Thar Desert as it is mostly covered by sand dunes including Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Barmer, Jodhpur, Nagaur and some regions of Churu, Sikar and Jhunjhunu districts. The other parts of the state covering the eastern and south-eastern areas have fertile tracts. There are 32 districts in the state with 241 tehsils, 183 municipalities, 237 panchayat Samitis and 9184 gram panchayats according to 2001 census data.

The two districts of Rajasthan selected for my study, namely Tonk and Bikaner represent two different cultural regions. The village Samerdha Nosera is in Khajulwala Tehsil and the other village Soda is in Malpura tehsil.

Figure 1.2: Map of Biakner District



Samerdha Nosera Village: Bikaner District

The first village for the present study is Samerdha Nosera located in Khajuwala tehsil of Bikaner district of the state of Rajasthan in western India. The district headquarters is Bikaner city. Bikaner is bounded by Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Churu, Nagaur, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer on different sides. It has five major divisions; Bikaner, Loonkaransar, Nokha, Dungargarh and Khajuwala. There are 219 gram panchayats and 923 villages and one municipal corporation along with six municipal councils.

The area of the district is 30247.90 square km. and population density is of about 78 people per square kilometer. According to 2011 census, population growth rate is 41.42 percent and sex ratio is 903 against 1000 males with literacy rate of 65.92 percent. Nosera is a small village which comes under Khajuwala tehsil and Bikaner district.

The Sarpanch of this village is a Dalit woman Sarpanch who was elected to an unreserved seat in Bikaner district of Rajasthan state and has effectively brought gender issue to the forefront of the development discourse with the support of a Jaipur-based group. She has tackled the crucial issues of sex selection, maternal and infant mortality, child health and reproductive health by focusing on gender nurturing. Tara Devi was elected as the Sarpanch of Samerdha Nosera village of Khajuwala block in Bikaner district in February 2010, who is now a common name in the region because of her dedication to the issues of protecting the female child. She has also encouraged marginalized Dalit communities by being an example of success herself.

Samerdha Nosera is situated 113 km from Bikaner district. This village is among the twenty selected villages which are included in a project (Strengthening Gender Response of Panchayats) by *Sangam Maitri Mission Sansthan* in Rajasthan. This project has been initiated in the state by Society for Participatory Research in Asia. The data collected under this project reflected that the chief reasons for low child sex ratio were poor health facilities.

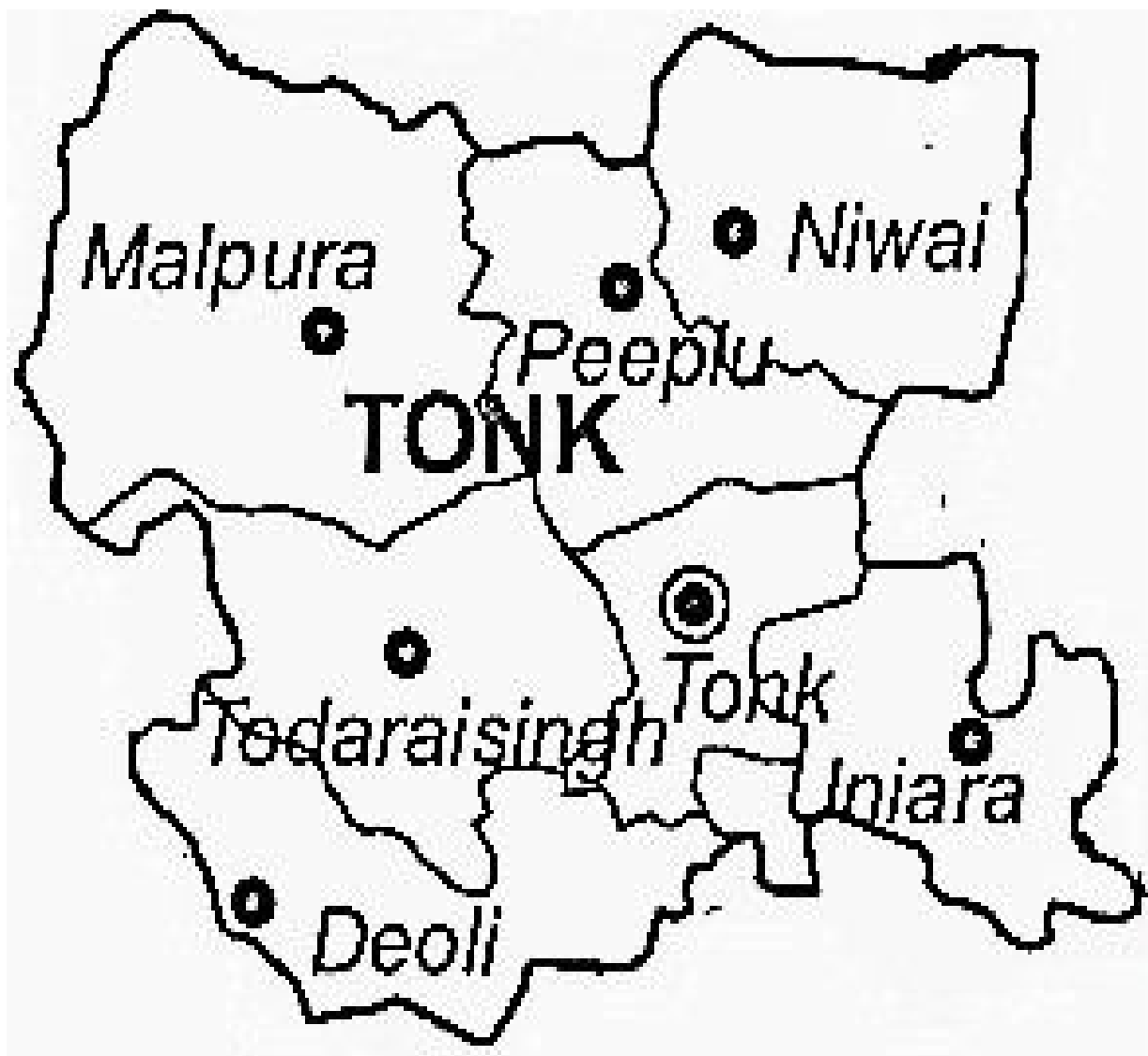
Tara Devi's long-drawn-out effort and accomplishment in achieving women's empowerment to a significant degree is an encouraging saga for the disadvantaged Dalit

communities. Her struggle proves that the Dalit women functionaries tend to perform well than as compared to their male counterparts, if given appropriate guidance, training and direction. This village lacks easy connectivity with the main urban surroundings and the lack of even the basic facilities in the region made the conditions worse.

The Sarpanch has effectively utilized her awareness by promoting and nurturing Gram Sabha on the issues concerning gender development. She has also acknowledged support from the women based programmes of the region and is encouraging the villagers with the help of these groups to contribute in the Gram Sabha meetings. The sustained efforts of the Sarpanch (Tara Devi) made an impact on the local society and facilitated the process to integrate gender issues into the schedule of deliberations for development. She also started customary audit of the local health sub-centre which were earlier devoid of appropriate infrastructure and medicines and also constructed its new building by linking the VHSC members.

In another significant step, Tara Devi enhanced the conditions of the Anganwadi centre and made provision for water and power supply. Tara Devi visits the centre regularly and inspects the food quality served to children. The Sarpanch has also taken adequate steps to improve the girl's education standards in the village and improve measures for drinking water. She also organizes VHSC meetings for progress of the "annual health plan" and utilized the grant of Rs.10, 000. She is functioning for betterment of Dalit and Muslim population and constantly facing new challenges. Due to her concern over health check-ups of pregnant women and immunization, Tara Devi makes provisions for institutional deliveries at the community health centre and has arranged several blood donation camps. She also invested in Indira Awas Yojana (Rs.47.15 lakhs) and spent Rs.3.85 crore on development works in the village. As a result of her efforts, the child sex ratio has considerably improved in Samerdha Nosera with a current survey depicting 1,014 females against 982 males.

Figure 1.3: Map of Tonk District



Soda Village: Tonk District

The second village taken for the research is Soda village located in Malpura tehsil of Tonk district of the state of Rajasthan in western India. Tonk city is the district headquarters. The district is surrounded by Jaipur, Sawai Madhopur, Kota and Bundi districts. The district has a population density of about 198 persons per square kilometers and population growth rate of 17.33 percent with sex ratio being 949 females against 1000 males and literacy rate of 62.46 percent according to 2011 census.

Chavi Rajawat became the Sarpanch (Head of a Village) of Soda, a village 60 kilometers from Jaipur, Rajasthan. She left her corporate job and city life to help develop rural India. She realised the need to bring about a change in the grass-root level, if she wants to bring about a real difference. She is India's first woman Sarpanch with an MBA degree. Since then, she has been working to bring water, solar power, paved roads, toilets and a bank to her village. She has provided regular supply of drinking water to her village and facilitated the construction of more than 40 roads. "If India continues to make progress at the same pace as it has for the past 65 years since independence, it just won't be good enough. We'll be failing people who dream about having water, electricity, toilets, schools and jobs. I am convinced we can do it differently and do it faster," Chhavi said in one of her interview. Out of the total nine hundred houses at Soda, toilets have been constructed in eight hundred houses. A soft drink company spent twenty lakhs for cleanliness of a pond, the only source of drinking water in the village.

Chapterisation

The first chapter talks about the background and historical evolution of the panchayati raj in India since British time and the enactment of 73rd amendment act 1992 giving constitutional status to village panchayats. The study area and statement of problem along with the theoretical framework has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. The first objective of the study has been addressed by this chapter.

The second chapter looks into the discussion on democratic decentralization in the state of Rajasthan which was divided into a number of states in pre-independence period. Rajasthan has been comparatively backward in education, economic development and consequently in socio-political consciousness. The state is composed of a large number of former princely states. Rajasthan was the first state in India to launch Panchayati Raj Institutions on 2nd of October 1959. The introduction of three tier structure was a welcome step towards rural development in the state. The structural pattern of Panchayats is also discussed in the above chapter which talks about Gram Panchayat being a constitutional body constituted for a term of five years. Today the excluded and marginalized communities are also participating in the development process. The increasing number of women participants has given positive hopes of penetration of democracy at local levels and despite their weak educational, social, political and economic status, today they are ready to take the responsibilities and carry them with efficacy. Today, although few instances but, there are changes in power relations of our society. The two women Sarpanches elected for the study differs in terms of their caste, education, and economic backgrounds, still both manages to bring their respective villages to development. The local self-governance or grassroots democracy can never succeed without community participation. Therefore, the kind of leadership along with the participation from the entire village community plays an important role in bringing about real democratic decentralization.

The third chapter talks about village studies and later on discusses various perspectives on villages and panchayats in India. The Indian villages are one of the important institutions of our society. Gandhi has been rightly known as the ideologue of the village. After Gandhi, Nehru was perhaps the most important and influential leader of the Indian

nationalist movement. Apart from being an important ideologue of the Indian National Congress, he also became the first prime minister of independent India. He was the catalyst of the approach India chose for its development after it achieved independence from colonial rule. Though Nehru worked under the leadership of Gandhi and gave him a good deal of respect, his ideas on the nature of India's past and his vision of its future were different from those of Gandhi. These differences were also reflected in his views on the Indian village. Unlike Gandhi, Nehru perhaps never identified himself with the village. Various studies on the status of women and on initiatives of women representation has been discussed in this chapter. The third objective of the research of discussing various intellectual interrogations and debates on Indian villages is addressed by this chapter.

The fourth chapter illustrated about the emerging leadership pattern in rural India and it being the source of empowerment not only for the masses but also the marginalized and deprived sections of our society including women. Women who are customarily discriminated and denied involvement in political and public spheres, have initiated participation in such forums because of the reservations and quotas specially enacted for their welfare. The responsible leadership plays a crucial role in determining the successful implementation of various schemes and programmes at the grassroots. The community participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions also to a considerable extent depends upon the kind of leadership administered. Not only women citizens but also other disadvantaged communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes should also be encouraged and involved in the process so that the optimum results of democratic decentralization can be realized and the change in the power structure can be witnessed at the third tier of governance.

The fifth chapter discussed various issues related to women reservations and representation in detail. The political stature of women is determined by the freedom and access she gets in decision making process. The empowerment of women through the institutions of Panchayati Raj was also discussed along with the three major forms of empowerment; social empowerment, political and economic empowerment. The chapter also speaks about the significant trends in the emerging leadership pattern of the rural

India which depends upon the community support which he/she gets from the masses. The chapter also discusses about the hindrances faced by such leaders especially women's initiatives, which can be structural as well as institutional constraints in the form of caste, illiteracy, time constraint and other socio-economic factors. The chapter finally ends with the consequences of women's representation in India. The real representation of women in public or political sphere will only take place only when their condition and status will improve in private and domestic spheres, which needs efforts from both the male and female citizens of our country. The fourth and fifth chapter together addresses the third and fourth objective of the study through field study and discussing the level of participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

CHAPTER 2

Panchayati Raj Institutions and Democratic Decentralization in Rajasthan

Introduction

This chapter deals with democratic decentralization in the state of Rajasthan where almost four-fifth of the population resides in rural area dependent on agriculture. The implementation of Panchayati Raj system in Rajasthan was done under a Special Act of Legislature- Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act of 1959. The structural pattern of Panchayati Raj Institution is also discussed in this chapter where the Gram Panchayat becomes the point of direct participation for the rural masses. The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act gave rural masses their due share of political participation at grassroots democracy and hence it became necessary to look into the status of women in Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan, where the leadership for rural women becomes the source of their empowerment. The issue of local self-government is also discussed in the chapter.

Rajasthan was the first state in India to launch an experiment in democratic decentralization, commencing its program on October 2, 1959. It was certainly a bold step for the Rajasthan government to take since in some respects it was the state least suited from the point of view of historical antecedents to experiment with grass-roots democracy. And yet it has achieved no meager success, and it is possible that these historical antecedents have proved to be boons rather than hindrances to the emergence of a reoriented rural leadership.

Rajasthan is composed of a large number of former princely states, which, in most cases, have municipal institutions and legislative assemblies in some of these states before independence, most of them were characterized by a benevolent despotism, manifesting itself and operating through a network of feudal lords. This could hardly be said to be conducive to the "inbuilding of purpose" resulting in the cultivation of the instinct to lead, to take initiative and to work on their own for the welfare of their fellow elements which may be said to constitute creative democratic leadership.

Moreover, Rajasthan has been comparatively backward in education, economic development and, consequently, in socio-political consciousness. There have been welfare activities and welfare institutions in Rajasthan, but these have been confined largely to the former state capitals and other bigger towns. Thus, the self-confidence born of education, economic security, a keen social conscience, and a politically alive outlook, which may be called the inner springs of vigorous leadership, was hardly to be expected in Rajasthan.

Rajasthan had been divided in the pre-independence period into a number of states which did not always have friendly relations with one another. The rulers and people in the different states were keenly conscious of their separate identities, and cherished a sense of local loyalty and, often, even of superiority. These area loyalties have survived the process of integration, and have resulted in the formation of regional pressure groups and leaders which are still important in state-level politics. This intra-regionalism cannot be dismissed as a rather innocuous pluralistic trend in Rajasthan's socio-political scene. The real development needs democratic decentralization which can be possible only after ensuring participation from all the sections of the society.

Different models of development formed the part of discussions after independence. By the time the third general elections were held the gap between the expectations generated by the people and real achievements was highlighted. Congress adopted the mixed model of economics and tried to develop the country on western pattern till the time of defeat in 1965 war. But the persistent scenario forced to change the outlook on topics of social, economic as well as defense improvement. There were lots of changes going on simultaneously on the political front. The socialist movement held its identity despite being a failure in the general elections; the Communist Party lost influence after being split into two in the form of Chinese and Russian supports. In mid seventies India witnessed the JP movement which seemed to provide direction to the youth of the country but the failure of the movement left them aimless. Due to lack of any political organizations, most of them immersed themselves in voluntary activities and social

service. In order to look for an alternate movement some of them tried to establish a comparable social system in the form of Naxalite movement. This is why the post JP movement in Bihar saw boost in the Naxalite movement and some of the leaders like Laloo Prasad Yadav, Ram Vilas Paswan, Nitish Kumar, etc., are the young leaders of the JP movement.

Dalit politics found itself a new path in the form of landless laborers, menial workers and those engaged in daily labour that were earlier related to socialist movement. But the socialist movement itself had no clear vision and could not solve the problems of dalits. For dalits, social change equated to freedom from the clutches of caste system and oppression. Thus they deliberately stayed away from the industrial and economic movements and joined the caste politics to break away from the rigid culture of Brahmanical system.

The seeds of Indian democracy can be traced back to Indian National Movement although French revolution had a great impact on it. Indian National Movement was highly appreciative of representative democracy and complete choice of civil liberties for the individual. It provided an understanding through which these two could become an important of political thinking in the country. The advent of the movement saw it struggling for the idea of democracy and institutions among people and called for parliamentary institutions based on popular elections.

Along with pressing for adult franchise by nationalists in the starting of the twentieth century, efforts were being made to defend the freedom of speech and of press from colonial attacks. From its inception in 1885, Indian National Congress was organized on democratic lines and was the chief political organ of the Indian National Movement. It functioned through discussions and debates and then its resolutions were voted upon. Some of the most important decisions in its history were taken after brain storming dialogues and then voted upon. When India attained independence, Congress already had the experience of democratic functioning and struggle for people's rights for over six decades. Mahatma Gandhi, though pressed for liberal democratic structure, was not

successful in enabling people to keep a check on those exercising political power. The issue of non-violence also helped a great deal in establishing a temper for democracy in the national movement. The nationalists did not leave their demand for introduction of parliamentary system based on elections. The British ruling India said that owing to geographical and socio cultural variations India was unfit for democracy. It was this denial that national movement was further strengthened by democratic thoughts and India succeeded in making democracy and civil liberty an essential element of Indian polity. The establishment of democratic traditions among the people through national movement helped a great deal in making India a democratic nation at the time of independence. A reflection of the same is also seen in Indian constitution. It was repeatedly being said that the diversity in language, culture, geography in the Indian sub-continent would not let it progress on the values and idea of democracy. Thus, the national movement by setting up a culture of democracy paved a path for dissent, freedom of expression and rights of minorities to coexist in independent India.

The end of colonial era in 1947, India had rewritten its political culture by accepting the Western democratic form of government. The construction of Indian constitution in 1950 formalized representative democracy with an aim to establish classless social order in caste based social structure. The idea of Gram Swaraj as upheld by Gandhi seemed outdated to the modern political elites of independent India. A fresh platter of Nehruvian socialism combined with electoral politics seemed striking to Indian nation. The vices of poverty, illiteracy, rigidity of caste, violence on communal lines and many others made it non congenial to the idea of democracy. It was partitioned by violence and sharp social differences which were a threat not only to its democratic build up but also to the state itself. Taking these disparities into account especially those evident on linguistic grounds, Selig Harrison concluded that India was moving towards dictatorship. But it is a matter of pride that in spite of all these variations India not only survived democracy but also strengthened its existence with time.

The Gandhian model of development stressed on empowering the down trodden by introducing Panchayati Raj system and making the weaker section empowered by

increasing their participation in the development process of the country. It was emphasized by our freedom fighters that participation of the people in democracy was essential for them to govern the country with the help of their elected representatives. There have been divergent qualitative changes in leadership before and since the Nehruvian era. Those leaders who were a part of the Nehruvian era have derived their legacy from the freedom movement and were committed to take nation on a different level for a better tomorrow. It was a means to achieve goals for larger good of nation. The need of appropriate and able leadership was always in demand to take the nation on the path of development.

The paradox of Indian democracy has been explained in several ways. India is one of those societies where political revolution was seen before the social one. The independence movement in India and the guidance of Congress leaders like Gandhi and Nehru altered the face of India from a 'cultural unit' to 'cultural political unit.' This was seriously required because a democracy cannot be born without the presence of a political unit. The colonial hangover and development of elites educated in modern ways lead to development of constitutional government, political parties like Indian National Congress, efficient civil service and apolitical armed force which were the foundation stone of a well-built institutional structure and growth of democracy.

The organization of the Indian constitution and the endeavors of first generation political leaders legitimized representative democracy in the country. The basic principles of justice, fraternity, liberty and equality set a strong floor for acceptance of parliamentary democracy as system of domination among people of India. Although Nehru expressed this democracy through adult franchise and electoral politics yet he tried to go beyond this formal politics and give power to the people. It was during his time that the Panchayati Raj System was initiated but it could not be held tight due to non-reach to grass root level and still the power stays in the hands of English educate class and middle class. The implementation of welfare schemes and policies at grassroots need inclusive participation at each level of governance.

The introduction of three tier structures of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rajasthan was a welcome step towards rural development by bringing masses together as participants in decision making process. Almost four-fifth population of the state resides in rural area which is dependent heavily on agriculture and yet the land productivity is far from average. The state of Rajasthan posed a challenge in implementation of PRI Act as it had numerous internal ecological variations and diverse social composition.

The implementation of Panchayati Raj system in Rajasthan was done under a Special Act of Legislature; “Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act of 1959”. The earlier “Rajasthan Panchayats Act of 1953” provided for the establishment of panchayats which continued in the same way but the panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zila Parishad at the district level was introduced in accordance with the Act of 1959, which aimed, “to enable the people to participate fully and actively in all development programmes. The Government hopes that this would develop the initiative of the local people and that sound leadership, which is highly indispensable to the successful working of democratic institution, will arise and be developed at all the levels in the district. Thus, the three tier structure of Panchayati Raj institutions came to be created not under a single comprehensive Act but under two separate Acts which were suitably harmonized with each other.

In pursuance of 73rd constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the Rajasthan state legislature enacted the new "Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994" (Bhargav, 1979: 33).

“Using the conventional classification of ‘political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation,’ the World Bank’s three-volume study of Indian decentralisation (World Bank, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c) ranks India ‘among the best performers’ internationally in terms of political decentralization, but ‘close to the last’ in terms of administrative decentralisation. Most States have held at least one round of elections since 1993. Reservations allowing the participation of women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been respected (although there is great scope for corruption – see below). Finally, voter participation has been high. In its study of 53 villages in

Rajasthan and MP, for instance, the World Bank found that voter turnout in Panchayat elections was well over 90% for all categories (defined in terms of gender, class and caste). This is significantly higher than the (still high) turnout for the most recent round of Lok Sabha elections, which was 61% for women and 65.9% for men” (Yadav, 1999).

The study conducted by the World Bank states that despite the fact that union government and state governments are willing to give recognition to Panchayats, hold elections and reserve seats for SC/ST and women on one hand, but on the other hand they are not ready to grant ample administrative control and fiscal autonomy (World Bank, 2000 a:xi). “In its assessment of Indian decentralisation, the Task Force on Devolution of powers and functions upon Panchayati Raj Institutions (MoRD, 2001) found that ‘most of the States’ had satisfied only the basic requirements relating to the transfer of functions, functionaries, funds and financial autonomy to the Panchayats”. Oommen’s study (1999:157–8) about the comparison of twelve Indian States observes that the Conformity Acts have usually been an exercise in amending prevalent Panchayati Raj legislation in order to satisfy the mandatory provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act.

Several studies have proved that with the introduction of Panchayati Raj Act, conventionally marginalized and socially excluded groups have braved all odds and started participating in this democratic process of governance. The study on Panchayati Raj in Karnataka by Crook and Manor (1998:34) points out towards the need of widening the description of political action so as to include “proactive” form of participation of the rural masses. Further they write, “As one would expect, educated men were somewhat more likely to contact a representative, although women also had relatively high levels of involvement. Moreover, those with no education or only primary education were ‘remarkably active’ in contacting counselors” (Ibid 36). It was also mentioned in the study that the population belonging to lower castes were more drawn in rather than general populace in canvassing and signing petitions to counselors during the elections. Crook and Manor wrote, “campaigning was largely restricted to the hamlets in which individual castes are generally located. Where participation involved ‘mixing with

others,' during 'non-official' meetings in which reservations requirements did not apply, levels of involvement were far lower" (Ibid 37).

The path to successful implementation of democratic decentralization involves commitment and dedication at different levels of our political system; centre, state and local governance. The real meaning of democracy can be brought forth only when there is decentralization of power, functions and authority, for which there are Panchayats in our country.

Structural Pattern of Panchayati Raj Institutions

The Gram Panchayat is a constitutional body constituted for a term of five years. The state government has the authority to dissolve the Panchayat but the panchayat has to be reconstituted within six months. Its chairman is designated as Sarpanch. It was established that each panchayat circle with population less than 3000 shall consist of minimum nine wards and this number could be increased by two for every additional 1000 people. The seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are reserved in percentage of their population. There is a provision of reserving one-third of the total number of seats for women and also one-third from the total number of seats reserved must be reserved for the women who belong to SC/ST and OBC. Similar is the case in the reservation of seats for the post of Sarpanch.

The second level of the three-tier Panchayati Raj structure is Panchayat Samiti (currently 237), working at the Block level. The members belong to the territorial constituencies who are directly elected. There are fifteen constituencies for every Panchayat Samiti having population up to 1, 00, 000 and increased by two for every 15,000. The reservation for SC/ST and OBC population is done in accordance to the proportion of their population along with 1/3rd seats are reserved for women even the post of Pradhan follows this reservation of seats. There is also a provision for indirect election for both the Pradhan and Up- Pradhan. The Pradhan and Up-Pradhan are elected from among the members who are elected from the Panchayat Samiti, whose term is for five years and can be removed by no-confidence vote. There are also appointments made by the State

Government who are designated as Development Officers, Extension Officers, Accountants and Junior Accountants for every Panchayat Samiti and are selected from persons holding posts under State Government or All India Services. These people can be transferred by the State Government.

The third or the apex tier of the Panchayati Raj is Zila Parishad at the district level which is essentially an advisory body and the key task of it is the general supervision over Panchayat Samiti and Gram Sabha. It is constituted for five years and consists of members from territorial constituencies who are directly elected. There shall be 17 constituencies for population of 4, 00, 000 and will be increased by two for every additional population of 1, 00, 000. The seats will be reserved for SC, ST and OBC and 1/3rd of the seats will be reserved for women. The post of *Pramukh* will also be reserved for SC/ST/OBC and women. The election to the office of *Pramukh* and Up-*Pramukh* is indirect. The officer of the level of Indian Administrative Services (IAS) or Rajasthan Administrative Services (RAS) is supposed to be the chief executive officer of the Zila Parishad appointed by the State Government. The Additional Chief Executive Officers can be selected by the State Government. All ex-officio members of Zila Parishad, including the Lok Sabha members, Rajya Sabha and also Vidhan Sabha, enjoy full membership and they can vote, hold election offices and partake in the deliberations of Zila Parishad.

The Gram Sabha being the point of direct participation for the rural population and is the “general meeting of adult residents within the area of Panchayat”. The Panchayat circle consists of Gram Sabha consisting of all the residents of the village who are registered in the electoral rolls. These meetings are held twice a year; once in May-June and another in October-December to discuss and account for the activities of the preceding year as well as programme implementation and budget preparation respectively. The Gram Sabha unit is the medium for broad appraisal and analysis of the work done by the panchayats. The meetings of the Gram Sabha require minimum quorum of 1/10th of all the adult citizens, though for adjourning the meeting there is no quorum as such. It was in January 2001, when for the first time Rajasthan Ward Sabha were introduced in rural

India. The ordinance mentions that, “Ward Sabhas will consist of all adult persons of the ward in a Panchayat circle, and that there shall be at least two meetings of the Ward Sabha in a year i.e. at least one in six months”.

The 73rd Amendment Act consists of Article 243-D which talks about reservations for different categories and women; “The principle of reservation is a main plank for the 'empowerment' and political involvement of various caste, creed and gender. The reservations of seats for the members at all levels have been made for SCs and STs in proportion to the population and minimum of 15 percent seats (total reservation should not exceed 50%) for other backward classes. In case where the total population of SCs/STs is between 50-70%, at least one seat was to be reserved for OBCs but where it exceeds 70%, no such reservation is required. One -third of these reserved seats are in turn reserved for women of these categories. Further, Sarpanchas/Chairpersons/Presidents will also be elected on the basis of reservation. The allocation of reserved seats between different Panchayats, *Panchayat Samitis* and *Zila Parishads* is to be done by rotation. Thus, a certain number of PR bodies will be headed, even against the democratic principle of majority rule by Scheduled Caste, a certain number by Scheduled Tribes, a certain number by other backward classes and a certain number by women”. The Panchayati Raj aimed at 'empowerment' the people especially women and poor sections.

Political system and decision making procedure in seen evident in the changes included in the Panchayati Raj Institution. The objective of bringing development in the socio-economic situation of women could be possible only by taking appropriate measures and initiatives for empowering them. The empowerment of women would not be possible until they are provided adequate representation in the political system. The objective must be accomplished at desired level by making the provision of associating and linking maximum number of women citizens in political sphere even at the grassroots level of political activity. In recently implemented Panchayati Raj Institution, the strategy for

reservation for women has thereby, been thought as an important step to maximize their involvement at the local level.

Conceptually, providing representation to women candidates in Panchayati Raj Institution can be accepted as an significant planning approach regarding minimizing the conventional status of women in our country, principally in terms of keeping women citizens under the suppression of men, imposing constraints by the households and also the society against them in the availing of opportunities and numerous other cultural, social and traditional rules disfavoring them for changing personal life and status in prevailing social and economic setting. Accordingly, this newly introduced policy would improve the potential of increasing equalities in the course of socio-economic development, their participation in various activities in mutual understandings and various decision making processes of the household among women and men.

The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act has given the rural masses their due share of political participation at grassroots democracy and today the marginalized and excluded communities are also participating in this process. It has created a broader political and social base in our society. The increasing number of women participants has given some positive hopes of penetration of democracy at local levels and despite their weak educational, social, political and economic status, today they are ready to take these responsibilities and carry them with efficacy. Although in small numbers but there are changes in power relations.

Status of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rajasthan

The state of Rajasthan was primarily a land of Princes and Kings with an established system with traditional practices. Women were excluded from educational pursuits in those times and the condition of rural women was even worse. They were socially, educationally and economically marginalized in all the spheres of their life and were confined within their households. However, after the coming of PRI Act, women in the state of Rajasthan got opportunities to come out in public domain and participate in political life which led to some level of empowerment for them. These transformatory

changes were also witnessed in other parts of the country also. An NGO conducted a study which states that;

"Women suffer more than men, precisely because the power structure in the family or in society is pronouncedly male biased. So, poor women get a double blow from economic policy, one blow she received as a part of poor and working people, and another blow from an inherently male biased social structure. As the marginalization of the poor increases, the burden on women will increase. As the poor families live either at or below subsistence level, more burdens are passed on to women to cope with the situation" (Astha, 2000:17).

The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act brought about several changes in the local governance and also in the status of women. Earlier it was presumed that women were submissive by nature and were not interested in participating in political institutions, therefore all the reservation benefits will be accrued by the women of upper stratum of the society. There were concerns regarding the issues arising because of proxy members. There are several cases to demonstrate that women holding the positions of *Sarpanch* and *Zila Pramukh* have emerged out as strong representatives and role models for others in the country. Some extraneous factors have also contributed towards strengthening the position of women leaders in PRIs. It was found that women leaders who were earlier associated with any kind of voluntary organizations had better leadership capabilities as compared to the ones who didn't have any such experience. As can be substantiated by the present study of the two villages of Rajasthan; the educated *Sarpanch* (from soda village) being more aware of her roles and responsibilities since the beginning of assuming her office had greater command as a leader. On the other hand, the uneducated *Sarpanch* from Samerdha Nosera village took time and learned about her role and responsibilities with time and experience.

It is noticed that the women who got positive support and cooperation from families, officials, village members contributed commendably to their panchayats. Many of the

studies point out that women representatives have agreed to the fact that initially they took help from male members of their families in carrying out their duties but later, in due course of time, they gained confidence and started working on their own which reduced their dependence on their family members. But, it may be recalled that some women PR representatives have shown understanding of rural society and have done well in adjusting with their new role in the traditional society. As told by the *Sarpanch* of Samerdha Nosera village, that the support of her husband and family played a vital role for her when it came to contest the panchayat elections and now she is even ready to contest state level elections.

The relation between the women representatives and bureaucrats and other officials is also important as the Gram Panchayats and *Panchayat Samiti* are dependent on these officials. The increased activities and powers at *Zila Parishad* level have changed the situation at district level. Here also the knowledge and awareness of both the *sarpanches* came to the fore where they had to deal with the bureaucrats on regular basis. The *Sarpanch* from Soda village could do her work more efficiently at this front while the other one from Samerdha village faced some difficulties during her initial days as *Sarpanch*. The issue of women representatives has to be viewed in the overall context of Rajasthan where women suffered due to backward social economic development. Women representation has increased in other services but the overall status of the women remained weak and poor in the state. The women PRI representatives, particularly the second and third timer among them, have shown articulation and understanding of their role and new status which they have been given after the 73rd Amendment Act.

The present field study sees how both the *sarpanches* bring about changes in their respective villages and carry on their duties and responsibilities as leaders and a woman. The successful implementation of Panchayati Raj system depends a lot on the efficacy of the leadership offered. The main purpose of PRIs is to empower rural masses and bring them as active participants in the process of democracy. Therefore, a committed rural leadership plays a significant role here. The requirement of committed and dedicated leadership in encouraging people for successful implementation of developmental

programmes is of great importance especially in a society where traditional institutions have deep rooted hold.

Leadership, especially for rural women becomes a foundation for their empowerment. In order to create democratic and free social order, empowerment plays a significant role. The two different forms of empowerment have been recognized; first, where natives seek power through struggles and claims and secondly, where power is offered by the state. The power which the PRIs have granted to rural masses falls in the second category. The Panchayati Raj Institutions became weak in 1965-1978 and since 1985 onwards till 1994, and this weakness and errors were removed with the coming of 73rd Amendment Act. The institution of Panchayati Raj has survived in the state of Rajasthan and has progressed positively in terms of creating socio-political awareness among rural masses. The two women *Sarpanches* chosen for the study differs in terms of their caste, education and economic backgrounds, still both of them manages to bring their respective villages to development. The magnitude and degree of development is what needs to be seen through the field study.

Local Self Governance: The Road Ahead

The term 'Local Government', generally understood as administration of a territorial unit smaller than the State, is sometimes used interchangeably with Local Self-Government. Local Self-Government is a body consisting of the local inhabitants, retaining a large degree of autonomy. Local government finds mention in the constitutions of very few countries. Still fewer contain rules for local governance. The Constitution of India, as adopted and enacted in November 1949, did not envisage any role for them but for an entry in the state list of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, and a specific article in the Directive principles of the State Policy which requires the states to pursue for organising panchayats. The changes made by the 73rd and 74th amendments in the Constitution are innovative and have given a new dimension to the system of governance at the local level in the country. It is not that the municipalities and panchayats were not in existence prior to these amendments; almost every state did set up these institutions in accordance with the law passed by the state legislature. Most of the states also had a structure of three-tier system of panchayati raj as recommended by the report of

Balwantrai Mehta Committee. Functions, powers and responsibilities were assigned to them through state legislations, and where necessary, executive powers were delegated to them under the rules, and administrative instructions. They also had powers of taxation in a limited way and were entitled to grants for general or specific purposes.

The changes made in the Constitution do not create any new set of institutions but recognize afresh the role that these bodies can play in promoting the social justice and economic development in urban areas and also in the villages, in improving services essential for better community life. The inclusion of the two new schedules - Eleventh and Twelfth - has added a new dimension to local governance and has raised hopes that these bodies will be entrusted with the implementation of schemes on subjects included therein (Gulati, 1994:2622).

The village communities were all a separate state in which the needs and requirements of the villagers for their own individual lives were well provided for. The village officers were appointed for such objectives, and in virtue of heredity and caste they were compensated by land or fixed payment for their services provided to the community. They also looked after arts and agriculture, sanitation and public health, trade and commerce, and also security and education. Section of the population, like the barber, potter, and the cobbler used to be appointed. The groups of these rural communities would also in times of trouble fortify themselves. The succeeding generations would return and the sons would take the place of their fathers-on the same site, the same homestead and the same lands. Thus, in India from the distant past there was a highly organized system of village self- government.

The dawn of 21st century is apparent by decentralized governance as a philosophy and as a strategy as well bringing about changes and reforms in democracies. These changes would lead to such qualities of responsiveness, transparency and accountability and would ensure good governance. Today democracy and decentralization are the most significant aspects in the development discourse. In the present scenario of rapid social transformation and development activities, decentralization is found to be much more suitable to deal with contemporary facets of liberalization, privatization and globalization.

In certain parts of the world, especially in Western Europe and North America, democracy and the democratic process have been internalized in the values and norms of society, as such they are accepted as guiding principal of the day to day politics and administration and with adequate measure of success. But, the democratic process has been gathering renewed momentum in recent years. To quote a declaration of the Government of India, "It is not, primarily, with a view to improvement in administration that this measure (i.e. the extension of local self-government) is put forward and supported. It is chiefly desirable as an instrument of political and popular education" (Resolution of the Government of India, 1870.) An avowed object of British rule in India is the training of the people in carrying out their own concerns; the differences among the Government of India and its critics turn rather upon the pace at which this aim can be achieved than upon the aim itself. To certain sections of educated Indians the present pace appears unduly slow; on the other hand it is contended that progress is as rapid as is compatible with safety. Circumstances arising out of the war have recently accentuated the demand that the pace shall be accelerated, and it is relevant, therefore, to examine (in a few salient aspects only) the extent to which one of the "instruments of political and popular education" has so far proved successful.

Local self-government in India presents three forms: that of municipalities dealing with the affairs of towns; that of rural boards concerned with the improvement of non-urban tracts; and that of villages in which authorities of various kinds in varying degrees regulate the business of the smallest administrative unit. To village government it is not now proposed to refer at length; the Indian village has a history of its own, presenting markedly different features in different parts of the country; it is not, for the most part, the product of legislative enactment, nor was it an element in the scheme of local self-government as devised in the 'seventies and the 'eighties of the last century for which the term local self-government in the Indian sense now ordinarily stands. It is true that it is thought by many that the foundation of real self-government must be sought in the villages rather than in the artificial creations of British legislatures, and towards the fostering of village life efforts are being made, but its development lies in the future, and the immediate results of local self-government are to be seen in the working of municipalities and rural boards.

The PRI function in a traditional set up is to draw illiterate peasants into the politics of development. The use of the traditional ways of communication with the masses is therefore a necessity. Undoubtedly, there is an inherent danger in this practice, however, so far as political development is concerned. The continuous use of traditional ways might result in the strengthening of traditional bonds of caste and kinship, and thus obstruct the drive towards equality. It is noteworthy that the panchayati raj institutions have evoked a certain enthusiasm among the rural masses, which now appear to believe in '*swaraj*' (self-government) as an experience of their day to day life. Elections to the three-tiered institutions are brought forth 'new rural elites'. These non-westernized 'sons of the soil', have more in common with the rural masses than with the westernized elites of urban India, whether bureaucratic or political. It is not suggested here that 'vernacular-speaking' leaders have replaced the 'English-educated'. In all probability, many of the new rural elites are conversant in English. What is significant about them is that they have strong roots in the villages. The understanding of western democracy by the 'English-educated' elites was mainly confined to the above institutional and to some extent mechanistic aspects. Hence, the emphasis in the Indian Constitution on parliamentary democracy, universal franchise, independence of the judiciary and so on. But when these institutional arrangements had to function in a non-western political culture, there were in fact three different political idioms operating together-the western, the traditional, and the saintly. The Indian Constitution envisaged only the first; while the politics of India could be said to be mainly under the influence of the other two political idioms (Sirsikar, 1966:581-584).

The 73rd Amendment Act has not only accorded constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions but has also contributed towards giving a definite structure to Panchayats in all the states along with the powers and functions. It has also made provisions for the constituting the office of Finance Commissioner and also the reservation of seats for the SC/ST in proportion to their population. The administration of local affairs has to be tackled by the Panchayats but it is the responsibility of state government to provide adequate support to the panchayats. The system of decentralization can only be successful when the crucial issues of transparency, planning, devolution of powers, autonomy and accountability are addressed appropriately.

Grassroots democracy is closely related to the term participatory democracy being known for the efforts for empowerment and diverse micro movements at the grass root level. This democracy engages in the development goals by participation of people and is articulated in terms of empowering people through joint efforts of developing local resources and every day struggle for achieving the same. Grassroots Democracy hints at authorizing the Gram Sabhas by the principle of self-governance and construction of decision making bodies to manage the affair of their own villages.

Confrontation is evident when the powers get decentralized and conflicts occur with the state, bureaucracy, law and order apparatus and multinationals entering the rural and urban India. These clashes can also occur with the political parties and the trade unions. The supporters of such form of democracy see these disagreements as a part of larger struggle for political and social transformation and not as a means of power capturing from the political parties. This helps people to expand political spaces, lift their own consciousness and create a culture of participatory democracy.

M.N. Roy had prepared an exhaustive proposal for constitution of free India based on his vision of participatory democracy as he was not in favor of representative form of democracy. These proposals which were ignored then have now been revived and seen relevant by activist groups in the changing context of globalization.

Jai Prakash Narain joined the Gandhian movement in 1954 and the issue of intensifying his proposal for participatory democracy was central to his agenda. He believed that without this form of democracy only elite will continue to be in power. He was against the idea of representation by the political parties and accounted for a more inclusive and participatory form of democracy where the dispersal of power will be from below upwards maintaining the transparency in the system. The supporters of liberal democratic theories as well as party politicians saw JP's thesis as a symbol of idealism without being informed of the dangerous consequences of the same. JP revised his vision in two years and came up with politically more persuasive and comprehensive statement on participatory democracy. He elaborated on his earlier claims by establishing the need of comprehensive democracy theoretically as well as historically where people were the base of polity exercising both economic and political power. He launched a huge

movement in 1970s for restoring power in people which meant “*lokshakti*” in democracy. This gave rise to non-party political process inspiring many young men and women in new class of grassroots movement.

Grassroots democracy can never succeed without community participation. The kind of leadership along with the participation from the entire village community plays an important role in bringing about real democratic decentralization. There have certainly been certain lacking in accomplishment of the goal of participatory democracy. These include lack of social equality in local democracy, incomplete involvement of people in local governance, lack of powers in certain spheres and misuse of public resources provided for development under the Panchayati Raj and latent form of Gram Sabhas. Despite the above mentioned there are numerous other reasons for celebration and not leaving hope for a better future.

If we look at how politics in India has changed both at national level, state level and local level; we see that a lot of changes have taken place especially during the last decade or so. It may be difficult to trace all the changes but the most important change that has taken place is that state politics has acquired a very important place in politics of India which also in a way affects local politics. Recently an ordinance has been delivered by Governor Kalyan Singh, which has fixed minimum educational credentials for contesting polls for *Panchayat Samiti* and district councils, attracting much opposition from many political parties, local communities and also the civil society groups. The ordinance effecting an amendment to the *Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act 1994*, has made it mandatory for candidates contesting *Zila Parishad* and *Panchayat Samiti* polls to be Class X pass and those contesting *Sarpanch* elections to be Class VIII pass. In scheduled areas the eligibility has been fixed at Class V pass.

This step is discriminatory to a large section of the rural population, particularly women among whom the literacy rate is the lowest. In rural Rajasthan, the literacy rate stands at 76.16 percent for males and 45.8 percent for females. The move has been criticized by many referring it as discriminatory to implement it with a category of people like tribals, Dalits and the poor who never got an opportunity to go school.

Mridulika Jha (of *Mahila Panch Sarpanch Sangathan*) said,

“In Rajasthan the literacy rate of women in rural areas is only 45.8 percent, which is lower than the national literacy rate of 57.93 percent. In tribal areas, the situation is even worse with literacy rate of women 25.22 percent. By introducing such discriminatory disqualification criteria, it excludes the rest of the non-literate women from the possibility of exercising their political right to contest elections thereby defeating the very purpose of the 50 percent reservation of seats for women in the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act. By issuing such an Ordinance the state government is absolving itself of its primary responsibility of realizing the Right to Education Act (which only came into effect in 2009). Many of the current potential candidates have voiced their discontent and anger at being excluded from accessing their fundamental rights. Moreover, potential and current candidates re-contesting elections have expressed their ire against the government by citing that literacy should not be equated with their capacity to be effective elected representatives of people. In a democratic country, introducing selective disqualification measures such as the two child norm and now the minimum education requirement is hindering inclusive participation of all in the grassroots development and governance of the country. We urge the government to take immediate action and retract this Ordinance at the earliest”.

Now, because of the new criteria, more than half the women of the area are not even eligible to contest the elections. This literacy rate is not uniform throughout the state and thus, there are always possibilities that more than two-third of the women are not eligible from a specified area. Even though there are constitutional mandates to ensure participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, the participation will now be limited to a layer comprising of the privileged class and would not be observed among the general mass. In the absence of proper representation, the condition of the women of the area will become even worse. This could also lead to an adverse impact on the government schemes and plans taken towards promoting gender equality. The same is

true for participation of other minorities and weaker sections of the society in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The ordinance is discriminatory in nature and thus is a violation of the constitutional right to equality guaranteed under Article 14.

Rajasthan is one of the states with the lowest literacy rates in India. The Right to Education was until very recently a Directive Principles of the State Policy and became a Fundamental Right only in the year 2002. Prior to that, education itself was not a right and for many it was a distant possibility because of the absence of proper facilities and it makes no sense to impose on a person a penalty due to the failure of the state. More schools should be established in order to spread literacy. Punishing the masses that were left illiterate because of absence of schools or Government efforts few years ago, will in no way help in promoting education. Imposing minimum educational qualifications for political office is harmful for the disadvantaged sections thereby leading to exclusion and runs against the spirit of introducing three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The Panchayati Raj can be successful only when these institutions are accorded fully autonomy in decision-making and sufficient financial powers. There are several provisions in the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 itself which prevent such autonomy. For instance, sections 92 to 107 provide that the State government can dissolve Panchayats on specific grounds. The Panchayats also require prior permission of the government for performing their duties of introducing new programmes. It is obvious that Panchayats are working under excessive bureaucratic and government control. This is against the concept of Panchayati Raj. Therefore, the efforts for strengthening Panchayats are still at the state of conceptualization. The objective of Panchayati Raj is not only an instrument of public relation but also is people's movement in which healthy dialogue, proper communication, greater participation and implementation of time bound programmes for success. Village level planning requires understanding of local problems by the people themselves. It should also be backed with sufficient financial and other resources. The State of Rajasthan is very keen to strengthen the PRIs and from time to time various efforts have been made to improve the working of Panchayats.

Panchayati Raj Institutions is an opportunity to provide the people to feel the sense of real democracy at the grass root level. It also provides an opportunity to the members of

communities no matter whether weaker sections or even of women, to participate in the governance. We can say that it is a governance of the people, by the people and for the people. It follows the principles of bottom-up approach and benefit sharing among the participating members. It is supposed to be striving to reduce the workload of the government, to increase the responsibilities and provide facilities to the people, to protect the environment, to revive the traditional science and technology to harness the resources for development, to build people organization to manage the affairs of community and to achieve equity and social justice.

The organizations of local responsibility are not adequate in most of the developing countries, and thereby, the local governments are time and again at the mercy of local elites who may discourage the goal of realizing public delivery to the general masses of social services, infrastructural amenities and conditions conducive to local development. This means that democratic decentralization, in order to be really effective, has to complement serious attempts to change the prevailing structures of power within groups and to expand the opportunities for contribution, voice and engaging the hitherto marginalized or disenfranchised in the political sphere. After all, the logic behind the idea of decentralization is not just about the weakening of central authority and neither is it about preferring local power elites to central authority, however, it is fundamentally about building governance at the local level much more responsive to the felt requirements of the majority of the population. To expedite this, the state, far from receding into the simple role of classical liberalism, may occasionally have to play certain other roles; like enabling (even if as a catalyst), organization of people in local participatory progress; neutralizing the power of native oligarchs; providing supra local support in the form of pump- priming local finance; supplying technical and professional services toward building local capacity; acting as a watchdog for service quality standards, evaluation and auditing; investing in larger infrastructure; and providing some coordination in the face of externalities across localities.

The chapter discussed democratic decentralization in the state of Rajasthan which was divided into a number of states in pre-independence period. Rajasthan has been comparatively backward in education, economic development and consequently in socio-

political consciousness. The state is composed of a large number of former princely states. Rajasthan was the first state in India to launch Panchayati Raj Institutions on 2nd of October 1959. The introduction of three tier structure was a welcome step towards rural development in the state. The structural pattern of Panchayats is also discussed in the above chapter which talks about Gram Panchayat being a constitutional body constituted for a term of five years. Today the excluded and marginalized communities are also participating in the development process. The increasing number of women participants has given positive hopes of penetration of democracy at local levels and despite their weak educational, social, political and economic status, today they are ready to take the responsibilities and carry them with efficacy. Today, although few instances but, there are changes in power relations of our society. The two women Sarpanches elected for the study differs in terms of their caste, education, and economic backgrounds, still both manages to bring their respective villages to development. The local self governance or grassroots democracy can never succeed without community participation. Therefore, the kind of leadership along with the participation from the entire village community plays an important role in bringing about real democratic decentralization.

CHAPTER 3

Indian Panchayats and Villages: Studies and Debates

Introduction

This chapter is about the various studies and debates conducted on the Indian villages and the Panchayats. The decades of 1950s and 60s were recognized as the watershed years in the study of villages. The social scientists made village studies as the entry point into the social, cultural and economic life of the nation. The numerous studies conducted on village by eminent sociologists like Andre Beteille, Louis Dumont, S.C Dube, M.N Srinivas are discussed in this chapter. Village is considered to be an ideal locale where the community ties bind the people together and its Panchayats form a close element of Indian traditional governance. The devolution of power and functions is an important aspect in the rural empowerment. Further, the chapter deals with the debate and discussion on villages and panchayats from the perspective of the national leaders like M.K.Gandhi, Jawaharalal Nehru, Dr. B.R Ambedkar and J.P Narayan who can be considered as the architect of Indian politics.

It is vital to perceive that for the social researchers in India, village has been a vital target for capturing the observational reality, as well as a basic sociological reality, the base of various methodological conceptualizations. The genre termed as 'village studies', has given an exceptionally noteworthy character to sociology studied in India, which is reflected in the immense assemblage of sound academic debates drawing in with the 'sociological reality of villages in India'. Within the history of sociology in India, 1960s is perceived for its fortifying, sagacious and scholastically enhancing conceptualizations referred to as 'village studies', that has assumed an imperative part in building up a sound disciplinary convention of enquiry.

The 'village in national imaginations', was the result of the British colonial rule and it is through the works of the colonial administrators that India was conceived as the place where there are 'village republics'. India was essentialized into a place where there are

villages, where the British colonial rulers imputed characteristics of autonomy, stagnation, and congruity to the village life in the subcontinent. The possibility of village was acknowledged as given, portraying the “essential” Indian realities. It obtained the status of signifier of the genuine local life, a cultural and social unit uncorrupted by outside impact (Mines and Yazgi 2010).

In the post Independent India, the centrality of village in the writings of nationalists was converted into concrete projects and strategies for desirable change in the rural areas after India's independence from the British in 1947. The major schemes, for example, Land Reforms, Community Development Programme, Green Revolution, and Integrated Rural Development Program were actualized to introduce an era of improvement, development, and modernization. The requirement for systematic rural development came to be even more underlined when the Planning Commission came up with community development programme as an essential segment of the five years plan (Dube, 1992: 72-81). In this attempt, social researchers assumed a critical part. Srinivas (1975: 1) contends that since independence the requirement for data, information and facts from the rural India by the Planning Commission and bureaus of Central and State governments pushed the social researchers, particularly the market analysts, sociologists, and political researchers to go to the rural territories, the villages and assemble data scientifically. This data was essential as the machineries of the government planned how to allocate resources for development and analyse how and whether diverse sections of individuals were gaining from these development programs. Breman (1997: 15-75) contends that state led rural development has always been important. As indicated by him the discourse on 'rural development', that is 'village developmentalised', includes –'the village colonized', 'the village nationalized' and 'the village anthropologised'.

Thakur (2014: 11-12) builds up an intriguing contention, where he expresses that the intervention of the state through the programmes and plans of rural development has changed the conceptual and empirical nature of village in India. It is imperative to realize that village studies in India need to connect with various parameters of characterizing village, as the rural development discourse is changing the significance and meaning of rural India. In India, village is used to depict a condition of either absence, presence or as

degrees of improvement. In this way, rural development is the medium in which village is placed in relation to national development. It is intriguing that, the state through its arrangement of rural development. As indicated by him, villages in India are organized as "statist" plans of rural development, in this way concentrating just on the underdevelopment part of it and eradicating its differences and specificity. It inspires the development of a unified monolithic village India subject to plans and policies from the state. In this setting, it is vital to concentrate on the nexus between sociological portrayal of village and policy making exercise with regards to rural development. It is vital to include the contention of Breman (1997:59), who is of the opinion that the state, through its policies make a 'monolithic village', so it is imperative to perceive that the village additionally redefines the state, as the "state is not only present in the village but the village also penetrates into the state". Subsequently as sociologists intrigued by village studies, ponders, one could mediate and connect with the changing political social reality of the village (Thakur, 2014:13).

Studies on Indian Villages

For social researchers, village turned into an advantageous methodological access point into the economic, social and cultural life of the country. It came to symbolize India as a microcosm-an "invaluable observation centre" where one could observe and participate. Beteille (1965, 1974: 269), while analyzing the scholarly custom of village studies in India, contends that the significance of the village inside Indian society is to be comprehended not just statistically but rather normatively too. The village was not just a place where individuals lived; it had a plan in which mirrored the essential values and traditions of Indian society. The reviews were done by social anthropologists amid the 1960s attempted to comprehend the central way of social relations in the Indian culture. As indicated by Beteille the two imperative concentrations of village studies incorporate; one archiving the way of traditional social existence of the non-western world and two, the worry in the sociologies for the plan of development study the "real" India, its social association, and social life.

Sharma (1969: 10) in view of the discussion between Louis Dumont and David Pocock and F.G Bailey in the Contributions to Indian Sociology, discussed about the basic

question whether village in India has a sociological reality. As indicated by Sharma, both Dumont and Pocock deny 'sociological reality' to the village in India. In their understanding, the essential component of social association is caste and kinship, and not the village. Sharma counters that by drawing upon the works by sociologists S.C Dube and M.N Srinivas and contends that despite numerous group memberships and participation, a village in India has its substance and we can't deny sociological reality. In post-independence India, one of the most initial push towards village studies was the request of planning scheme for information on the villages for the facts and data for outlining development programs. Srinivas (1975:1) contends that the concentration of these reviews were the economic aspect of the general population to archive up and coming financial issues of the rural masses. The financial aspects and material prosperity of the village turned into the concentration of village studies attempted then. By the 1950s the base of essential information had been aggregated, at any rate, to endeavor evaluating the national income of rural India with reasonable precision, to figure plans and programs for India's rural development, and to support studies and researches on an all-India scale for the planned development of India. Tragically that the economic specialists have disregarded social lattice of village community and the sociologists and social anthropologists have overlooked the monetary and class frameworks while leading village studies. As indicated by Srinivas, this mechanical prohibition of either part of social reality and dichotomizing of social universe of village life has made an unconventional distortion in our appreciation of the rural social structure and its changes.

The period of 1950 was extremely noteworthy from the perspective of village studies in India, where the concentration was to choose one village and analyse and examine it. S. C. Dube was occupied with the study of two Deccan villages Dewara and Shamirpet, M.N Srinivas was engaged with the study of Rampura in Mysore and the Coorgs of South India where he studied Religion and Society. David G. Mandelbaum studied the Kota village of the Nilgiri Hills, Morris E. Opler in the village of Senapur in the eastern Uttar Pradesh, Kathleen Gough in the village of Kumbapettao in the Tanjor area of Madras state, Mckim Marriott in the village of Kishan Garhi in Uttar Pradesh, F.G Bailey in the village of Bisipara and Bolscoopa in the slopes of Orissa, Alan R. Dabs in the village Hattarahalli in the Mysore state, G. Morris Carstairs in the village of the previous

condition of Udaipur, Marian W. Smith in some Punjab village, Jyotirmoyee Sharma in a village in West Bengal, W.H Newell in a Gaddi village in Himalayas, Eric J. Mill operator in the field in north Kerala and Colin Rosser in the remote village of Malana in the far away Kula valley of the Himalayas (Jodhka 2012, Singh 2009, Shah 2005, Rao 1974).

Srinivas warns sociologists against the assumptions that what is written is true and the older the manuscript, the truer its contents. For him Indology can develop only if along with 'book view' of India, comprehensive study of contemporary Indian reality is carried out through field view. He strongly argues for scientific, empirical village studies to correct the 'book view' and 'upper caste view' of many phenomenon of Indian society. Srinivas, while reflecting on field work, especially participant observation argued that social sciences in India, does not have a strong field work tradition and this reflects on its growth and development. Such a perspective has a number of impacts: one has alienated social scientists from grassroots reality and two, made them ignorant about the complex interaction of economic, political and social forces at local levels. This had made the 'educated elites' of India, who generally make up the class of social scientists regard the 'peasant as ignorant, tradition-bound and resistant to progress (Srinivas, 1975:1389). Gupta (2005) argues that social anthropology was challenged of its 'romanticized' notions of village in India, especially with the institutionalization of 'field view' perspective.

S.C Dube (1955) on village studies in India, justifies for the change in focus of the Social Anthropologists from tribal studies to village studies by arguing that there is a need for a clear conceptual framework for studying both the structural matrix of the village community and the change it is experiencing. For Dube, a systematic study of village communities will provide the requisite background data from which more purposeful planning can emerge. S.C Dube in his seminal work *Indian Village* in 1955, by presenting the physical, demographic and historical details and linking it to the caste, political, social and economic along with ritual structures to the ethos and ambience, is able to provide a vivid portrait of the village (Dube, 2007: 497). For Yogesh Atal, the two questions that were his main concern, includes the issue of representativeness of a

village that can a village represent the whole nation? And another, the challenges faced in developing a conceptual framework of a village. In situations where a village in the neighborhood of Delhi is compared with a village in Tamil Nadu, the utility of such a comparison is uncertain and representativeness of the compared villages is very much open to question. Further one also needs to recognize that provinces are organized for administrative purposes and their boundaries are defined mainly geographically but cultural boundaries do not necessarily coincide with the geographical (Atal, 1993). Thus one has to work towards developing Indian Village as a conceptual category.

Ramakrishna Mukherjee had a very different approach to village studies and provides a historical evolution of village studies in India. He focuses on rural discontent over poverty and squalor forced the British government to take into consideration the agrarian crisis and led to the appointment of the first Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1926. According to him, 'Village studies' should be used to collect data to understand rural life for better administration purposes (Mukherjee, 1981).

The upper caste bias is other important restrictions of village studies predominantly about the position and location of untouchables. There is essentially no reference to the notion of the village being a location of exploitation and discrimination in the rural studies. It was only in the decade of 1970's and more prominently in 1980's that the caste began to be observed at from a Dalit perspective (Jodhka S., 2002:3343-3353).

As Dipankar Gupta (2005:751-758) mentions,

"The village in India, where life was once portrayed as 'unchanging' and 'idyllic', has in recent decades seen profound changes. The twin shackles that once decided matters for India's villagers, caste, and agriculture, no longer exercise their vigorous hold. While a break in caste rigidities has fostered greater fluidity in occupational choices, agricultural stagnation has ensured the constant march, in increasing numbers, of employable people in the villages towards urban areas. At the same time, vote bank politics means that parties and politicians continue to pay lip-service to the cause of villages,

chiefly the poor farmer. It is in the light of these changes that the ‘culture’ surrounding agriculture and the village need to be understood”.

There are two points that need to be noted and worth mentioning in this context. The first is that while there is the acceptance of the fact that rural India is transforming in factual terms, yet on the theoretical stage the villagers and the villages still remain in the past. This is possibly due to the hangover of previous scholarship, as well as prevalent conceptions concerning India, that portrays Indian society to be fundamentally rural. So, the conjectural cum analytical frameworks remain in large part unaltered, whilst at the stage of statistics there is a strong recognition that things are as what they used to be and the second factor that needs to be identified in terms of present rural dynamics is that it's not urbanization that usually is the grave thing impacting on the rural India from the outside. The landholding structure is such that there are few opportunities available within the fields which could engage the rural populace on a sustained, albeit, sub-optimal, foundation. It is far real that the availability of urban jobs has made a difference; it is also true that there are greater electrified villages in India, many greater motorized motors, and better roads connecting country to village than was the case some decades in the past. Yet, it is not as if the village is remodeling internally entirely because urban inputs. In fact, it is the sheer inertia of the agrarian economy that rarely permits for any optimism, which is forcing people to look elsewhere for both livelihood and respectable recognition and identity.

If rural India has lost its centrality within the minds of most villagers in contemporary India today, it is not, as we stated earlier, only because an urban world has opened their horizons, rather the village economy itself has lost its sustaining strength. Such changes and transformations of India's villages were witnessed in the late 1950s. Some critiques, like McKim Marriot's *Village India* (1955), confirmed that India's villages have been no longer little republics. A select gathering of recognized anthropologists remarked on the way that the considerable culture of Hinduism communicates with the little societies of the villages and in that process, both are modified. Scarlett Epstein's work which was a longitudinal time study of two villages moreover exhibited the growing connection amongst village and nation. Given the situations, till the late 1960s and mid 1970s the

importance of cultivating was overwhelmingly noticeable, as likewise the occurrence of procured work even though automation had made a few advances into farming (Epstein, 1973:192).

The village has frequently been essentialized as an idyllic region where community ties bind the populace. These villages were little republics, immortal and perpetual as well, in their stasis, yet engagingly so. In such originations, the Indian village knows no detestable, and is counter posed to the brutal and shameless existence of the urban areas. This is the place the local "authentically" lives. Charles Metcalfe and James Mill were the most eminent among the writers who upheld this view. Indeed, even Marx, who resolutely championed dialectical movement, likewise fall prey to this 'village republic' conception of rural India. Dynasties may come and go, incredible wars might be battled by ambitious monarchs and potentates, and however, the unfaltering murmur of village life is barely at any point disturbed (Cohn 1987: 213). As indicated by Ronald Inden, colonial administrators saw the village as the atom of Indian civilization, no less (Inden 1990: 131). Quite a bit of this can be found in Gandhi's appeal to resuscitate the Indian village to its prior bona fide presence. He, obviously, perceived large portions of the inadequacies of rural life, however nursed the political objective of restoring the village to its unblemished ways.

Gandhi was not however unchallenged in the years paving the way to the national development. The Peasant leaders like Swami Sahajanand Saraswati delivered the cruelty of village life where the proprietors pillaged poor workers and lived off the best stuff around. The much expounded on jajmani framework was plainly a quite romanticized wonder (Wiser 1936; Beidelman 1959). Regardless of the possibility that the flawlessly organic division of labor based on caste did not quite exist, nevertheless, as M. N. Srinivas contended, "the power wielded by the dominant caste was real" (Srinivas 1987:59). Members of the dominant caste were the chief patrons of the village (Beteille 1980: 110-115). However, they needed to experience factional contentions inside (Dumont 1970: 163-64).

What remained undisputed was that daily existence, legislative issues, financial matters, and customs included turned around the dominant caste. The way that the village

community, howsoever characterized, did not mean egalitarianism comes through obviously underway of a few researchers, preeminent among them is M.N. Srinivas. Given the circumstances, the idea of the dominant caste does not illuminate village India today like it used to a couple of decades prior. Bose (1991), Bandopadhyaya and Von Eschen (1991), Harriss (1982), Sahay (2001), Chakravarti (2001) and a large group of different authors discussed about strains between agrarian classes, drawing out the serious asymmetry of rural social relations. So, for quite a while, village India has stopped to be a peaceful, charming rural shelter in scholarly compositions.

Generally, caste and village worked with each other in collaboration. If the village was said to be serene it was contended that rank belief system was in charge of it. This is how the highly vaunted jajmani framework worked. What most researchers neglected to notice was that the progressive system on the ground was not a result of ideological acceptance but rather a result of an unequal appropriation of wealth and influence in a closed agrarian economy. Truth be told, each position esteems itself and its custom practices vary, and no caste really trusts that it is essentially impure. In each case, these beginning stories review a mythic past when as far as anyone knows, when a 'low standing' really held a high status in the far-off past. Loss of status occurred in such cases because sophistry, double dealing, inversions in war, and now and again likewise because the divine beings were peculiar. Nevertheless, for no reason did the individuals from the purported bring down position take an interest eagerly in their own oppression. Nor is it that thoughts of greatness manifest once a rank has financial and political power. These thoughts are dependably there, aside from that they can't be extraverted when conditions are not favorable as in a closed village economy under the influence of a dominant caste. As this part of unlimited strength is quickly turning into a relic of times gone by in Indian villages, the assertion of caste identities is winding up noticeably to a great deal more strident and out in the open. This is additionally why caste issues have such a great amount of procurement in contemporary India.

The idea of the isolation and self-sufficiency of the Indian village was first propounded by Sir Charles Metcalfe in 1830, and since then it has had distinguished supporters, scholars as well as politicians. Sir Henry Maine and Karl Marx supported the idea, and in

recent times, Mahatma Gandhi and his followers not only stated that Indian village was traditionally self-sufficient but also wanted a political programme which would restore to these villages their pristine self-sufficiency. Charles Metcalfe (1833) writes;

"The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations...If a country remains for a series of years the scene of continued pillage and massacre, so that the villages cannot be inhabited, the scattered villagers nevertheless return whenever the power of peaceable possession revives. A generation may pass away, but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take the places of their fathers; the same site for the village, the same positions for the houses, the same lands, will be preoccupied by the descendants of those who were driven out when the village was depopulated; and it is not a trifling matter that will drive them out, for they will often maintain their post through times of disturbance and convulsion, and acquire strength sufficient to resist pillage and oppression with success".

About forty years later, Sir Henry Maine (1871:19) revived the idea of the self-sufficiency of the Indian village:

"For the most part, the Indian village communities have always submitted without resistance to oppression by monarchs surrounded by mercenary armies. I have several times spoken of them as organized and self-acting. They in fact include a nearly complete establishment of occupations and trades for enabling them to continue their collective life without assistance from any person or body external to them"

As M.N Srinivas puts it that the caste is even nowadays an institution of exceptional strength, and as marriage and inter-dining are forbidden with members of other castes, the members of a caste residing in a village have many crucial ties with their fellow caste men dwelling in neighboring villages. These ties are so powerful that a few people have been led into affirming that the solidarity of the village is a myth and that the only thing

which counts is caste. Secondly, although communications between villages are nevertheless poor and were much poorer in the past, they were far from being self-contained. It is argued that the many and robust ties between villages came in the way of the development of a sense of village unity. If inside the nucleated villages, a sense of harmony is weakened if not destroyed by caste and by the interdependence of villages it ought to be even weaker in dispersed villages. The unity of caste is so great that it nullifies the unity of the village community in those villages in which more than one caste exists. It undertakes numerous activities, and occasionally, the members of a sub-caste living in neighboring villages meet to consider a matter of common concern to the caste. But all this does not make a caste self-sufficient.

The castes living in a village or other local area are interdependent economically and otherwise. Ideally, each caste enjoys a monopoly of an occupation, and this monopoly both unites as well as divides the people enjoying the monopoly. While the members resent other castes taking over their occupation (this is not true of agriculture though) and secrets of the occupation are closely guarded among the members, rivalry between the members for the custom of the other castes is an important fact that divides them. The fact that the members of a caste in a village are, at any rate in south India, linked by ties of kinship but it does not lessen the rivalry. It is true that a man does not easily change his barber or carpenter or washer man or potter as payment is made annually in kind like grain, as such old relationships are respected. But this does not mean that continued inefficiency or non-payment will be tolerated for a long time.

The concept of the "dominant caste" given by M.N Srinivas is relevant in this connection. A caste is dominant while it is numerically the most powerful within the village or local place and economically and politically exercises a preponderating impact. It need not be the highest caste in terms of conventional and traditional ranking of castes. Any caste can be the dominant caste in an area though he did not come across the Untouchables being dominant anywhere. Occasionally, a group initially outside the Hindu fold, which includes the *Coorgs* or the *Raj Gonds* may become dominant by virtue of their numbers, wealth, and martial prowess. The point that is important here is that the dominant caste

supports and maintains the total system. The dominant caste respects the code of every caste even when some features of its code are divergent, from the code of the dominant caste. Disputes occurring among the non-dominant castes are occasionally taken to the elders of the dominant caste. The autonomy of a caste court is only part of the story—there is a tendency to refer disputes upwards locally to the elders of the dominant caste as quite a few contributors have noticed. The Peasant (Okkaliga) elders of Rampura were frequently being called to settle disputes among the other castes including Muslims. This tendency does not probably obtain north of the Vindhyas.

The ties cutting across the lines of caste are then as important as the ties of kinship. Emphasis on horizontal ties at the expense of vertical ones has been the cause of much confusion. Village unity cannot, however, be reduced to the interplay of these various ties and relationship. It is normally not visible, but some incident suddenly and strikingly reveals its existence. When the village is threatened with an epidemic or drought or floods or fire, or when the government passes an order, which the villagers regard as unjust, or on certain religious occasions, or in a fight with a neighboring village, the unity of the village reveals itself in an unmistakable manner. Though the Indian village by no means had a community in the sense in which the category is thought in the western social sciences, there has been a sense of collective identity that the villagers shared. The disintegration of the caste and hierarchical social order has additionally weakened this experience of collective identity considerably. It has different implications for unique sets of populations and there can be distinctive approaches of looking at these changes. For those on the margins, specifically the ex-untouchable dalits, this alteration has only been for the better. It has freed them from the oppressive normative order of caste and the traditional valued body of hierarchy. For the dominant and the upper castes, this has intended an end to their power and privilege. No longer surprisingly, they have been the ones who complained the maximum about the change. At another level, this “disintegration” of the community and the process of individualization also produce a neo-liberal sensibility. Desire for mobility, growing reach of electronic media, cell phones and culture of consumption brings in the lifestyles of the urban middle classes to the village, a subject of much significance with multiple implications – social, economic, and political.

The village community which was earlier considered as self-sufficient requires certain institution for local level governance so that democracy can penetrate to the masses. Thus, the efficient functioning of democracy demands involvement of the people at the diverse stages of administration. The prime objective of the implementation of Panchayati Raj Act is to reinforce the foundation of democracy at the grassroots by decentralizing powers, functions, and responsibilities to the people. The rules regarding local governance are mentioned in very few constitutions globally. The Constitution of India initially contained provisions regarding local self-government only in the state list of Seventh Schedule and an article in Directive Principles of State Policy. The detailed provision regarding establishment of Panchayats and their powers and functions was provided with the enactment of 73rd Amendment Act 1992. The institution of Panchayati Raj is a sphere where people can directly participate in the governance process and hence is viewed as a “developmental mechanism”. The Panchayati Raj Institution is the medium of implementing developmental schemes and programmes at the grassroots, which can be percolated to all the sections of our society irrespective of class, caste, and gender.

Constitutionalisation of PRI

Village communities have been surviving in India for centuries and Panchayats form a close element of the Indian culture. It has taken excellence and culture of centuries to establish the institutions of Panchayats. Post-independence efforts were made to establish and concretize the institutions of local governance but it all went into darkness as the subject of people’s participation at grass root level was not seen as important. After independence, government at the center and the state attempted to develop rural India but the rural fraction remained underdeveloped with no infrastructure and basic amenities of electricity, roads, schools, and poor opportunity for livelihood.

The theoretical background which framed the idea of 73rd Amendment Act was an effort to mitigate the occurrence of rural poverty and restructuring of government’s work culture. Both center and the state were the think tank behind this idea and PRI was a panacea for the crisis the government was facing at that time. The PRI in its revitalized form seeks to hasten equity and social justice to attain the objective of democratic

decentralization. The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act and the state wise regulations had once again highlighted the already stretched subject of grassroots democratic process. This was a result of the notion that government at the center cannot achieve growth and development in the society without direct participation of the people in department. This experience alerted that the success of PRIs depends on the commitment of the people, their leaders and officials and their role play in new system. Decentralization focuses on execution and implementation of schemes to meet the local needs, to channelize the potential of people towards socio economic rebuilding and community involvement in new institutions. Not only does it leaves the power to decide future in hands of people but also relieves higher government of its work.

The ancient village system of India was independently organized with autonomy in functions and financial matters. There was a sanction of fellow community and society for the authority, power and responsibilities which were conventionally evolved and the consent of the community was given for carrying on duties. The village problems and issues were decided in the meetings of this village community which assembled occasionally. There was a position of village headman who was entrusted various roles and duties and was held accountable in these village community meetings. The traditional village panchayat was a body of elders of the village who were recognized as the leaders of the village without any kind of formal elections (Altekar, 1927). With the coming of Panchayati Raj, the development could be carried out at the grassroots level through its various bodies and ensure participation of the masses. The Community Development Programme of 1952 played a significant role in this regard. Today, analysts are confronted with the issue that whether there is dichotomy between “Panchayati Raj as a developmental mechanism and Panchayati Raj as a democratic institution” (Mathur and Narain, 1969:109).

The Community Development Programme (meaning voluntary self-help by the village community) was launched in 1952 for uplifting the social and economic life of the natives of the villages. It called for active participation from all sections of the village population without which any such effort would not be able to sustain. After Independence, there was plethora of government welfare schemes such as Five-Year

Plans which was designed to enable people to live dignified life. Rajeshwar (1997) says, “They provided with various employment facilities and opportunities to set up industries and the training to improve their agricultural production. Cooperative societies and other such bodies were set up for them to undertake various activities of development planning”. To meet this goal, Community Development Programme and National Extension Services were launched, which failed to bring about the desired participation. After the failure of both these schemes, a committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta which submitted its report in 1957 and hence the foundation of Panchayati Raj in India was laid. Mahipal (1977:73) writes, “The committee broadly suggested two points for participation of the local people in decision-making process. First, administrative decentralization and second, bringing it under the control of elected bodies for effective implementation of developmental programmes”. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report recommended three tier systems for Panchayati Raj Institutions in India with Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad at different levels and it came into force after the failure of Community Development Programme and National Extension Services.

The Balwant Rai Mehta Report made some recommendations such as;

- i. The content of the programme and priorities assigned to different fields or activity within it;
- ii. The arrangements for the execution of the programme with special reference to;
 - a) Intensification of activities in the sphere of agricultural production.
 - b) Coordination between:
 - 1) The different ministries/Departments at the centre;
 - 2) The centre and the states; and
 - 3) The different agencies, within the communist projects administrations and other state govt. organisations and Department;

- 4) The organizational structure and methods of work with a view to securing a greater speed in the dispatch of business;
- iii. The assessment of the requirements of personnel for community Projects and National Extension Service and examination of existing training facilities, in order to meet the growing requirements of personnel for extending the coverage of the programme.
- iv. The assessment of the extent to which the movement has succeeded in utilizing local initiative and in creating institutions to ensure continuity in the process of improving economic and social conditions in rural areas.
- v. The methods adopted for reporting upon the results attained by the community projects and National Extension Service.
- vi. Any other recommendation that the team may like to make in order to ensure economy and efficiency in the working of the community projects and the National Extension Service.

The committee had also suggested drafting the constitutional Amendment Bill for awarding constitutional status to the Panchayats. The Ashok Mehta committee gave district as the first point of decentralization, under popular supervision, below the state level. The establishment of democratic bodies below the state level is an imperative from the political and social development perspectives. The committee also observed that, "at the grass roots level, village Panchayats is both an end and a means. As an end, it is the inevitable extension of democracy to the village, which in turn, makes it the base of the democratic pyramid in the country. As a means, it should emerge as a system of democratic local Government discharging all functions related to integrated rural economy" (Desai, p.16).

To review the working and functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India, various committees have been formed from time to time; Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), Ashok Mehta Committee (1977), G.V.K Rao Committee (1985) and L.M. Singhvi

Committee (1986). Along with these Committees some states also set up their own committees to assess the functioning of the Panchayati Raj and to suggest measures for their improvement. These committees are; the Purshottam Pai Committee (1964), Ramchandra Reddy Committee (1965), and Narsimhan Committee in Andhra Pradesh. Basappa Committee (1963) in Karnataka. Naik Committee (1961), Bongiwan Committee in Maharashtra. Mathur Committee (1963), Sadiq Ali Committee (1963), G.L.Vyas committee in Rajasthan, and Govind Sahai Committee (1959), Murti Committee (1965) in Uttar Pradesh are among some of the examples in this regard. But among all these committees, the Ashok Mehta committee was the major committee which reviewed the present existing structure of three- tier governance. The Ashok Mehta committee was appointed during the Janta Government in 1977 to evaluate the working of Panchayats and to suggest measures to strengthen them. The Ashok Mehta committee, while reviewing and evaluating the panchayati Raj observed;

"Politically speaking, it became a process of democratic seed drilling in the Indian soil, making an average citizen more conscious of his rights than before. Administratively speaking, it bridged the gulf between the bureaucratic elite and the people, socio-culturally speaking, it generated a new leadership which was not merely relatively young in age but also modernistic and pro social change in outlook. Finally, looked at from the developmental angle, it helped the rural people cultivate or developmental psyche".

Ashok Mehta Committee recommended;

- i. More genuine and effective devolution of powers to Panchayats raj should take place;
- ii. Primary unit in panchayati raj system should be Zila Parishad and not the Panchayat Samiti, as the Parishad has better leadership and resources to play a substantial development role;
- iii. The Mandal Panchayat with appropriate powers and resources and covering a smaller area than development block and larger one than

village Panchayats, should replace the Panchayat Samiti and the Panchayat as it would be more effective in management of development resources;

- iv. Administrative wing of Zila Parishad in particular and also that of Mandal Panchayat should be suitably stopped and appropriately led by well qualified senior civil servants;
- v. Below the Mandal Panchayat there should be village committee including substantially weak sections of people, to perform functions allocated it by the Mandal Panchayat;
- vi. In order to bring appropriate coordination between rural development and urban development, municipal bodies should have representation in Zila Parishad and Mandal Panchayat;
- vii. Political parties should take part in elections to Panchayat Raj and participate in its working as this would make it more coherent in working and;
- viii. For improving the capabilities and reorienting the attitudes of people's representatives as well as of bureaucracy within Panchayati Raj a massive programme and training are set up in place of the existing limited one.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions were given constitutional status only after 73rd Amendment Act was passed in 1992 but the father of the Indian constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was not in favor of including village Panchayats in the constitution. He condemned village Panchayats, "I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India. What is the village but sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness, and communalism" (Mishra & Mishra, 1995:27). As caste was an important institution of rural India, he opined that village republics spelled ruination for the country. Similarly, Jawaharlal Nehru also had certain views on village republic which he summarized as, "I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village normally speaking is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from backward environment; narrow minded people are much

more likely to be untruthful and violent” (Manipal, 2009:70-71). Therefore, it was only M.K. Gandhi who was the main supporter for the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. He gave a clarion call for grassroots democracy and that the real democracy begins from the bottom of the pyramid. He was impressed by the idea of ancient village where harmony, brotherhood, peace, and self-sufficiency played an important role. He described villages as, “my idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others which dependence is a necessity” (Harijan, 1942). He stressed for greater autonomy and power for the panchayats which will be better for the people. “If the villages perish, India will perish too” (Harijan, August 29, 1926). Gandhi stood for decentralization of powers. He was for self-rule of villages through sarpanches and panches. While on the other hand, Dr. Ambedkar was of opposite opinion on villages as he considered, “cesspool of cruelty, caste prejudice and communalism. No human rights would be safe if left to dominant groups that had oppressed minorities for centuries in the most inhuman fashion”.

The Article 40 in Part IV of the Directive Principles of the State Policy of our constitution says, “The state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self- government.” The Panchayati Raj Institution was first inaugurated on 2nd October 1959 at Nagaur in Rajasthan by the Prime Minister Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru where he observed, “the progress of our country is bound up with the progress in our villages. If our villages make progress, India will become a strong nation” (Ibid, p. 18). Andhra Pradesh was the second state to introduce Panchayati Raj system and by 1960s most of the states had launched the Panchayati Raj system.

The G.V.K. Rao committee was in broad agreement with the main recommendations of the two previous committees namely C. H. Hanumantha Rao and M. C. Dantawala committee. Both these committees after studying the various aspects of decentralized planning at the district and block level had recommended that the basic decentralized planning functions must be done at the district level. The district is the basic unit of decentralization. In addition, in 1986, the government of India set up another committee under the chairmanship of L.M. Singhvi to put together a concept paper on the

revitalization of the Panchayati Raj institutions. The committee advocated that the local self-government should be constitutionally identified, protected, and preserved through the inclusion of a new chapter within the charter.

It was against this background, that on 15th May, 1989, the Rajiv Gandhi government delivered the constitution (sixty fourth) amendment bill in the Lok Sabha which was adopted by the house in August 1989. However, it was defeated in the Rajya Sabha in October 1989. The government failed to secure a two thirds majority in the Rajya Sabha. In 1990, when the V. P. Singh government came to power, the government took a fresh view about the subject and after consultation with the chief ministers of the states. Another Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in September 1990. The V.P. Singh government's initiative as the Constitutional Amendment Bill could not be taken up for consideration as the Lok Sabha was dissolved on 7th November 1990. In 1991, when the Narsimha Rao government came to power at the Centre, based on the recommendations of a group of ministers, the constitution (Seventy Second) Amendment Bill 1991 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 16th September 1991. In December 1991, the Bill was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for its examination. Based on its recommendations and a consensus, a revised constitution (Seventy Second) Amendment Bill 1991 was piloted which was finally passed by Parliament on 22 December 1992, as the constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Bill. After rectification by more than half the State Assemblies, the President gave his assent on 20 April 1993. The Act was brought into force by a government notification on 24th April and 1993 as the Constitutional (Seventy Third) Amendment Act 1992.

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 has given a new dimension to the concept of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. The main objective of enacting this 73rd Amendment Act is to improve the participation of the people in the process of development at the local level. All the states have amended fresh Act on Panchayats as provisions laid down under this Amendment Act of 1992. The seventy-third amendment is celebrated as an important benchmark in the political and social history of India. Politically it envisages constituting a new India which would be more democratic, more dynamic and which would have a more egalitarian power structure. Through the

instrument of 'direct democracy', Panchayati Raj would turn the traditional 'hierarchical power structure' upside down and would bring democracy closest to people, thus flattening the power structure by making it more broad-based. Socially, it envisions the 'inclusion' of hitherto excluded groups (like Dalits, Tribals, and Women) by providing for their participation in decision making processes.

The importance of Panchayati Raj institutions as means of rural reconstruction and development requires no emphasis. They have been provided with wider powers and authority and financial resources not only as bodies of political participation but also as institutions of economic and social development. Panchayati Raj Institutions has come to be linked with two broad images. Firstly, it is governance by itself and secondly it is an organization of the state government. The integrated attempt of planning for economic and social development, co-ordinate roles, and the contemporary structure is a three-tier representative system of the government where the elected leaders, administrators and local masses participate in the developmental exercise. In fact the elected representatives also play the major role in the decision making procedure, leaders are regarded as facilitators of the process of this development. Since the prominence of rural development schemes are bringing about people's active participation in the development project, it is possible to accomplish this through the leaders. The development of the villages and such institutions are to be galvanized to turn into effective instruments of economic and social change.

Rural Development and PRI: Devolution of Power and Functions

Devolution of power and functions refers to the empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions to enjoy financial and functional autonomy. The intent of constitutional amendment is to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) with adequate powers to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. The Article 243-G of the Constitution provides that the States and UTs may bestow Panchayats with such powers and functions to enable them to prepare plans for economic development and social justice to be implemented. Rajasthan is one of the states which have devolved powers and functions to these bodies. Further, the Constitution empowers Panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls, and fees (Article 243-H). To strengthen their financial

base, a State Finance Commission must be constituted every fifth year to recommend the distribution of the State resources to Panchayats.

The Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 makes provisions relating to finances for all three tiers of the Panchayats. Emanating from the mandate under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the Rajasthan State Finance Commission was constituted on April 23rd, 1994, to make recommendations for augmenting financial resources of Panchayats and give suggestions for implementing these recommendations. The State Finance Commission (SFC) had found after considering the receipts and expenditures of the Rajasthan Government over 1991-92 to 1995-96 that the State hardly had any resources to spare for the local bodies. The SFC recommended that 2.18 percent of the net proceeds of all state taxes be placed in a "divisible pool" for being devolved in the ratio of 3:4 upon the PRIs and the urban local bodies.

With the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1993, a clear-cut role of the PRIs in rural development has been laid down and the Centre as well as the state government is now increasingly seeking the assistance of the PRIs in implementation of various schemes. The Zila Pramukh has been made the Chairman of the DRDA and the Collector has been made the executive Director of the DRDA. The everyday operations have been entrusted to an official of additional Collector rank who is called the project Director. Since the undertaking Director has also been made ex-officio chief government Officer (CEO) of the Zila Parishad, an additional CEO has also been appointed for the work of the Zila Parishad. The CEO is known as the project Director of DRDA. The Collector continues to exercise all powers beneath the designation of ex-officio chief executive officer of the DRDA. The DRDA is unfastened to put into effect its projects. Today, the PRIs are additional implementation mechanism for the DRDA.

Through the new roles of the Zila Pramukh as chairman of DRDA and the project Director as CEO of the Zila Parishad, it is believed that the DRDA has successfully been merged with the Zila Parishad. The DRDA is now a financing body for the Zila Parishad. The decisions are taken at the Gram Sabha level, forwarded to the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad, and applied by them, with financing from the DRDA. The primary goals of the rural development Programmes are poverty alleviation among rural mass,

improvement of sturdy infrastructure for financial and social development of rural regions, era of more employment opportunities and investment in rural areas, elimination of rural disparity and to enable weaker sections to steer a better social and economic life.

The relevance of Panchayati Raj is greater for rural development as it is a catalytic agent as well as a significant segment of rural development. The advantages are derived from its ability to involve people in decision-making. It plays a significant role in the implementation of various programmes of rural development. It brings awareness and motivates people to nurture development psyche, discover dormant resources, skills and endeavor to encourage them. The Panchayati Raj Institutions in India are the chief instruments of decentralization at grass roots level and assume importance owing to the requirements to deal with the relentless demographic pressures and full use of scarce resources for development. In our country Panchayati Raj Institutions are looked upon as instruments of rural development. The objectives of both the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Rural Development are the two sides of a coin.

In the post-Independence period, the Government has accorded the highest priority to rural development, to increase agricultural production, create employment, eradicate poverty, and bring about an all-round improvement, in the rural economy. The decision of development will be more suitable if it considers opinions of the village people, identify the priorities, and implement the programmes for the rural people. Thus, rural development has been understood in various ways: it aims at improving the economic and social life of a specific group of people - the rural poor; it involves the extension of the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in rural areas.

Even before Independence, Rabindranath Tagore thought of rural development and launched a programme centered at Shantiniketan in Birbhum district of West-Bengal. Tagore's interest was in the all-round development of the village people, economically, educationally, and aesthetically. Mosher (1997: 29) writes that "Tagore aimed at inducing each villager to work to the limit of his capacity, and to help his fellowmen. Tagore

believed in both Self-help and mutual help and was one of the first to recognize the need for a change in the outlook of villagers as pre-condition for improvement".

Rural development received mass popular support, for the first time with the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into public life. The resolution for non-cooperation moved by Mahatma Gandhi and passed in the annual session of Indian National Congress in September 1920, articulated the approach to rural development by recommending "hand spinning in every house and hand weaving on the part of the millions of weavers who have abandoned their ancient and honorable calling for want of encouragement" (Maheshwari, 1985:24).

For the successful implementation of rural development programmes, people's participation is very essential. People's participation implies participation at all the stages of the programme viz. decision-making, planning, formulation, implementation, sharing the benefits of development monitoring and evaluation (Mishra, 1989, p.143). In the past, several attempts were made to solve the multi-dimensional rural problems by launching various development programmes. Development of rural areas and rural people has been the central concern of development planning in India: Rural India which encompasses three-fourth of the country's population is characterized by low income levels, not even adequate to ensure a quality of life compatible with physical wellbeing. The first comprehensive approach to rural development was introduced in India in 1952 through the Community Development Programme, which was India's first experiment with rural development. It was a comprehensive self-help movement which embraced multi-faceted development, viz education, health, drinking water, roads, agricultural production, and Cottage industries.

Jawaharlal Nehru on one occasion described community development programme (CDP) in the following words: "I think nothing has happened in any country in the world during the last few years so big in content and so revolutionary in design as the community development projects in India" (as quoted in Maheshwari, op.cit., p. 38).

Rural development is intimately linked to the process of socio-economic reconstruction in the rural areas. The ideas and practices concerning rural development can be traced to the colonial period. During the colonial era, various experiments were taken up mainly by

the state for the social and economic reconstruction of the rural areas. Though these experiments were confined to small areas, they contributed a great deal to the pool of ideas on rural development and reconstruction. For Surinder S. Jodhka (2003: 3343) rural development has been among the most critical components of the official discourse on social and economic change during the post-Independence period in India. This is quite understandable, given that at the time of India's Independence nearly 85% of the Indian population lived in it more than half a million rural settlements, the "rural" had to be among the foremost concerns of the emerging democratic state. "Rural" was not merely a site of backwardness. It was where the soul of India lived, in its fields, in its working kisans and in its traditions.

After independence, the Indian state was designed to work against the backdrop of poverty and underdevelopment. The Indian state had to undertake policies that were essentially development-oriented. The priority was to undertake speedy development at the national level. The First Five Year Plan undertook various plans and programmes for economic generation and rural reconstruction in the country, which resulted in to the introduction of CDP. Among other things, this programme was meant to foster unity and bring about progress in the country. Very early on the policy makers had realized that economic development in India would be impossible to achieve without tackling poverty and underdevelopment at the rural level. Two issues were at the forefront of the debate on rural development during the early decades after independence. First issue centers around the theme of participation.

It was realized that the Community Development Programme did not yield result primarily due to the lack of the involvement of the people. How to ensure the people's participation and a sustained it is necessary to consider major concerns of the policy makers. The concern for appropriate institutions was the second issue that confronted the policy makers in India. All the recommendations offered by several committees as discussed above focused primarily on these two issues. The 72nd and 73rd Constitutional Amendments Acts have tried to deal with both the issues. The debate is far from over. The theme of rural development remains one of the important issues in the realm of Indian politics today.

Village and Panchayati Raj in India

The Indian villages are one of the important institutions in the society. Gandhi has been rightly known as the ideologue of the village, as such celebrated the Indian village life as no one else did. He also wrote and spoke a great deal on various aspects of village life. Though, he was not born in a village but much of his social and political philosophy revolved around the idea of the village. Gandhi became preoccupied with 'the Indian village' right from his days in South Africa and remained so until the end of his life. However, his ideas on village, as also his politics, evolved with time and underwent some important changes along with his political career. There are at least three different stages or ways in which he used the idea of the Indian village.

“In the first, he invoked it to establish equivalence of the Indian civilization with the west. In the second, he counter posed the village to the city and presented the village-life as a critique of, and an alternative to, the modern western culture and civilization. In the third phase of his engagement, he was concerned with the actual existing villages of India and emphasized on the ways and means of reforming them. Though he continued to see village as an alternative way of living, he also found many faults with the existing lifestyle of the rural people in the Indian countryside. It was perhaps in 1894 that Gandhi for the first time invoked the idea of the Indian village as a political symbol” (Jodhka, 2001:3343-33353).

The idea of village was used to further corroborate his argument and establish equivalence of the Indians with the ruling Britishers. Village, for Gandhi, was not merely a place where people lived in small settlements working on land. For him, it reflected the essence of Indian civilization. The Indian village had a design, a way life, which had the potential of becoming an alternative to the city based and technology driven capitalist west. Empirically such villages did exist in the past and one might still find them in the interiors of India. Drawing support for his argument from Sir Henry Maine's writings, he argued in *Harijan* in 1939: “Indian society was at one time unknowingly constituted on a non-violent basis. The home life, i.e. the village, was undisturbed by the periodical visitations from barbarous hordes” (Gandhi 1978:4).

The Gandhian ideology firmly believes in the economy of self-reliance and self-sufficiency of villages, and village as the basic unit of administration. Gandhian Line of thinking was based on the ancient village republic model of India. Gandhiji had a vision of self-sustained village where people can manage their own affair. He regarded village panchayat as an institution by itself. According to Gandhi,

"Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs... This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces ... In this structure, composed of innumerable villages there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom" (Gandhi, 1993:36)

Gandhiji, while propagating the idea of village republic in the ancient Vedic model, was also quite aware of the obstacles in the practical implementation of his ideas. He was cautious of the kind of social maladies the village social milieu was undergoing at that time. The barriers of castes fragmented village community. The dichotomy of touchable and untouchables was quite prominent and had gathered dangerous dimensions. In this context Gandhiji wrote,

"I regard village Panchayat as an institution by itself. But thanks to degradation of caste system of government and the growing illiteracy of the masses, this ancient and noble institution has fallen into destitute, and where it has not, it has lost its former purity and hold. It must, however, be revived at any cost if the village are not to be ruined" (Gandhi, 1931).

Gandhiji was equally concerned for the socio-political segregation of women. He gave a clarion call to the women folk to join national politics. The independence struggle got activated when women in large numbers joined it. He was quite optimistic about women's participation in national politics as well as the local government. He had immense faith in women's power and always advocated for the liberation of womanhood from the bondage

of orthodoxy and stigma. He told, "If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house suddenly discovered, what a celebration it would occasion. Similarly, women's marvelous power is lying dormant. If the women of Asia wake up- they will dazzle the world" (Mukherjee, 1995).

After Gandhi, Nehru was perhaps the most important and influential leader of the Indian nationalist movement. Apart from being an important ideologue of the Indian National Congress, he also became the first prime minister of independent India. He was the catalyst of the approach India chose for its development after it achieved independence from colonial rule. Though Nehru worked under the leadership of Gandhi and gave him a good deal of respect, his ideas on the nature of India's past and his vision of its future were different from those of Gandhi. These differences were also reflected in his views on the Indian village. Unlike Gandhi, Nehru perhaps never identified himself with the village. He was also quite self-conscious about his urban and upper middle-class upbringing. He admits in his *Autobiography* (first published in 1936) that until 1920 or so his 'political outlook' was that of his class, 'entirely bourgeoisie'. It was only when he started his political career and came in direct contact with the common rural masses of India that he began to think differently. It was "a new picture of India...naked, starving, crushed, and utterly miserable" (ibid: 52).

As was the case with Gandhi, Nehru's writings on village too have several different strands and could be classified into two or three categories. First, as in Gandhi, the idea of the Indian village communities is also quite central to his notion of traditional India. However, his approach to the 'realities' of rural classes as he saw them during his encounters with 'the existing rural India' was very different from Gandhi's. As mentioned above, Nehru's importance also lies in the fact that he was the first prime minister of independent India and played a crucial role in shaping its policies and programmes for development. His comments on how rural India ought to be developed also reflect his notion of Indian village life. His ideas on the traditional Indian society are perhaps best spelt out in his well-known book, *Discovery of India* (first published in 1946). Although Nehru's approach to the understanding of Indian past was historical in

nature, he apparently looked at the 'old' social structure of Indian society from an evolutionary angle.

This is specifically so in his discussion on village and caste. "The autonomous village community, caste and the joint family", that he identified as the three primary concepts of the "old Indian social structure", had something in common with conventional or traditional societies in general because the organizing principles were identical everywhere. In most of these three it is the group that counts; the individual has a secondary location. There is nothing particular about all this, when held separately, and it is simple to find something equivalent to any of these three in other countries, particularly in medieval times (Nehru, 1946:244).

He further elaborated his 'functionalist' notion of an integrated traditional village society in the following text: The functions of each group or caste were related to functions of the other castes, and the idea was that if each group functioned successfully within its own framework, then society worked harmoniously. Over and above this, a strong and successful attempt was made to create a common national bond which would hold all these groups together the sense of a common culture, common traditions, common heroes and saints, and common land to the four corners of which people went on pilgrimage. This national bond was of course very different from present-day nationalism; it was weak politically, but socially and culturally it was strong (ibid: 248).

Though Nehru did not celebrate the old 'village republics' of India as Gandhi did, the sources of their understanding of India's past seem to be common. Nehru too seems to have read the writings of colonial administrators and western scholars on the 'traditional Indian society' quite uncritically. This is best reflected in his comments on the 'old' agrarian economy. He writes: "Originally the agrarian system was based on a cooperative or collective village. Individuals and families had certain rights as well as certain responsibilities, both of which were determined and protected by customary law" (ibid: 246). Similarly, in relation to village panchayats and political spirit of the traditional Indian village, he reinforced the prevailing notion about the village society as having been economically stagnant and community-oriented but democratically organized. The traditional social structure emphasized 'the duties of the individual and the group' and

not 'their rights'. However, he additionally focused on the fact that one of these system of village republics had for long, degenerated into a society that become marked by diverse ills. there has been a clear shift in Nehru's dialogue on village life as he moved closer to modern times. He appears to have become increasingly more critical of the past structures, especially of caste based hierarchies, which, in his scheme of things, ought to have no location in contemporary modern-day societies. Unlike Gandhi, Nehru saw no virtues in reviving the traditional social order.

Nehru's view on the village and caste system is best presented in the following passage from *Discovery of India*:

“the ultimate weakness and failing of the caste system and the Indian social structure were that they degraded a mass of human beings and gave them no opportunities to get out of that condition – educationally, culturally, or economically...In the context of society today, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive, and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within its framework, nor can there be political democracy, and much less, economic democracy” (Nehru 1946:254).

This shift becomes even more evident from his comments and observation on Indian rural society of the colonial period. Not only did he become more critical of the traditional social order but also viewing about the existing social and economic structures of the village society in terms of 'social classes' by referring the peasants (kisans) and landlords as social classes. His writings clearly reflect a modernist attitude to the village class structure. For example, he referred to the landlords as a “physically and intellectually degenerate” class, which had 'outlived their day' (Nehru 1980:52). On the other end, the peasants or “the kisans, in the villages” constituted the real masses of India.

On the issue of centralization vs. decentralization of power, Nehru observed the necessity for both, even though, there are contradictions. In his inaugural address at the 23rd annual meeting of the Central Board of Irrigation and Power at New Delhi on 17 November 1952, he pointed out that, how “civilization is important in the Modern world, it is

inevitable whether it is Government or anything else. It may give you better result, it may produce better efficiency and all the rest of it, although a stage arrives in the process of centralization when perhaps efficiency does not grow, it lessens. Undoubtedly, the greater the centralization, the less the individual independence, although some better result might be obtained." He visualized, therefore, a balance between the needs of centralization and of independence to be arrived at through political decentralization. In Panchayati Raj he saw that decentralization is necessary for a healthy base of democracy. Further at the 3rd Annual General Body meeting of the PRI held on April 6, 1967, he told 'It is true, I think, that our experience of Panchayati Raj has been distressing. But real democracy cannot be at the top; it can be only at the bottom.' Nehru always advocated for the administration to be functional in accordance with the public will, always thinking of public grievances trying to remedy them also. He, in a speech, asserted as follows;

"Over 80 percent of our people live in villages. India is poor because the villages of India are poor. India will be rich if the villages of India are rich. Therefore, the basic problem of India is to remove the poverty from the Indian villages. Some years ago, we abolished the Zamindari and Jagirdari system in various parts of India, because the villages of India could not prosper under a semi-feudal system of land ownership. This is not enough. We have to go ahead further...Panchayats should be given greater power. We want the villager to have a measure of real swaraj in his own village. He should have power and not have to refer everything to big officials. We do not want the officials to interfere too much in the life of the village. We want to build swaraj right from the village" (Nehru, 1993:2)

When compared with Gandhi and Nehru, the influence of B R Ambedkar was rather limited, particularly during the movement for Indian independence. However, over the years, he has grown in stature. As Eleanor Zelliot has rightly pointed out, he is perhaps the only pre-independence leader who has continued to grow in fame and influence throughout the contemporary period (Zelliot, 2001). The significance of Ambedkar lies in his social background. Over the years, he has come to represent the most downtrodden sections of the Indian society, the 'untouchables' and the Dalits. Though, like Gandhi and

Nehru, he too was well educated and had spent a good part of his youth in the west, he identified, almost completely, with the Dalit cause. This was reflected in his thinking and politics. Like most of his contemporaries, Ambedkar too spoke about the Indian society and the village life in civilizational terms. Despite recognizing the obvious cultural diversities, the social structure of the Indian village was, for all of them, the same everywhere. However, unlike others, Ambedkar saw the Indian civilization as being a Hindu civilization. More importantly, he saw Dalits as not being a part of this Hindu society. The structure of village settlements too reflected this basic tenet.

Quite like the Hindu civilization, he asserted that, village too was divided:

“The Hindu society insists on segregation of the untouchables. The Hindu will not live in the quarters of the untouchables and will not allow the untouchables to live inside Hindu quarters. It is not a case of social separation, a mere stoppage of social intercourse for a temporary period. It is a case of territorial segregation and of a cordon sanitarian putting the impure people inside the barbed wire into a sort of a cage. Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The Hindus live in the village and the untouchables live in the ghetto” (Ambedkar 1948: 21-22).

Thus, for Ambedkar, village presented a model of the Hindu social organization, a microcosm. It was ‘the working plant of the Hindu social order, where one could see the Hindu social order in operation in full swing’. Though he often used the expression ‘Indian village’, the village for him, did not include the untouchables, who lived outside, in the ‘ghetto’. The Indian village was not a single unit. It was divided into two sets of populations: ‘touchables’ and ‘untouchables’. The ‘touchables’ formed, what he called, ‘the major community’ and the untouchables ‘a minor community’. The ‘touchable’ lived inside the village and the untouchables lived outside the village in separate quarters. The touchables were economically the dominant community and commanded power; the untouchables were a ‘dependent community’ and a ‘subject race of hereditary bondsmen’. The untouchables lived according to the codes laid down for them by the dominant ‘touchable’ major community.

Though Ambedkar did refer to the Indian village and its casteist social structure in his earlier writings, most of his ideas on the subject were perhaps crystallized in response to the debates in the constituent assembly where many 'Hindu members' of the assembly made 'angry speeches' in "support of the contention that the Indian Constitution should recognize the village as its base of the constitutional pyramid of autonomous administrative units with its own legislature, executive and judiciary". In his well-known response to those who wanted village to be treated as the basic unit of Indian civilization, he said: "I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India...What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism? His concern obviously emanated from the standpoint of the 'untouchables', for whom recognition of the village as a unit of legal structure of India would have been a great calamity".

Parliamentary Democracy formed the focal point for stalwarts like Gandhi, Nehru, and Dr. Ambedkar but J.P Narayan criticizes parliamentary democracy. To him democracy may be the government of the people and for the people but not by the people. People have very limited choice to select from the candidates set up by the political parties. The system of election is very expensive and appallingly wasteful. It creates unnecessary passions and excitements and fails to elect good and able men. He believed the greatest fault of parliamentary democracy is its inherent tendency towards centralization of power. He believed in modern states, individuals have no control over the government and finds themselves reduced to a position of helplessness. The important issues in such states are decided by the political parties, industrialists, bankers and labor unions. To him, parties often put group interests above the national interest and are run by the caucuses that are beyond democratic control. Party rivalries give rise to demagoguery which eliminates political ethics.

Therefore, according to Jayprakash Narayan, a government which is elected under universal suffrage represents only the minority of the total voters where there is multi-party system. He reaches to the conclusion that parliamentary democracy is the formal democracy. He presents his scheme of government based on the principles of decentralization, individual independence, and popular participation. He visualizes a

pyramidal structure of Indian polity based on communitarian democracy composed on village communities as its basis. In his communitarian democracy, there is no place for political parties. He says that there may be political parties but they are likely to be local fraction. Their role will not be commanding. This is maximum decentralization of power. People will actively participate in the administration and will be accorded a central place. There will be no centralized state.

He recommends separation of legislative and executive powers. During the Total Revolution Phase, he advocated the formation of people's committees in the villages and the cities. He gives full sovereign rights to the individuals. He laid emphasis on economic decentralization. His communitarian democracy will be stateless society. He called the system of western democracy as democratic oligarchy. He criticized the parliamentary system of democracy and he visualized the communitarian democracy.

Jai Prakash Narayan enjoyed the vision of building of national structure mainly the polity from below which was to include village as democratic configuration depicting cooperation and reciprocation. His line of thought came from the work of A.S. Altekar who deeply impressed him. He saw villages as centers of accomplishment, existence, communal thinking, and community oneness. He also insisted to return to the grass root levels and build a superstructure based on agro industrial and self-regulating community devoid of ego and malice.

The principles of work, basic needs and self-adequacy are crucial for the village community to function pertinently. The working population in the villages should be provided employment and care should be taken that the primary needs of food, shelter and clothing are met by the community (Narayan, 1959:46).

The village community satisfies the primary needs of its population while the remaining needs may be gratified with the collaboration of larger groups existing in the form of district, province, nation, and international groups. The association between the village community and other groups is of two-way dependence in an ascending order. The new polity would see the planning from village community which would be union of few villages (Panchayat Samiti) and it would witness the assimilation of regional plan into

national plan. Although it was mentioned that villages would be integrated with regional and district communities yet no mention was made of the mega cities except using the word reconstitution for them by JP.

The community of an area held the possession of land and other natural resources in that area. A common agreement shall be drawn for sharing the resources such as forests, mines, etc (Narayan 1959:47). As far as other areas such as regions, districts etc. are concerned the same principle applies to them. The organizational set up at the level of industry may vary from the lowest in the hierarchy namely village to highest in the pyramid meaning nation. As far as the primary communities are concerned this industrial set up would be the owner worker type but at the higher levels it could be private, communal, or cooperative in nature. To give leverage to participatory democracy the practice of self-government in commerce is a significant rule and self-government representation in large industries might be practiced.

Jai Prakash envisioned that in a society which is communitarian a “limited inequality” would exist which would not be powerful enough to destroy the “spirit of the community”. He was very clear in his conception that the bureaucracy controls the community development programs in rural India and community hardly gets a role to play in it. Therefore, he suggested for discretionary polity of participatory democracy which was based on the principles of self-sufficiency and self-governance.

The Gram Sabha in the village would consist of all the adult members and the executive council of Gram Panchayats would be elected by them without any political interference. All members of the council are elected by Gram Sabha based on the qualifications already set. There are committees to assist Panchayats in its working to divide its labor and the state government has no role in nominating the members of Panchayats. The executive council of Panchayats shall be elected purely based on voting.

The hierarchal structure places the Panchayat Samiti at the second level. The Samiti is elected by the Gram Panchayats which in turn defines it to be the representative of Gram Panchayats. The District Council will be made up of the representatives from the Panchayat Samiti and would define powers and responsibilities to fulfill. The District

Council would be headed by the State Assembly which would be created in same manner as the Council. The whole method of elections would be indirect in nature. These bodies shall operate through their executive committees and committees shall be responsible to carry out special functions.

The Pranth Sabha or the provincial community will be responsible for appointing committees which will function as executive bodies accountable to the Sabha. The Rashtriya Sabha will function on the same lines. National Coordination Committee shall consist of representatives from each committee to make responsible decisions binding on other committees. These Committees would hold periodic meetings and act on a collective basis. The matters relating to policy will be decided on the motion of a committee or its members and the execution of the policy will be the responsibility of the committees.

It is strange that in the polity recommended by JP have only provincial and national committees and Chief Minister or Prime Minister find no mention. He highlighted the role of civil servants who will be responsible to the committee and will assist the executive at the primary level. He also clarified that experts in the committees could be drawn on their experience and hold on their subject of administration which in turn would benefit the community. The political communities at each level will be independent in nature and make decisions through executive and other committees.

JP was certain that the structures at political and economic level needed to be transformed concurrently. It would call for the reconstitution of the Panchayats as well as economic institutions and reorientation of the educational system. It must be a non-partisan development at the community level to evade any kind of divisions and collectively utilize the energies of the people for renovation.

On one hand where Gandhi views villages as “little republics” and self-sufficient economies and Dr. Ambedkar opines of villages as “sink of localism and den of ignorance”, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia had clear-cut views on local governance and local government. In his view, decentralized planning become the only way to devise diverse schemes considering local sources and he wanted decentralization up to the grassroots

level. Dr Lohia pleaded for making the panchayats the unit of self-governance by means of vesting in it the power to oversee law and order. He advocated the idea that the government ought to be near the people so that they have smooth access to it and can see the functioning of their government. For local governance, Dr Lohia recommended a 'four-pillar state' comprising of the Centre, state, district, and village as framework for decentralized policy and improvement. The views expressed by Dr Lohia in the early 1950s appear to have been incorporated in the 73rd Constitutional amendment Act which has prescribed a three-tier structure of the village panchayat as the lowest tier, the panchayat Samiti being the intermediate tier, and the Zila Parishad being at the apex tier of the panchayati raj system in the country.

Dr Ram Manohar Lohia additionally dealt with programmes and actions for local development. When he began deliberating on the policy of the Socialist party in November 1953, he recommended a scheme of local development which blanketed the reclamation of wasteland, the equitable distribution of land, abolition of land revenue, with the establishment of a bhoomi sena or land army, and an emphasis on small and medium irrigation. On tackling the food problem, Dr Lohia opined that this problem ought to most effectively be solved if the monopoly of a few people on land became broken and the land was given to the tiller of the soil. These factors recommend that Dr Lohia desired to create an India with greater equality and social justice. The problem of linkages operating between leaderships at the grassroots, State and Centre levels has not received much attention from scholars. It is only recently that leadership and other studies of village India have thrown light on this important aspect of village politics.

The review of empirical studies into rural leadership in India gives a revealing picture of emerging leadership. The introduction of democracy and the consequent political changes have challenged those who hitherto enjoyed power because of their social and economic status. The social groups which were politically underprivileged but numerically stronger and which were denied access to power in the past posed a serious threat to this old leadership. The unquestioned obedience and hereditary power of the old and venerated leaders of the higher castes found themselves in an inevitable situation. They are no

longer able to reap the advantage of their social and economic conditions. The challenges of new democratic processes called for a different kind of leadership. Nevertheless, at the other extreme the new policy has adopted itself in the traditional society. It has created conditions which did enable the traditional village power structure to influence the modern democratic processes. The old leadership has managed to reach or sustain the positions of power. However, most of the recent studies have concluded that the local political system is under the control of a leadership which comes from the richer peasants which has tradition, social status, wealth, and other factors on its side (Sireiker, 1970:185).

M.N Srinivas in 'Village studies and Their significance' states that the research of village communities which might be currently being accomplished in different components of the country provide the future historian with a large frame of information and facts about rural social life, information amassed, retrieved, and gathered, not with the aid of travelers in a rush, but by men who are trained to observe keenly, accurately, precisely, and correctly. Those researches constitute therefore precious contributions to the social, political, economic, and religious history of our country. Their value is further enhanced when it is realized that the changes which are being ushered in independent and plan-conscious India herald a complete revolution in our social life.

Yogendra Singh in 'The Changing Power Structure of Village Community- A case study of Six Villages in Eastern U.P.' discusses about the sociological concept of power and how it occupies a very basic and central position in the study of the dynamics of social systems. He mentions about the power structure under feudal social organisation and states that the caste organisation is another face of the social system which determines the social, behavioural, ritualistic and traditional expectations and interests of the villagers. He also mentions about the Zamindari system and the power structure, about the village panchayat and the caste panchayat along with the new pattern of power distribution in rural social relations.

Irawati Karve in 'The Indian Village' discusses about the different types of villages according to their structure and states that a village is an ever-changing nucleus of

habitations from which tiny clusters separate and remain attached or separate completely to form a new nucleus. There is also mention about how the habitation areas are demarcated from one another according to the caste structure and hierarchy. The peripheral existence of households of the so called 'untouchable' castes clearly demarcates a distinguishing boundary existing among the different caste groups.

The Institute of Social Sciences (1995) studied the Panchayat Acts of 11 states Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, etc. and pointed out that the overall scenario of Panchayati Raj in the country is dismal. Besides, the functions assigned to the Panchayati Raj Institutions do not cover all the aspects of rural life and the Panchayats do not have their personnel in key positions all through. The state government frequently makes interventions in their day-to-day functioning, thereby reducing them to non-entities. As a result, they cannot function effectively. It further reports that the major drawback of the system is that very little power has been entrusted to the PRIs. The developmental works are largely handled by the government and discontinued at times at its will.

Initiative for Women Participation

The status of women has gone through many ups and d in Indianowns history. The thought of women as equivalent subjects at standard with men has been ensured by the constitution of India. However, the truth holds something else for them. The section of Women Reservation Bill requesting 33% reservation gives some positive course in the battle for achieving political equity for the women citizens of India.

The study of women in Panchayati Raj in Madhya Pradesh by Rashmi Arun (Ambedkar, 2008:69) found that however women constituted the greater part of the populace in India, their cooperation in the basic leadership process was insignificant. The Panchayati Raj Act, notwithstanding, has visualized and executed to an impressive degree, the interest of women and power sharing. It was discovered that most of women Panches were housewives and were either ignorant, illiterate or had very elementary education. If a seat was reserved for a female candidate, the men who were politically active persuaded their spouses, mother, or sisters-in-law in contesting the elections.

The Tamil Nadu encounter as contended by Dr. P. Jeyapal and K. Dravidamini's (Jeyapal and Dravidamani, 1997) study about the democratically elected female candidates of Lalgudi Panchayat Union in Tamil Nadu uncovered that there was a prevalence of the more youth individuals among women panchayat presidents. Among them, 80% were unpracticed in political or social fields and 87% of them were found with low knowledge about the Panchayati Raj System. In Tamil Nadu, it was recognized that half of the electorate contained women and the male campaigners could barely enter homes to look for support of women voters. It was additionally seen that a few women candidates were dummies, running for their spouses (Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, 41).

As indicated by George Mathew, in a study of women delegates in Karnataka PRIs in 1987 and 1990s led by the Institute of Social Sciences when Zila Parishad had quite recently appeared acknowledged that dominant part of women candidates have no understanding of basic political issues; typically, a male individual from the family had been instrumental in convincing these women to contest in the elections. As a rule, women keep on devoting all their efforts to household errands because the men in the family were busy in carrying out their political duties for them. Notwithstanding it was accounted two years later when the same Zila Parishads were studied again that there were clear changes (Mathew, 1995:34). He, likewise, expresses that India is the one of few nations to perceive the social reality that women participation and authority is as essential for Panchayati raj to work effectively as male administration and leadership. The measures taken to draw women into positions of leadership and along these lines into political issues by giving them 1/3rd reservation is what that may now be known as the third level of governance. He additionally discusses the obstacles and restriction which are confronted by women leadership. He discusses how the women in India have been efficiently denied the opportunity, resources and basic leadership control and decision-making power.

Helmut Reifeld and Ambrose Pinto in 'Women in Panchayati Raj' (2001) examines about the power being an indispensable block of any framework, whether it is social, financial, or political. There is likewise specify about how this gets "systematized" as uncovered truth as because religious directives, composed or oral. Different sections discuss the

deterrents and realities which women face being a part of this constituted foundation of local governance. While, P. Manikyamba (1989) concentrates on the way that women's political participation is significantly less than their support in work and that there is no absence of authority and leadership qualities among rural women nor are they uninformed of their own needs and those of improvement, however the disguise of their subordinate status and socially forced limitations have made women reserved and frightful of participating in general society undertakings. The author conveys out plainly that the endeavor to reinforce democracy at the grassroots level through enhancing the portrayal of women, the most essential section of Indian culture is admirable. However, the achievement of Panchayati Raj relies upon satisfactory and in addition powerful cooperation of women in the rural procedures. The part of women as recipients and supporters in the financial and political procedure of improvement has additionally been looked upon deliberately.

Promilla Kapur (2001) is for the most part talking about the participation of women in various electoral procedures in parliament. They have analyzed the condition of strengthening of women in present day setting. They call attention to that women's empowerment is prefaced on three "central," and 'non-debatable' standards. The standards of fairness, add up to improvement of women's probability, their self-assurance and self-portrayal in political exercises. However, there are sure hindrances in the method for their compelling investment and these are "four Cs – culture, childcare, money and certainty" (Kapur, 2001:239). Besides, political gatherings are for the most part unwilling to choose women competitors in safe electorates. The author feels that women's over the top engagement in family tasks, absence of family support, absence of certainty and awareness assume more prominent parts in unequal interest in power structures and basic leadership and decision making bodies.

Then again, Eschel M. Rhodie (1989) holds that all through the world the status of women is low. They are the most denied and discriminated in social orders. Through a similar and complete review, the author tries to highlight the oppressive laws, rights, traditions, and convictions against women and looks to discover the plausible techniques for arrangements. In the review, the author has demonstrated clearly that still there are

massive discriminations against women, even in advanced, developed countries. Patriarchal viewpoint, unfair laws, predisposition state of mind of political gatherings and administrators, bring down level of instruction and destitution keep women far from the passageway of political power. The review manages a few components of oppression women which are yet common in the public arena to be specific physical manhandle, female bondage, sexual mutilation of young women, fetus removal and so forth. The author does not deny that there has been more prominent interest of women in various fields, viz. science, innovation, expressions, law, pharmaceutical etcetera, however this development is sporadic, not rational.

There is a comparative review by Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya (1975:29-36.) where she discusses the women's movement in pre-independence and post-independence era. Indeed, even before the formation of the United Nations, the education of women and kids were emphasized in India. Working women's inns were built up and women's associations were formed. These associations have battled hard for institution of law for expanding status of women. The Central Government and in addition the State Governments did almost nothing to enable them. The women stayed unaware of their lawful rights and responsibilities and their conditions disintegrated slowly.

In another review, Niroj Sinha, and others (2000) manage the extension and degree of interest of women in the freedom struggle. Different scholars have inspected the political status of women in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana. Sinha calls attention to the lack of information and data on women's interest in legislative issues and different fields. The review conducted in 1968 and 1988 touches different angles and aspects of women's cooperation. The review directed preceding 1975, is focused on the elite section of the public. Niroj Sinha feels that governmental issues are an entirely male commanded field since sanity, self-control, intensity, forcefulness, efficiency, comprehensiveness are the evaluated characteristics of men. Despite what might be expected, accommodation, lack of caution are a few qualities related with women. Absence of education, low-financial condition, hesitance of political gatherings, high cost of electoral process, patriarchy, reliance on male individuals, conventionality and custom of the state are a portion of the explanations behind the low interest in the political procedure. 33 percent of women

delegates were elected in Haryana at the panchayat elections of 1994 yet in actuality the women individuals did not participate in the basic leadership positions since they were hesitant to sit with the male individuals in a custom bound society.

The various aspects of Panchayati Raj System in India are discussed about by Bidyut Mohanty (1995). She has started with the setting up of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957) and Ashok Mehta Committee (1977) regarding constitution of village panchayats. She identifies the different factors that affect women's empowerment. According to her findings age-old Indian culture and social ethics covered by a patriarchal value system, female infanticide, illiteracy, and inaccessibility to health care facilities, discrimination between boy and girl child in the family and violence against women are the usual symptoms of Indian society that cripple the scope of women empowerment. In addition to these, there are some other factors like criminalization and factionalism of politics, emergence of factionalism at a macro level and lack of awareness among the women regarding economic and legal rights which create limitations on women's participation in politics.

In another article 'Panchayati Raj Institutions and Women' the author tries to reveal how the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 facilitates women's participation in grassroots politics and empowers women in the decision-making. She explores that the reservation of seats for women in panchayats would break the age-old constraints and facilitates women to take part in the decision-making process in a more positive way. However, the author points out that, women are treated indifferently by their male colleagues in the meetings and the bureaucracy also does not treat them with dignity. In addition, women elected members face violence, rape, and ill-treatment from the male political leaders. Moreover, working condition is not always congenial for women members and emerged in a situation of corruption, violence, and mean-mindedness. Anyway, she is confident that reservation of thirty three percent of seats for women in three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions and in the posts of office bearers is likely to lead to the empowerment of women in India.

A new light on women's empowerment has been thrown through the study by Raj Singh and others (2000) in the northern states especially Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan. The

contributors have examined the status and position of women and the roles they play in the Panchayati Raj System. One of the contributors has also examined the perceptions of the voters on the role of the people's representatives besides dealing with the problems faced by women members in playing their role as office bearers. The authors have also put forward some suggestions for actual empowerment of women. These include the need for enhancing the literacy level and increasing consciousness of women in addition to the changing of attitude of the male members of the family. Along with literacy level, political participation also gives a sense of empowerment to women which have been focused upon by Bishakha Datta and others (1998) in a study on 'All women Panchayats' in Maharashtra examined the scope of empowerment of women through their participation in panchayats. The study is important because there is no male member in the panchayats and as such the direction and functioning of panchayats depends on the women members exclusively. As a result, the panchayats have difficult agenda when compared to the male dominated panchayats. The members give priority to the basic needs of the society which include water supply, sanitation facilities, smokeless *chulahs* (hearth), road improvement, health, and hygiene of the community especially of the women and children and the like. Though most of these panchayats have been formed by the direct or indirect support of the male village elders and leaders, effective participation of women suffers due to distance, lack of time, heavy work pressure at home and field, financial crisis and above all traditional outlook of family as well as of the society, the study concludes.

The extent of empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj has been discussed upon by Sudha Pillai (2001). She argues that in the post-independence period rural women could not be able to modernize themselves in comparison to their urban counterpart. The 73rd Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1992 provided a legal right for the rural women for the first time to enter the functioning of the local self-governing bodies. Now it has become mandatory to fill one third of the posts of representatives and office-bearers in three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions by direct elections, which paved the way for one million women to participate in rural local self-governance. While, Hazel D'Lima (1983) conducted her study on the position of women in local governments in Maharashtra. She has tried to find out social and political background of the women representatives and

their level of awareness that has clear bearing on their participation. It also describes the scope and actual rate of women's participation along with problems faced by them in course of participation. The study shows that mostly upper caste, educated and land-owning women are represented in the Panchayat Samities and Zila Parishads and most of the women representatives are middle aged and only a few young women are found to be elected to the local self-governing institutions. But the study does not present a clear picture on their empowerment through such participation. So also, Sudha Pai (1998) in a review in Meerut locale of Uttar Pradesh demonstrates that even after statutory arrangements, the strengthening of women is low both in family and society.

The Amendment Act (73rd) has provided adequate and positive development and to guarantee powerful cooperation of women in rural local bodies. The "pradhinis" were for the most part over 40 years age and they happened to major land owning rich families. Pai demonstrates that "the pradhanis play an almost insignificant role in the functioning of the gram and block panchayat level bodies". The greater part of them neither go to any gatherings nor take any choice; they only put their marks on papers as told by their spouses and other male family members. As a micro study, the present one has certain restrictions however it introduces the pattern that is by all accounts a typical element in rural India. While then again, Satnam Kaur (1987) for a situation study of Haryana looks at the part of women in both home and in addition in homestead exercises and the nature and degree of their support in basic leadership. It additionally displays a review of their awareness about village development projects and programmes. She has additionally proposed certain measures for compelling support of women in the basic leadership identifying with development of the decision-making process relating to development of the locality and along these lines, their empowerment.

This chapter discusses village studies and later on also discussed various perspectives on villages and panchayats in India. The Indian villages are one of the important institutions of our society. Gandhi has been rightly known as the ideologue of the village. After Gandhi, Nehru was perhaps the most important and influential leader of the Indian nationalist movement. Apart from being an important ideologue of the Indian National Congress, he also became the first prime minister of independent India. He was the

catalyst of the approach India chose for its development after it achieved independence from colonial rule. Though Nehru worked under the leadership of Gandhi and gave him a good deal of respect, his ideas on the nature of India's past and his vision of its future were different from those of Gandhi. These differences were also reflected in his views on the Indian village. Unlike Gandhi, Nehru perhaps never identified himself with the village. Various studies on the status of women and on initiatives of women representation have been discussed. These studies revealed that the issue of proxy is still prevalent in most parts of our country; women candidates have little or no understanding of political issues; they are hesitant to sit with male counterparts because of their traditional society structure. Women contestants also face problems regarding dealings with the bureaucracy, family and household issues among others.

CHAPTER 4

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PRIs

Introduction

This chapter will look into the changing pattern of leadership and the concept of empowerment also their interrelatedness in the context of women leadership in Rajasthan. The emergence of new rural leadership has given hopes to the community about an inclusive growth and development. The institutions of caste, family and religion influence majority of the voting pattern and still it continues to play a deciding factor even today, so voting pattern is one of the main focuses along with the community participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The changing pattern of village power structure and leadership pattern will also be discussed in the present chapter while elaborating the field findings and seeing the women participation and experiences from the field.

Leadership and Empowerment

The emergence of a new pattern of leadership even in a developed democracy is a long drawn out process, which is even more in the case of developing society such as India. The quest for new leadership is the quest for a revolution in man, who does not stand in isolation but who is subject to a numerous influence, both traditional and contemporary. An additional complication is the issue that the new leadership offered is at once the reason and the consequence of social change. It is this interdependence which makes both the pace of social change and the course of the emergence of new leadership at times distressingly slow. The development of leadership is part of the course of reorientation in which the chosen leader plays a twin role: first, of embodying the essence of social change in oneself and, then, of serving as a catalytic means in society.

The course of social change and the development of reoriented leadership face peculiar challenges in the rural situation, predominantly in India. Rural India has been accustomed to a definite pattern of life and thought which has traditionally come down to the masses

from their ancestors and to which they treat as a sacrosanct trust. They are naturally uncertain even about the need for reorientation; moreover, they are likely to have a passive psychology because of their long history of subservience to the political overlord, to the intermediary over- lords (such as the *Jagirdar*, or the *Zamindar*), to the ruling agents (such as the *Mukiya* or the *Patwari*), and most of all to the village moneylenders. It may be added that the pace of education which can weaken this resistance to the idea of change can be but slow. And mere literacy is not very significant. Similarly, urbanization is more a process of uprooting than of reorienting the rural populace and as such may create more problems than it solves. Finally, the primary task of a leader is to provide fresh stimuli in terms of ideas, devices and institutions that may eventually become rooted in rural life.

The successful implementation of Panchayati Raj system depends a lot on the efficacy of the leadership offered. The main purpose of PRIs is to empower rural masses and bring them as active participants in the process of democracy. Therefore, a committed rural leadership plays a significant role here. The requirement of committed and dedicated leadership in encouraging people for successful implementation of developmental programmes is of great importance especially in a society like ours where traditional institutions have been deeply rooted.

Thus, it is obvious that social change and the emergence of a reoriented leadership is essentially a long-term process. Institutional devices, such as the community development program and democratic decentralization, can at best help the process and expedite it slightly, but should not be expected to accomplish these ends on a short term basis. The community development program and democratic decentralization were initially intended to serve as instruments for bringing about social change and a reoriented leadership, but in different ways. The community development program was started on the assumption that service to the community and the challenge of its development should be an adequate incentive to bring about a new service and development-oriented leadership through which the rural people would be made active partners in the plans of their own development.

The present rural society of India is transitioning from tradition towards modernity and thereby, the new economic and social structures have replaced the old attitudes and values. This change has affected the nature of leadership and increased its roles too which can be seen with the coming of Community Development Programmes, decentralized planning and land reforms. Thus, a new kind of leadership emerged and here comes the importance of Panchayati Raj, which brought about people's participation in the developmental programmes along with penetration of democracy at the grassroots (Mishra, 1977:7). In relation to study of leadership, Setty (1994: 130) has written as follows,

“The study of the leadership in the PRIs has been recognized to be most crucial because, there is a close relationship between leadership in a rural society and the nature and degree of people's participation in rural development activities. The local leaders may be instrumental in mobilizing and motivating people to participate in developmental activities or they may sometimes act as barrier inhibiting and subtly or deliberately discouraging participation for their self interests or do so out of ignorance or misinformation”.

The actualization of functions and responsibilities of PRIs is related with intricate uncertainties rising out of the institutions of caste, kinship and variables of our Indian society (Imandar, 1991:561-573). Sirsikar (1970) holds that the quality of leadership offered at the grassroots determine to a great extent the democratic working of Panchayat and they act as medium of social change.

The village Panchayat is the most important unit for the implementation of developmental programmes even during the ancient times. Before the existence of present form of Panchayats, these village panchayats were in the form of “*Sabha*” or “*Samiti*”, headed by “*Pradhan*” or “*Mukhia*”, who had all the control over village power structure. The conventional panchayats were created only for the welfare of the village community with no explicit privileges and duties. The village leadership was mostly in the hands of elders, especially upper caste males (Chakraborty and Bhattacharya,

1939:9). The marginalized and labor class and caste was kept outside the ambit of power structure and were not given leadership roles.

Rajasthan adopted a three tier Panchayati Raj system with Panchayat Samitis at the block level and Zila Parishads at the district level, while the third tier, Gram Panchayat at the village level. Of these three, it is only in the case of the lowest tier that its head (*Sarpanch*) is elected directly by the people and is contested on the individual base, not party base. For these two reasons- the post of *Sarpanch* is powerful because he/she is truly representative of democratic decentralization at the grass root level. On the other hand elections for the posts of Zila Parishads and Panchayat Samitis level were held on the political party basis.

During the first phase (1959-62), the emerging leadership appeared to strike a balance between panchayati raj as a power mechanism and as a service-cum-development mechanism. Nor could the new leadership be fitted entirely into the pattern of traditional village leadership, for it exhibited some non-traditional traits. Nevertheless, they did appear to be what might be termed a neo-traditional form of leadership emerging in which the traditional ruling elites who retained their position of leadership but under different conditions and with strikingly different overt attitudes.

The obligation of assuming a democratic approach and pattern was increasingly realized by the newly emerging leadership. Wealth, social status or feudal relationships continued to play an important role, but were in themselves insufficient to ensure a position of leadership as they once had. It was now essential to deliberate with the rural masses on issues of mutual interest and to assume an approach of service to the rural population, as a duty. It was interesting to observe how the emerging leadership responded to this new situation. This is still a nascent development, at times only indistinctly visible, but definitely which nevertheless is potentially significant in view of the steady expansion in political consciousness.

The upper economic groups in the rural areas, former feudal lords (*Jagirdars* and *Zamindars*), businessmen and large landholders continued to hold a virtual monopoly on leadership, particularly at the *Pradhan* (Chairman of Panchayat Samiti) and *Sarpanch*

(Chairman of Village Panchayat) level. A sudden change was not to be expected, as broadening the base of leadership is part of a long drawn out process of social change in class relationship. What is significant, however, is the fact that many members of groups on the lower levels of rural community have emerged as village leaders and have been elected as *Panchas* (members of panchayats).

It is also noteworthy that a substantial number of the new leaders belong to younger age groups. Contrary to the popular assumption, villagers do not necessarily subscribe to the myth that wisdom is the prerogative of the aged. Young educated leaders can command respect both for their education and for their active participation in social and political movements.

While kinship and caste loyalties are still a feature of considerable significance in the emergence of the new leader, there are some changes in the traditional function of these factors in village politics. Villages were faction-ridden long before panchayati raj, with family factions, caste factions, and also religious factions playing significant roles. With the introduction of panchayati raj, though, a new impetus for factional action has emerged and the operation of this new channel was made for the confinement of political power at the level of village. Caste, family and religious factions may ultimately be eclipsed by new form of factional alignment, though playing subsidiary role from within or without. Caste, family or religious factions may sometimes transform themselves into political factions, but they may occasionally be neglected for the attainment of promising political alliances and alignments.

Political factions, thus, may eventually cut across caste, family and religious loyalties. These will still segregate the village, but along non-conventional lines. Already there are instances, though still relatively infrequent, of political alliances that have weakened the religious, family and caste barriers. Besides, the power arrangement at the Panchayat Samiti level, which consists of the *Sarpanches* of all the Panchayats in that region, may follow non-conventional lines because no single caste is liable to enjoy an absolute majority.

Most of the newly emerging leadership comes from the upper strata of the social hierarchy, but there are also exceptions to this rule, chiefly at the panchayat level, are not uncommon. Moreover, a new nucleus of young educated leaders is on the horizon. The special provision, under which members of scheduled castes and tribes are co-opted for membership on the Panchayat Samitis, is a significant step in the rural context where untouchability is still a dominant fact of life. The effort to encourage women to assume positions of leadership by co-opting them on local bodies, has also met with negligible success so far since the emergence of woman leadership in rural India lies in the last lap of a social revolution now just getting under way. Still a significant beginning has been made for their empowerment that some women attend meetings and Panch-Sarpanch *Sammelans* (Joint Conferences), undergo training, and talk about panchayati raj and its problems is suggestive of changes to come, which may be delayed but are inevitable.

A sense of involvement and participation in the processes of government at the panchayat level in Rajasthan would seem to be limited for the most part to *Pradhans* and Sarpanchas. The reasons are partly personal and partly institutional. *Panchas* may lack the capacity or the courage to take the initiative, which is left in the hands of the chairman of the body. Even more important are the institutional deterrents, for the statutory framework tends to encourage the concentration of power in the hands of the *Sarpanch* in the panchayat and in the *Pradhan* in the Panchayat Samiti. Even at this latter level, participation by the membership is often not broad based and continuous. But what is more important, perhaps, is that the members who do participate usually conduct their deliberations sensibly and in a balanced fashion. They prefer ample discussion of an issue, and usually try to reach a unanimous decision.

The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act of 1992, introduced local self government through democratic decentralization and thus opened new avenues of leadership for rural masses. The new Act made way for new leadership which was young, educated and receptive. In this study we would focus on the emerging formal Leadership structure and style in two villages of Rajasthan (Soda and Samerdha Nosera) and the manner in which the new leadership developed by the PRIs brings about the development of their respective villages.

Leadership, especially for rural women becomes a foundation for their empowerment. In order to create democratic and free social order, empowerment plays a significant role. The two different forms of empowerment have been recognized; firstly where natives seek power through struggles and claims and secondly, where power is offered by the state. The power which the PRIs have granted to rural masses falls in the second category. The Panchayati Raj Institutions became weak in 1965-1978 and since 1985 onwards till 1994, and this weakness and errors were removed with the coming of 73rd Amendment Act. The institution of Panchayati Raj has survived in the state of Rajasthan and has progressed positively in terms of creating socio-political awareness among rural masses. The two women *Sarpanches* chosen for the study differs in terms of their caste, education and economic backgrounds, still both of them manages to bring their respective villages on the path to development. The magnitude and degree of development is what needs to be seen through the field study. Given below is table 4.1 depicting the profile of the two selected *Sarpanches* for this research.

Table 4.1: Profile of the two Select *Sarpanches*

S. No	Characteristics	Soda	Nosera
1.	Age group	36	39
2.	Education	Post Graduation	Illiterate
3.	Marital status	Unmarried	Married
4.	Social Category	General	S.C

Chavi Rajawat is the *Sarpanch* from Soda village who is 36years of age and is post graduate who belongs to *Rajput* community (General category) and Tara Devi is a ‘dalit’ *Sarpanch* from Samerdha Nosera village who is aged 39 years and is illiterate. The institution of caste is so deeply entrenched within the social fabric of the society that it assumes significance in most of the areas of lives, for instance the political sphere. Earlier the majority of panchayat leaders were chosen from upper caste but with the coming of PRI Act, things are changing and today citizens from backward caste are also coming forward to participate in this democratic process. My field work inquires about how a woman *Sarpanch* from ‘Scheduled Caste’ is contributing towards the development of the

village. It is, therefore, essential to find out as to what extent caste variables plays an important role in determining leadership at the panchayat level. Age is another factor that determines the village leadership. Two explanations can be given for the emergence of younger leadership at panchayat level: First, due to unemployment and under employment in the rural areas, the young people are getting more leisure time to involve themselves in politics and certain organizational activities. Another reason of their being in panchayat is that they are better educated, progressive and aware of their political rights than the older generation in the village. Education is yet another important variable affecting rural leadership because illiteracy restricts one's capacity to give informed perspectives on issues of importance. Education facilitates the development of a progressive attitude among individuals towards social and economic problems. The present study brings about the difference in the governance pattern of both the Sarpanches, where one is highly educated and the other is illiterate.

The Changing Pattern of Village Power Structure and Leadership

The village power structure was always based on the caste structure and the local Zamindari system, where the political, economic and social organisations were hierarchically organized. Singh (1969:717-718) aptly remarks that, "There was some kind of functional interdependence of power and the three institutions of power overlapped. They did not enjoy a state of independence but a status of relative dependency adjustment and symbiosis." The period after the independence brought about varied changes in the functioning of village panchayats. The institution of caste determines the traditional, ritual, behavioral and social patterns in a village. The caste system and the ownership of land were directly related to one another and therefore upper caste was the landholding class, thereby few upper caste people dominating majority of lower class and caste. Retzlaff (1962: 19) has pointed out that:

“The caste panchayats were primarily adjudicatory in nature and membership in each was based upon ascriptive characteristics. The caste panchayats were also formed on a regional basis. The regional caste

panchayat was called to settle a dispute which either could not be resolved within a single village, or which developed between the members of the same caste residing in two different villages. The ultimate sanction available to a caste panchayat was outcasting”.

The traditional power structure is undergoing changes as the marginalized groups are also making effort to win power and partake in decision making processes through the panchayats. In today’s time, when the factionalism has increased within the dominant castes in the village, it becomes important for them to seek support of the lower castes in the panchayat elections, in return to which they are given some kind of monetary or social help. The Panchayati Raj Act was enacted in order to distribute equitable benefits of developmental and welfare programmes to people of all the sections of our society. They got an opportunity to voice their concerns and safeguard their interests. It was a conscious effort to decentralize power and responsibilities among the rural community and bring them forward to participate in the process of democracy. Chakravarty (1975: 193) observes,

“The domination of traditional pattern of power and authority over the legal authority is observed in the functioning of village Panchayats. There is no clear distinction between exercise of power and authority in panchayats because of the nature of authority is traditional. A leader may possess authority even if he is not a member of the panchayat if, however, he is also a member of Panchayat, his authority as a leader would be supplemented accordingly. The political, economic and caste composition plays an important role in determining the village power structure”.

Srinivas (1955: 19-26) brings out the importance of the 'dominant caste' in understanding not only inter-caste relations but also the power structure of the village. He shows for instance, how the elders of the dominant caste play an important part in settling the disputes in the village. His explanation of 'vote bank' explain how the leaders of a dominant caste control a number of votes in their villages and they are contacted by the

candidates and party leaders at the time of elections. However, the Panchayati Raj institutions help in generating a new political environment at the grass-roots. This study was conducted in a Mysore village and it can be related to the present field of study as the role of caste as a deciding factor in voting for a particular candidate is visible here. The respondents agreed to the fact that after kinship, caste plays one of the major factors which influences their choice for voting.

The political parties play a vital role in democratic form of government, as it is through political parties that the struggle for power is made and at the same time it is an agency that educates the people politically. To build up leadership, a party must win the support of the influential individuals in the community, who easily becomes the spokesman of the party at various levels. The political parties, however, have little contact with rural areas. But they make the impact felt at the time of elections and else by meetings, demonstrations, etc. The political parties are not to take any direct interest in the Panchayat and Samiti elections and are only supposed to contest the Zila Parishad elections on party lines. But in the process of building up the support structure and political alliances they directly interfere in almost all the elections at the village level. Due to this role, i.e. of the political parties in village politics, new leaders have come up. The increasing participation and political awareness has encouraged the lower caste people, who had no place in village power hierarchy to enter the political class. Political parties have also opened new channels parallel to social and economic status for entering the achievement oriented politics. The position in party has also become a main criterion for obtaining the power position. Thus, the political parties are helping the emergence of new kind of leadership. As Iqbal Narain *et al.* observed;

“The role of political parties becomes quite significant. They do not only articulate and aggregate interests they also guide the behavior of vast sections of people through their members largely within the confines of the constitution. They articulate the issues and put forward solutions in the form of a programme of action. By doing so they contribute both to the substantial and procedural aspects of democratic systems” (Narain *et al.* 1976: 169).

Bailey's (1963:122) study of the upward mobility of the 'Baud' out-castes of Orissa found that, "in nineteenth century Orissa, the divisions of wealth and political power followed the same lines as caste divisions and the hierarchy in these fields approximated the virtual hierarchy. Caste, viewed as a ritual system, was congruent with the political system. As a consequence of land coming into the market, some castes whose members did not own any land were able to buy it". The warriors who owned almost all the land owned only 28 per cent of it when Bailey made his study. A similar observation was made by Beteille (1965:102) in a village in South India. His study mentions; "that in the village, 24 percent of the Brahmins dominated socially, economically and politically over 49 per cent of the artisan and service castes and 27 per cent of the untouchables, Adi-Dravidas. Gradually, many Brahmins sold their land, some of which was bought by non-Brahmins and in one or two cases by Adi-Dravidas. This Change in economic status has made the social and political life in the village increasingly 'caste free'. And the economic and political structures were getting increasingly differentiated from caste structure". In Madhopur, a village in eastern Uttar Pradesh, studied by Bernard Cohn (1955: 425), "the high caste Thakur, forming 24 per cent of the population, enjoyed social, economic and political dominance over the numerous but lower status Nomiya and Chamars until the 1940s. But, the introduction of strong local government with the process of open and competitive politics after independence had, however, made considerable dent in the traditional social, economic and political power of the high castes. The low political and economic positions of the Chamars and Nomiya of Madhopur were changing".

Community Participation in PRIs

The effective and active participation of community is the outcome of developmental programmes offered at grassroots since the implementation of PRI Act 1992. The procedure of electoral participation starts with the exercise of voting right and also attending gram Sabha meetings. Although the Government of India has made numerous attempts in the form of Five Year Plans to accomplish the participation of people but it

was also found to be inadequate. The benefits have not been shared by the masses equitably. In this context, the present work seeks to examine the degree of people's participation in various Panchayati Raj activities such as participation in voting, attendance in Gram Sabha meetings, decision-making process, etc. The study also seeks to examine relationship between education and leadership selection at grassroots level. People's participation is the basic necessity in a participatory democracy. It is the principal means by which a political system or sub-system generated legitimacy and maintained stability in the system. An attempt has also been made to assess people's participation in the electoral process in local Panchayat institution. The select villages' population information and the sample respondents' profile has been enumerated below;

Table 4.2: Demographic Profile of Nosera and Soda village;

Village	Population			Sex Ratio	Literacy Rate	SC Population			% of SC Population
	Persons	Male	Female			Persons	Male	Female	
Nosera	4489	2340	2149	918	55.07	605	324	281	13.5
Soda	3960	2036	1924	945	60.25	631	332	299	15.9

The above mentioned table 4.2 depicts the demographic profile of both the villages (Soda and Nosera) where Nosera has total population of about 4489 people (2340 males and 2149 females) and Soda has total population of 3960 people (2036 males and 1924 females). The sex ratio is 918 and 945 of Nosera and Soda villages respectively. Glancing at the literacy rate reveals that there is 55.07% literacy in Nosera and 60.25% in Soda village. The Scheduled Caste (SC) population is 605 persons (324 males and 281 females) in Nosera and 631 persons (332 males and 299 females) in Soda constituting of about 13.5% and 15.9% respectively.

After having a look at the demographic profile, social and educational profile of the respondents has been given in table 4.3 below;

Table 3: Profile of Respondents:

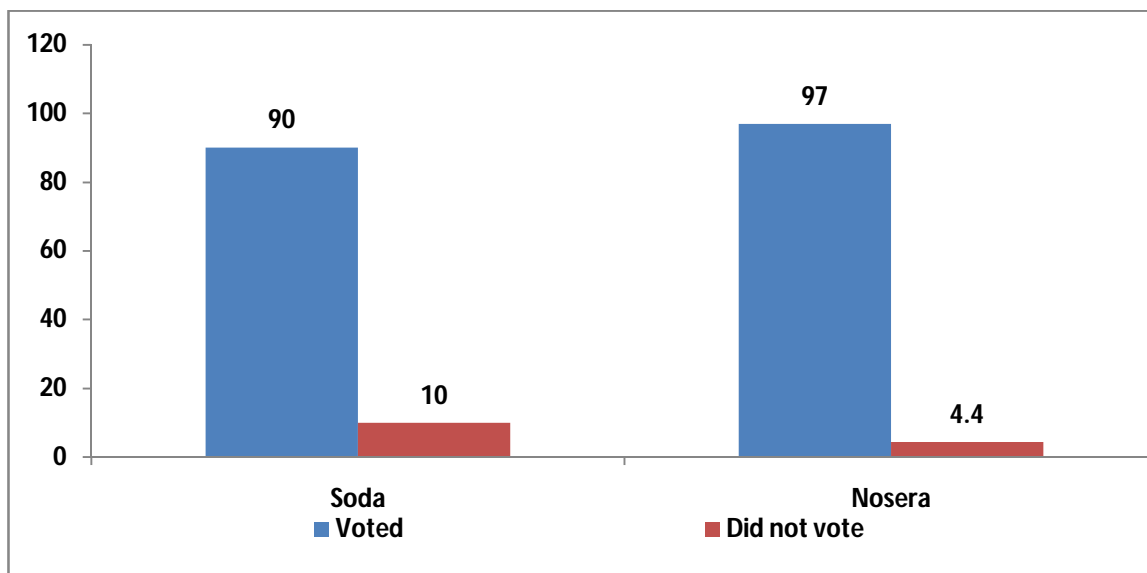
Social category & Education	Respondents	Soda	Nosera
Gender	Male	50	50
	Female	50	50
Caste	General	46	36
	OBC	32	46
	SC	22	18
Education	Illiterate	36	49
	Primary	10	15
	Secondary	26	15
	Graduation & Above	26	15

The respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling method with the aim to interview equal number of male and female respondents. By adopting snowball sampling technique, respondents who are comfortable in responding questions as mostly females were not ready to talk giving illiteracy as the reason. Therefore, there were equal numbers of male and female respondents from both the villages (Soda and Nosera). As can be seen from the table 4.3, from the profile of respondents, there were 46 respondents from Soda and 36 respondents from Nosera village belonged to general category, 32 & 46 from O.B.C category and 22 & 18 from SC category from Soda and Nosera respectively. The education level of the respondents was also taken into account and categorized as illiterate, primary educated, secondary educated, graduate and above. The data reveals that there were 36 respondents who were illiterate from Soda village and 29 were illiterate from Nosera village; whereas 10 from Soda village were primary educated and 15 from Nosera had same level of education. On the other hand 26 & 15 respondents had secondary level of education and 26 people from Soda village and 15 people from Nosera were graduate and above.

The participatory democracy is ensured by the institutional device of Gram Sabha. Ashok Mehta committee put it rightly that, "gram sabha has an important role in activating the democratic process at the grass root level, in inculcating community spirit, in increasing political awareness, in strengthening developmental orientation, in educating rural poor in administrative and political process and in enabling weaker sections to progressively assert their point of view. It is regarded as 'base of democracy' and considered as the highest political institution of local community. It is supposed to work as the watchdog of the Panchayat. Besides it also provides institutional device for people's participation" (Prasad, 1981: 72).

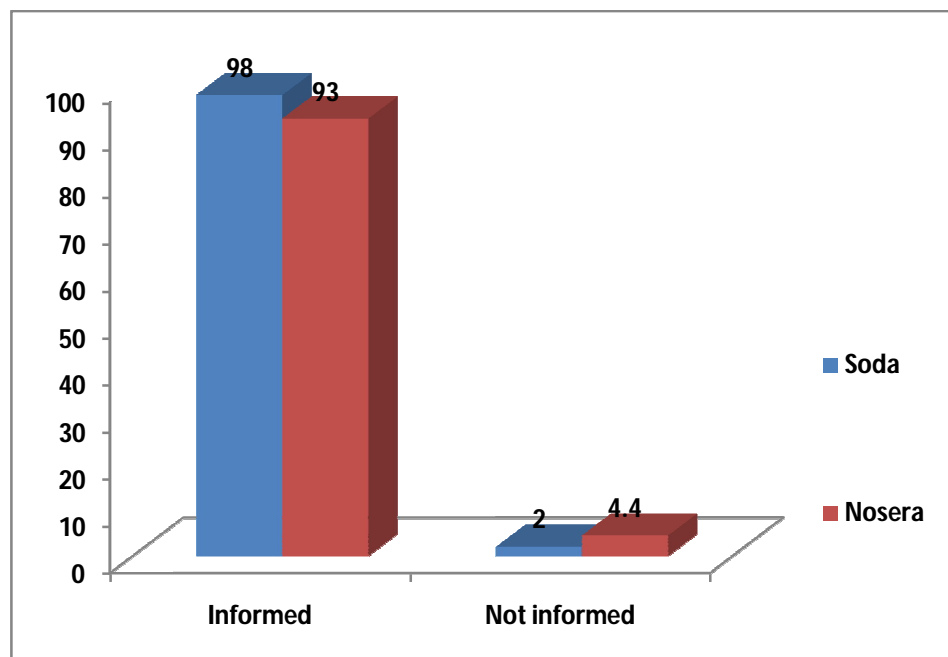
All the respondents were well aware about the role and duties of the gram panchayat, such as supply of electricity, drinking water facility, water conservation, providing health services, conducting panchayat meetings, solving the problems of the villagers, education including primary and secondary schools, regulation of melas, markets and hats in Panchayat areas, providing some source of employment, promoting rural sanitation, registering births, deaths, and marriages along with construction and maintenance of village roads, bridges. Hence, the respondent's electoral participation is very important aspect. The figure 4.1 below enumerates the percentage of electoral participation in the form of voting in Panchayat elections.

Figure 4.1: Percentage of Electoral Participation (voting) in Panchayat Elections



Participation of people in Gram Sabha depends upon their awareness and magnitude of their interests in development programmes. Unless the people are aware of the importance of grass-root level institutions in administration, their participation will be zero and even if they participated, their participation will not be genuine. Therefore, from figure 4.1, it is visible that although majority of respondents participate (90% in Soda village and 97% in Nosera village) in electoral process (voting) but there are few respondents (10% in Soda and 3% in Nosera) who abstain from participating in the process of voting and attending gram Sabha meetings and the figure 4.2 shows information about if the respondents were informed about the gram Sabha meetings or not;

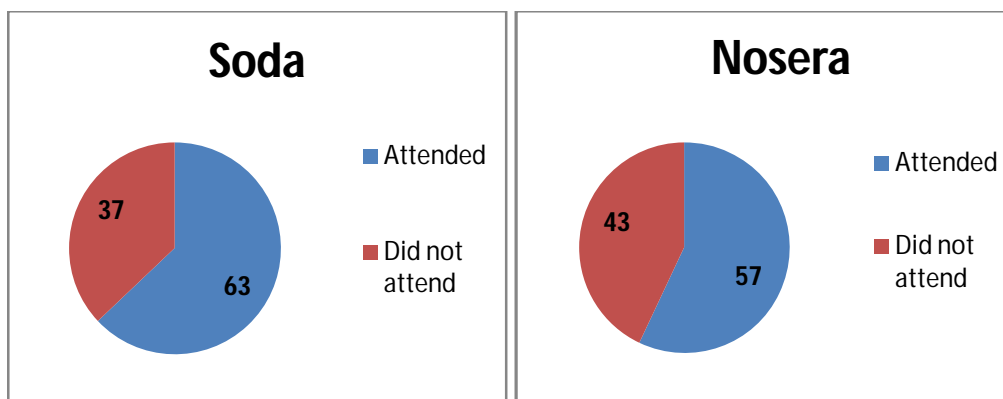
Figure 4.2: Information about Gram Sabha meetings by Ward member



It can be seen from the figure 4.2 that out of total 100 respondents (both male and female) 98 people from Soda village agreed to the fact that the information about the gram Sabha meetings was delivered to them at the appropriate time, whereas 97 people from Nosera agreed to the same. Generally, the attendance of women members of the village is below than normal in these meetings due to the lack of congenial conditions for their

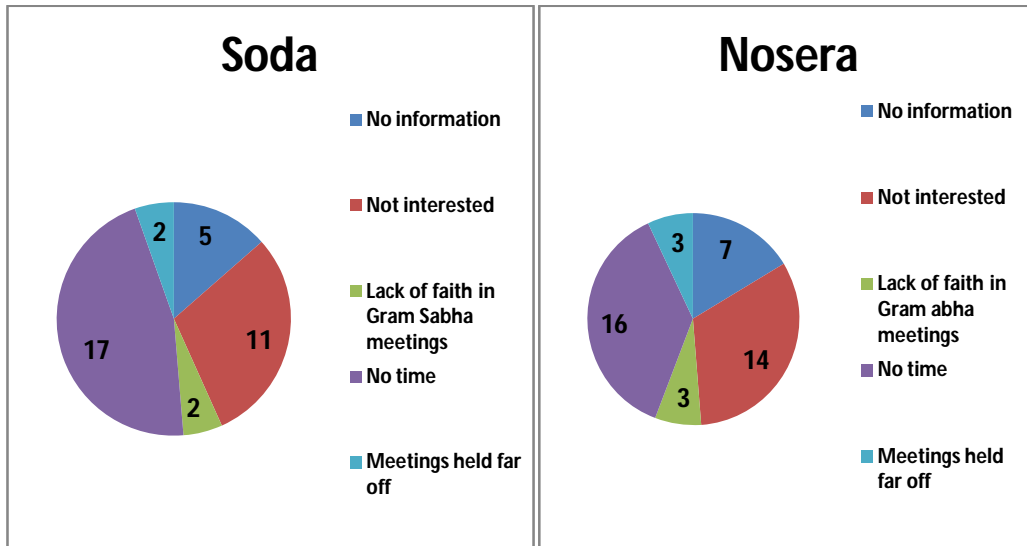
participation. They find difficult to express themselves in front of village elders and male members of their villages resulting in their absence from such public meetings. It is the legal duty of the Sarpanch to organize minimum of two gram Sabha meetings in a year. The Sarpanch should preside over the gram sabha meetings. The lack of information was also cited as one of the reasons for absenteeism from Gram Sabha meetings. The attendance in Gram Sabha meetings can be seen from figure 4.3 below;

Figure 4.3: Attendance in Gram Sabha meetings



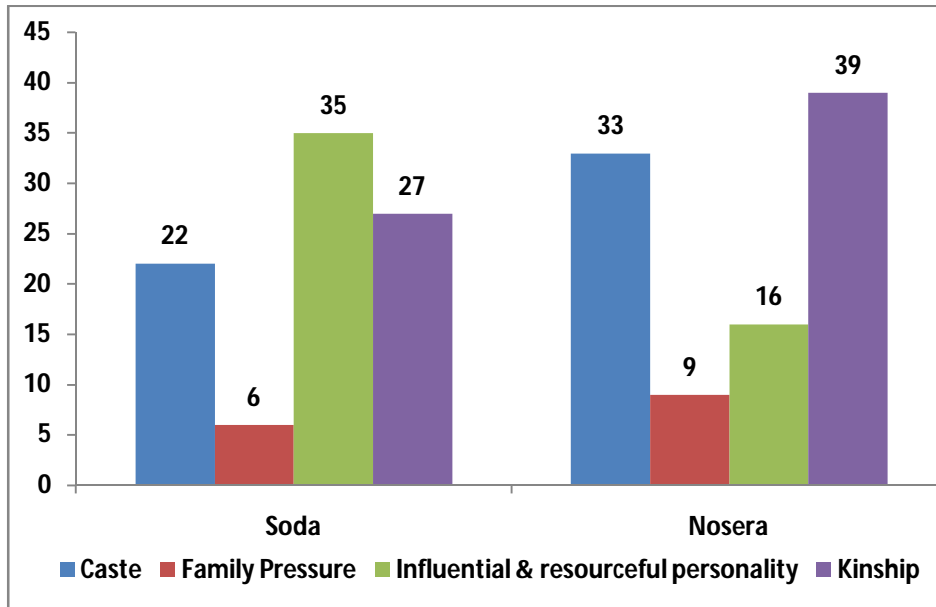
As is evident from figure 4.3 that 63% of the respondents attended gram Sabha meetings in Soda, whereas, 37% stated varied reasons for not attending the meeting. On the other hand, 57% attended gram Sabha meetings in Nosera village and 43% did not turn up for the meetings. There were various reasons cited for not attending the meetings which can be seen through figure 4.4 below;

Figure 4.4: Percentage of Respondents according to the reason for not participating in Gram Sabha Meetings by Village



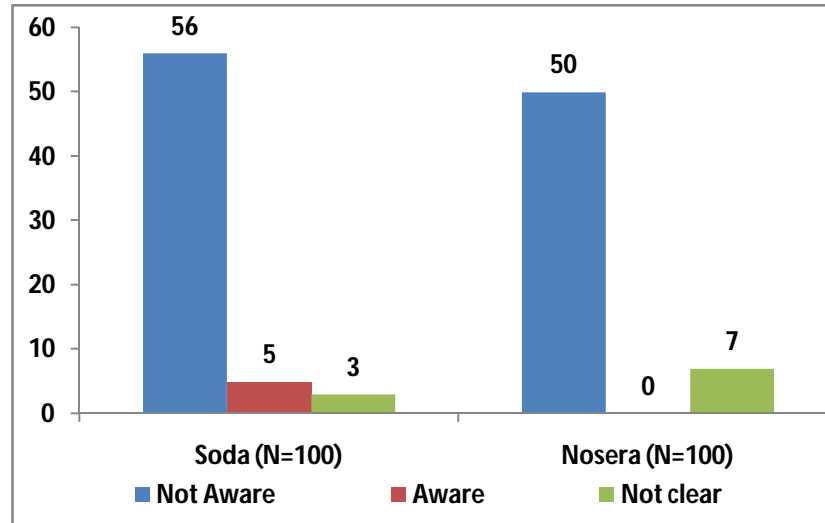
From noting the varying levels of awareness, among the respondents, about the powers and functions of the panchayat bodies, due consideration is given to various indices of people’s participation who were interviewed. The reasons for not attending the meetings as shown in the figure 4.4 reveals that those who have cited as lack of time as the reason was generally due to domestic work (esp. for women) or livelihood concerns, with smaller numbers citing the inconvenience of distance or seclusion as the reason for nonattendance. Information about meetings is frequently not even properly communicated. The distance of the venue was also one of the reasons along with many respondents not being interested in attending gram Sabha meetings. An important aspect of women’s participation in the proceedings of the panchayats is their role in committees. Most panchayats have several committees, but there is no provision for a quota-based representation of women on panchayat committees. This remains a serious lacuna because it provides a convenient handle for excluding and marginalizing women members. But there were majority of respondents (male and female) who participated in the process and there were varied reasons for the participation (voting) which are enumerated in the figure 4.5 below;

Figure 4.5: Percentage of Respondents according to the factors that influenced their voting behavior:



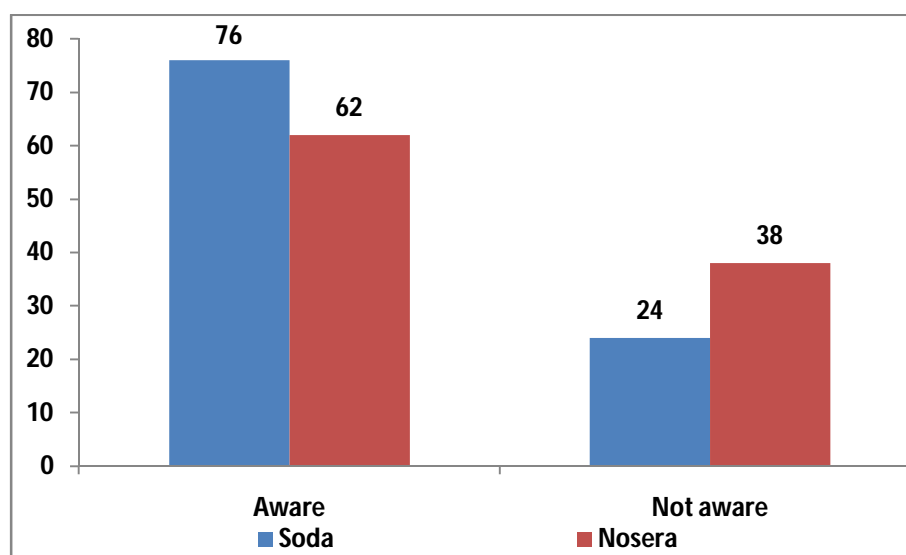
Besides the levels of participation in voting we are also interested to know the factors which influenced a voter to cast a vote for a particular candidate. The Figure 4.5 exhibits that 22% respondents from Soda and 33% from Nosera stated that, they voted for a particular candidate who belongs to their caste. 6% respondents from Soda and 9% respondents from Nosera opined that they voted for a particular candidate as they have been pressurized/ directed by the family elders/males. 35% respondents from Soda and 16% from Nosera admitted that the influential and resourceful personality of the candidate influenced their voting behavior; whereas 27% people from Soda and 39% from Nosera cast their votes based on kinship relations. Along with these factors, localism and money and muscle power also influenced the individual voters to vote for a candidate in the last Panchayat election. From the figure 6, it is clear that most of the villagers did not exercise their voting rights independently even though they have got the political rights. The respondents were also inquired about their awareness about postponement of Gram Sabha meetings due to lack of quorum on which the responses were as given in figure 4.6;

Figure 4.6: Percentage of Respondents who were Aware of Gram Sabha Meetings Postponed due to Lack of Quorum by Village:



When further probed about the postponement of meetings due to lack of quorum in Soda, majority of the respondents i.e. 56 percentage respondents among those who were attending gram Sabha meetings answered in negative while 5 percent said yes and 3 percent out of them were not clear about the answer. While on the same question, Nosera respondents who attended meetings, 50 percent out of them answered no postponement of any of the meetings due to lack of quorum and 7 percent respondents had no idea about the concept of quorum (figure 6). Not only the postponement of meeting due to lack of quorum but also the respondents' awareness about the various developmental programmes by the ward members is also one of the rights of the village residents which is enumerated in figure 4.7 below;

Figure 4.7: Percentage of Respondents according to the awareness about Developmental programmes by village



The time, purpose and place of Gram Sabha meeting should be communicated through a notice giving minimum two days prior information. The rules say that the Gram Sabha can be organized only after an appropriate notice of purpose, venue and time of Gram Sabha is informed. Government Order has recommended three methods for issuing notice of Gram Sabha meetings. They are;

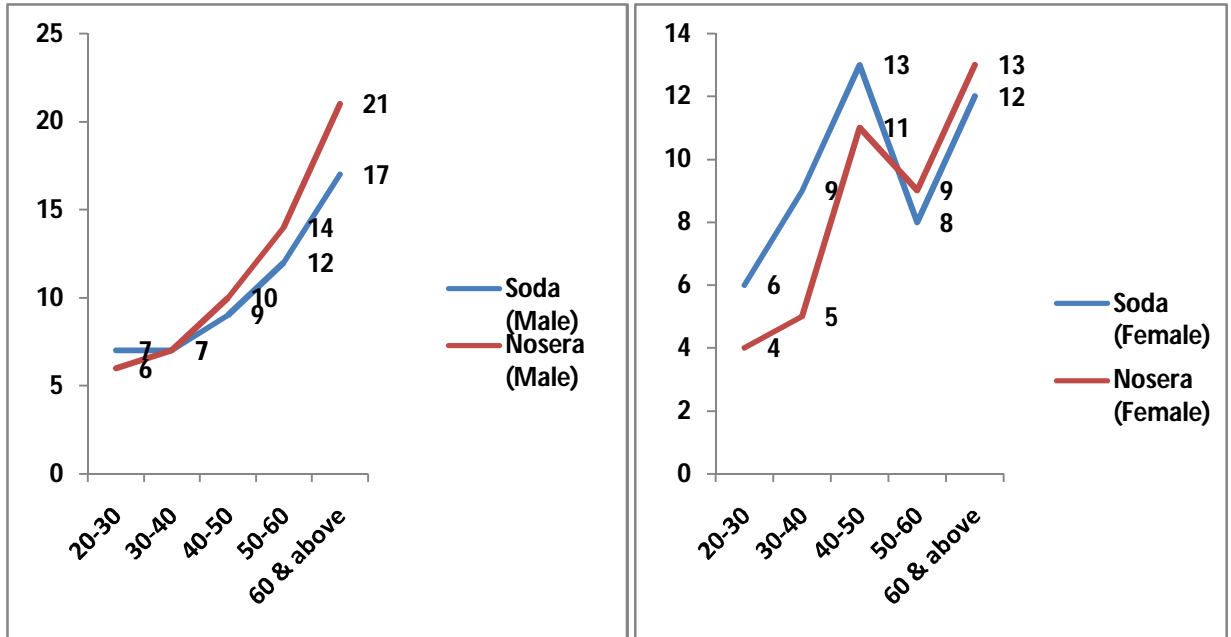
1. Making public declaration,
2. Displaying public notice at three main venues in the village,
3. Advertise the notice at the Notice Board of panchayat office building.

Either one of these methods must be stringently adhered to by the *Sarpanch*. Gram Panchayat shall take all feasible steps to ensure participation of villagers in Gram Sabha meetings depending upon the situation prevailing in the village. The awareness about various developmental programmes is also one of the duties of the ward members to be communicated till the villagers.

As the present study deals with the governance pattern of two female Sarpanches, therefore, it becomes necessary to evaluate the participation of women members from

different age groups of both the villages. The age profile of both the male and female respondents has been given in the form of Graph 1 & Graph 2 below;

Graph 1 and 2: Age Profile of Male and Female Respondents;



For the selection of the respondents a snow ball technique was adopted, yet it cut across all age group with a little heaping at 50-60 age group among male respondents and 40-50 age groups in female respondents. It is, however, over all the age distribution is inclusive. One of the research objectives was to look into the role of education while selecting the *Sarpanches*, which can be gauged by their responses and their own educational profiles plays any role in deciding education as an important factor or not can be seen through table 4.4;

Table 4: Education Profile of Respondents:

Education	Soda		Nosera	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	8	28	20	29
Primary	3	7	10	5

Secondary	21	5	12	3
Graduation & above	18	8	8	7

On inquiring the respondents about their preference, whether the educated and uneducated Sarpanch, the replies which were given by respondents from Soda village reflected that there were certain advantages of having an educated Sarpanch such as arranging vocational and skill training camps in summer vacations for the students and youth of the village which provides a kind of guidance for students in field of education. Being educated made it comparatively easier for the Sarpanch to complete administrative or bureaucracy related and bank related works. Soda became first IT enabled village under her. She is also promoting basic computer literacy among the villagers and youngsters of the village. There is a technology education Lab in village which could be made possible as the Sarpanch herself was highly educated and wanted to see the village progressing. There is also the provision of online postings for birth and death certificates and also the land records. After the present Sarpanch came to power, crime rate came down and she also plays counseling role for females of her village in cases of domestic violence & other domestic issues. Percentage of attendance in gram Sabha meetings has increased esp. female participation.

The Sarpanch encouraged the prenatal programmes for expecting mothers. There is a reduction in instances of early child marriages and sanitation and hygiene was given more importance. She took the work of building water reservoir and rain water harvesting seriously and completed the task successfully in a village where even safe drinking water was unavailable earlier. She took solar power support from a Delhi based company to increase the supply of power for her village. After she came to power, drainage and sewage problems have been resolved and there are garbage collection receptacles at the fixed points in the village along with the well paved roads inside the village.

While the respondents from Nosera village replied that their Sarpanch arranged for health checkup camps for pregnant women and several blood donation camps along with

institutional delivery services for the village females. They also told that a new building of local health sub centre was constructed during her regime. This Sarpanch made arrangements for water and power supply for her village and also improved condition of 'Anganwadi' centre. But when asked about any educational camps, it was found that this village lagged behind in arranging such camps which made it clear that vocational education related avenues are yet to be explored by the residents. She also realised that communication with bureaucracy was becoming difficult without basic functional literacy, so she started with her education process with distance learning mode.

When asked in Soda village about the difference in the working of male and female Sarpanch, most of male respondents were appreciative of the sincerity of her work but not any major difference in their day-to-day life. But the same question to female respondents brought out different perspective such as how there is advantage of having a female Sarpanch who gave importance to women related issues like reduction in cases of domestic violence and crimes, female counseling, awareness about pre natal and maternity programmes. They also said that this Sarpanch listens objectively to the problems of the villagers, irrespective of the gender of the complainer. After coming of the present Sarpanch, female residents of the village got a chance to voice their opinion, which in a sense is heading towards more egalitarian society to some extent. Whereas, the same question in Nosera village resulted in bringing out an important reality of our society engulfed both by caste and patriarchy. As a woman who came from a Dalit community it was a struggle against both caste and male domination, yet she managed to win (on unreserved seat) votes amongst her people and she today works for their betterment. The Sarpanch being uneducated herself, realised the importance of education & established schools up to class 12th which were earlier till class 8th only and contributed in increasing the female student enrollment. She has addressed the crucial issue of sex selection, infant and maternal mortality and reproductive and child health by focusing on gender fostering. Samerdha Nosera village is among the 20 Gram Sabhas selected for 'Sangam Matri Mission Sansthan' for a project on "Strengthening Gender Response of Panchayats in Rajasthan." It is due to her efforts that the child sex ratio of Nosera village

has improved to 1014 females as against 982 males. The cases of girl child dropouts from schools have reduced along with maternal and infant mortality rate.

On the issue of major developments and availabilities in their respective villages, the checklist was referred to in order to ask about the details of both the villages. The checklist enumerated different facilities and services which come under the purview of duties and responsibilities of the Sarpanch and which he/she should make it available for the villagers.

When inquired about such facilities and services from the respondents of Soda and Nosera village, they answered as given in the following table below;

Facilities and Services available in both the villages- Soda and Nosera, as per checklist and the responses from the local respondents:

Facilities	Soda	Nosera
Toilet construction	90% constructed	Constructed but slow progress
Safe drinking water facility	✓	Available but not regular
Water Conservation/Rain water harvesting	✓	Only 1 water tank constructed recently.
Public health centre (sub centre)	✓	Sub centre with nurse.
Panchayat Office	✓	✓
Records of birth/death /marriages	✓	✓
Primary schools	✓	✓
Secondary schools	✓	✓
All weather roads	✓	×
Bank	✓	×

Electricity/ No. of hours available	✓ Increased from 4 to 6 hrs.	✓ 4 hours
Connectivity to main road from the village	✓	✓
Transport: public/ private/ shared jeeps	No public transport; only shared jeeps	no public transport; only shared jeeps

The local respondents from both the villages answered about various facilities and services available in their respective villages such as on the issue of toilet construction, (under the name of *Total Sanitation Campaign* in 1999, later named as *Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan* and now covered under *Swachh Bharat Mission* to be completed by 2019), Panchayati Raj Institutions are given funds to cover the cost of building toilets and hence participate in encouraging sanitation through their respective Gram Panchayats. The respondents from Soda village agreed to the fact that 90% of the work has been completed and there are only few houses left to be covered (as interviewed in February 2016) and on the other hand in Nosera village, respondents said that although the construction is going on but the progress is slow for which they cited various reasons such as time delay in release of funds, non availability of continuous supply of water and willingness to use toilets inside their houses but one thing which was a major issue in both the villages was not only the construction of such toilets but also the frequency (preference over open defecation) of using these toilets. The senior citizens who were interviewed (Soda and Nosera both) were not comfortable in using these newly constructed toilets although few educated ones among them were in favour of the construction but they also pointed out the scarcity of water as one of the reasons for less usage of such toilets. In Nosera, the reasons cited were reluctance to change the traditional ways of life and greater scarcity of water than Soda village and some responded that they used toilets as storage places because it was the only concrete structure they had in the house. "It is impossible to relieve inside four walls. It looks like defecating in the house. All my life I have defecated in open air. But now I am trying to use toilets since it is compulsory," said one of the senior citizen of the village. There was

a misconception in the minds of villagers who argued that there was so much empty space to defecate and these toilets need lot of water. Many of the respondents think that having such a toilet near the residence would be ritually polluting and also that worshipping and cooking in the same area will not be possible if they will use these toilets. Secondly, because cleaning toilets is associated with “untouchables” so there was a problem of cleaning these toilets and few respondents also complained that using these toilets inside the houses will make their houses smell bad. To a great surprise, the respondents also cited that while they go out in the open to defecate, they get fresh air in the morning and also by walking they are getting good exercise regime daily. But the women respondents were happy about the recent changes and development as the women earlier could go out for defecation early in the morning or late at night. Therefore, there are culturally ingrained behavioral barriers which restrict these respondents from using the toilets irrespective of the fact that the construction of toilets is going on in their villages.

The next issue was safe drinking water facility which has been given priority even in our Indian constitution under Article 47, conferring duty to the state governments to provide safe and clean drinking water and maintain public health for the citizens. Both the state and central government are extending technological, financial and policy level support to extend the implementation of the safe and clean drinking water schemes in rural India. The mere access to drinking water is in itself a great challenge and above that safe drinking water is a greater challenge to be tackled. In this regard, the *Sarpanch* of Soda village went ahead in dealing with the bureaucracy and after lot of struggle and efforts she could make it possible for her village members to have access to clean and safe drinking water facility. On the other hand, the *Sarpanch* from the Nosera village also displayed commitment in bringing safe water facility to her village and after her sustained efforts, it is now available to the villagers but due to the remote location of this village the access is not regular. The respondents from Nosera village mention this facility as the first thing when inquired about the contribution of the present *Sarpanch*.

Along with the safe drinking water facility, rain water harvesting was also one of the aspects which need to be mentioned here, the reservoir for water conservation in Soda village was built up with the help of the village and community members when the Sarpanch took the initiative to provide water to the villagers. But on the other hand, the reservoir in the form of tank in Nosera was built by the government. The respondents from Nosera village also mentioned that they use rain water which is stored in *kunds* as drinking water also. These *kunds* help them store rain water for long as there is scarcity of rainfall in this region. They use this water for drinking and other domestic and agricultural uses.

On the facility of public health centre or availability of sub-centre in their villages, the respondents from Soda answered that they have one government health centre which had majority of health facilities and testing labs. This health centre also provided facility for institutional delivery for the women and there was a regular posting of MBBS Doctor with the required staff members for assistance. While in Nosera, there was a single room dispensary where only one staff nurse is available who administers few basic medical facilities and if any emergency arises, the respondents mentioned that they have to visit the Khajuwala Tehsil government clinic which is approximately 5 km from the village. Although there is one private dispensary in the vicinity of the village where one compounder is available for the village.

The panchayat offices were functional in both the villages. But the main difference being the IT enabled office in Soda village which was missing in Nosera. All the registrations for birth, death and marriage certificates are done online in Soda village which has made the process faster and more transparent. There is also a provision of dropping an email (although used by very less percentage) to the village *Sarpanch* of Soda for any query or problem which makes it to be at an advantageous position. There are registrations of birth, death and marriages in Nosera village also but they are still done in a traditional way.

The primary and secondary level schools are also available in both the villages. Earlier in Nosera village there were schools only up to 8th standard but with the efforts of the Sarpanch, these were upgraded till class 12th which was a welcome move towards empowering the masses. The respondents from Nosera said that the school dropout rates have reduced since then as their daughters do not travel outside the villages to complete school education. The Soda respondents were happy that their Sarpanch took effort in arranging vocational training summer camps every year which provides them basic computer skills and other needed skills for employment. There is a computer lab available in the village which makes Soda stand at better position today. Soda is doing well in two other facilities also such as all weather roads and availability of bank inside the village. There are well paved roads with proper drainage facilities inside the village which is missing from Nosera. The availability of Bank inside the village in Soda has made the respondents aware of many banking facilities and government schemes and they are happy about it too.

The availability of electricity was there in both the villages but in Soda it was increased from 4 hours to 6 hours with the sustained efforts by the Sarpanch towards her village. But apart from these facilities which were provided to the villagers there were some major problems which hinders the development of the respective villages and it included underemployment, and that the cattle rearing and farming are the only occupation options available and therefore they have to go to cities for better earning jobs, no regular supply of clean drinking water (Nosera), and lack of updated education facilities were listed by the respondents.

On the question that whether the condition of the marginalized section of the society (esp. women) have changed after the coming of female Sarpanch and the female respondents replied that now they can approach the Sarpanch directly without any hesitation, as they felt that she is someone from amongst them only. When it was asked from the respondents about their degree of satisfaction (or lack of it) from their position in the rural society, around 90% said that their position was far from satisfactory and when asked to outline the reasons for this position, they cited various reasons such as lack of

education, economic dependence, etc., On the issue of whether financial independence is necessary for the political career, 72.5% say that economic empowerment is a definite prerequisite for political empowerment of women at the grassroots, 20% say it is not a necessary prerequisite while 7.5% could not reply to this question. 77.5% identified literacy campaign and various education programmes including a campaign to inform the rural women politically as a measure to empower women in both the villages. 80% spoke in favour of equipping rural women with the source of economic means while 72.5% were in favour of removing traditional form of social life of rural areas so as to enable women to come on equal terms with men. This only shows a deep resentment among women in general against the continued suppression of women in the society and also a wish to break free from the clutches of those forces which perpetrate this suppression. But they also reported that there is improvement to certain level after coming of the respective female sarpanches as the leaders in their villages. Soda village respondents replied that she listens & takes action objectively. This clearly shows how the situation is changing in rural spaces where women were certainly not allowed outside their houses. They were not even allowed to talk in front of men or in their presence.

The problem of 'proxy' and concept of "*Sarpanch pati*" holds irrelevance in both the cases. Women from both the gram panchayats (Soda and Nosera) participate in voting and women representatives said that according to their familiarity, functions have been delegated to the panchayats although they have to deal with many problems when it comes to execution. They also pointed out that some issues, viz. lack of education, inadequate finance, low access to evidence about the real management of the PRIs, and absence of exposure to the external world inhibit their efficient functioning. The *Sarpanches* said that to bring all round development in their respective villages, problems associated with the availability of basic conveniences such as roads and water should be solved. It was said that discussions on gender and authority should be in the framework of capabilities and powers of the PRIs. Also, the exclusion of women representatives and leaders from effective decision-making positions in panchayat institutions has been frequently documented. Earlier there were also the cases of proxy representation by their husbands and other male family members who not only campaign for their women, but

also accept notices of and appear in meetings in their place. The husbands of women *pradhans* are all too often referred to as the *pradhan*, as they assume the power of the *pradhan* and discharge the functions of their office. Given the patriarchal arrangement of our Indian society, it is not surprising that cases of surrogate representation are found in many parts of the country. It is important to take note that while there are areas where this phenomenon is predominantly strong; there are also areas where it is weak. Therefore, it is imperative not to lose sight of local differentiation in social structure, especially gender relations in order to escape the rash general conclusion that women's emancipation and empowerment under the new panchayati raj system is a complete and hopeless failure.

One of the basic problems of PRIs still remain that some of the women Sarpanches didn't even know that they were the Sarpanches. Here the role of illiteracy and social customs are equally responsible for her ignorance about her own self and rights, which she considered herself as an appendix of her husband. However, in my field work, both the sarpanches (educated and illiterate) were well aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities. This can be seen as a stark contrast between the earlier studies done and the situation as it exists today. The problem of 'proxy' as observed generally among illiterate female sarpanches was not present in my field. The help and cooperation from the male members of both the family and PRIs is of great significance, without which it will be difficult for women to come out and participate in public spaces. The positive attitude of male members of Panchayats would encourage rural women's active participation. In my study, the Sarpanch of Samerdha Nosera (uneducated and married) agreed to this fact that the family support indeed plays an important role in carrying out our responsibilities and also stated how her husband and family were very encouraging supportive of her work.

The earlier studies conducted on PRIs and women participation had cited numerous reasons for their participation in the form of contesting elections. The most common reason being the mandatory reservation of seats for women candidates, without which in many states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka, women citizens were kept outside this purview. The provision of reservation has enabled women to come out in the political

arena but this provision is also plagued with problem of 'proxy' in most of the cases. Many factors play their role in deciding the position of women at decision making levels; such as economic, socio-cultural and patriarchal trends in the region.

The study of women representative in Khajuwala tehsil (Nosera) has informed that the support from community and family being the key reason for contesting. Other studies have showed that there are instances about women who took their own choice to contest for the *Panchayat Samiti* election were subjected to physical and verbal abuse from their husbands and families. Here, in my field, on the contrary, the support from husband and family proved to be the major motivating factor. The positive correlation between education and literacy, on the one side, and awareness, on the another, is reinforced by data from Tonk (Soda). In this region, we find superior literacy indicators, as well as greater levels of awareness about the fundamentals of the new panchayati raj institution. In fact, the lack of awareness generally relates to features which most ordinary citizens would want to be informed about.

The mostly neglected feature of consciousness among rural women representatives or leaders about the functioning and responsibilities of a Gram Sabha was also inquired about. Both the Sarpanches were well aware about their roles, responsibilities, powers, rights and duties. The unit of Gram Sabha is unquestionably the most important unit in the pyramidal structure of PRIs. The education level was also one of the reasons why many members did not understand the importance of their participation in the electoral processes of the village. Therefore, it becomes an important aspect to be inquired whether education plays any role in participation.

Women empowerment and representation: Experience from the field

The conclusion from the field shows that many women have come out of the veil system and few of them also mentioned that with the coming of female Sarpanch, there is certain sense of improvement in their decision making positions within and outside the household. The instances which they quoted were their opinion regarding their daughter's

early marriage and dowry issues. The female respondents, especially in Soda village mentioned the fact about their participation in few issues of decision making. Today, most of the rural women are aware that illiteracy is an impediment and hence they want their daughters to be educated. The women from dalit and tribal backgrounds were seen to be more eager to come out of their bondage than others. Although the enactment of PRI Act has reserved seats for women in order to ensure their participation but extra efforts has to be put in to implement it seriously. The lack of formal education and basic literacy makes it difficult for them to understand the gender biases in the policies. The form of caste and gender discrimination which women go through especially in rural areas of our country needs to be tackled carefully by educating men along with women and making them gender sensitive. The transformatory role of PRIs will continue in order to bring equity among the rural masses.

The study has been conducted at the micro level by taking two Gram Panchayats (Soda and Samerdha Nosera) as sample units from Tonk and Khajuwala Tehsils in Rajasthan. The main aim of this study is to see the development pattern of both the Sarpanches measured through degree of people's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Ever since independence, a range of efforts have been made to attain people's partaking at the grass-root level through Panchayati raj institutions. During 1952, the CDP and NES were introduced, but they could not accomplish the preferred goals due to lack of popular enterprise and participation of the people in the plan. For this purpose, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was constituted in 1957 which recommended three tier structure of local self government. Later on, many committees were setup with the aim of strengthening grassroots democracy, few of them being, Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977, G.V.K Rao Committee in 1985 and L.M Singhvi Committee in 1986. The regular elections in PRIs ensure an opportunity for rural masses to choose and change the leadership according to their needs and preferences. The people's participation in PRIs as illustrated through the field study at Gram Sabha level is high in the form of involvement in voting.

Every enrolled voter in Gram Panchayat must attend the meetings of Gram Sabha to make it an effective means for seeking solutions to their daily problems. They must come prepared to discuss the different issues associated with the village community. The members must openly discuss about the authenticity of the beneficiaries to be chosen under various schemes and make sure that the poorest amongst the poor gets the benefit. The members must support the Gram Panchayat in arranging the developmental works for the entire village. They should be willing to contribute in the form of funds or through their labor whenever desired by the Gram Panchayat for the progress of village. The members should participate in the Gram Sabha debates and seek any elucidation regarding the performance of Gram Panchayat or on any development related works given to the Gram Panchayat. They must also encourage fellow members especially members coming from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and also backward communities to attend and participate in the Gram Sabha meetings.

While making village development plans, attention should be given for the empowerment and upliftment of citizens belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Backward classes, women and other weaker sections of the society. We have to insure their better attendance and participation in the meetings of gram sabha and provide them with an opportunity to freely communicate their felt requests and grievances. In order to assure their better participation, the information concerning the conduct of gram sabha must be extensively propagated in regions inhabited by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes along with other weaker sections. If their complaints are redressed prior to the next meeting, their trust on gram sabha will be increased and they will show more interest for participating in Gram Sabha meetings regularly.

Normally, the participation of women in Gram Sabha meetings is very meager, and even if they were present at the meetings, they find it hard to voice their opinions and put forward issues and problems related to women due to lack of affable circumstances. Though the self help groups in the state have developed into village groups and are interacting on aspects like loans, savings, etc., they are still uncertain to openly participate in the meetings of Gram Sabhas. In these situations, the Gram panchayat must

take initiative and insure wider participation of women members in gram sabhas by propagation via. Women Self Help groups and the village organisations which can be engaged with the support of women ward members and also by other members. Women related issues should be discussed and steps must be taken to solve them.

This chapter illustrated about the emerging leadership pattern in rural India and it being the source of empowerment not only for the masses but also the marginalized and deprived sections of our society including women. Women who are customarily discriminated and denied involvement in political and public spheres, have initiated participation in such forums because of the reservations and quotas specially enacted for their welfare. The responsible leadership plays a crucial role in determining the successful implementation of various schemes and programmes at the grassroots. The community participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions also to a considerable extent depends upon the kind of leadership administered. Not only women citizens but also other disadvantaged communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes should also be encouraged and involved in the process so that the optimum results of democratic decentralization can be realized and the change in the power structure can be witnessed at the third tier of governance.

CHAPTER 5

Women Representation and the Panchayati Raj Institutions

Introduction

This chapter will deal with the women representation and the issues related to their reservations and representations in India. The policy of affirmative action as legislated by the Parliament took more than two decades to be implemented speaks volumes about the condition of women even in contemporary times. Ironically, the reservation at grassroots politics were implemented through the institutions of Panchayati Raj since the Act was enacted in 1992. There was a long drawn struggle for providing special reservation of seats for women in Parliament. The issue of empowerment of women and Panchayati Raj is also discussed in detailed in this chapter along with the trends and changing pattern of rural leadership. In India, gender has to be situated and understood within a caste-class nexus framework. Uma Chakravarti (1993: 579) opines that caste, class and gender are systems which are inextricably connected together. The institution of caste, which is the traditional form of stratification in our Indian society, is based on ideas of purity and pollution. It works on the argument that caste purity is ensured and maintained through women and therefore women's sexuality is sternly restricted and regulated through the tradition of marriage.

Women were the vital elements for maintaining the limits of these closed groups. Chakravarty depict this inter-linkage of gender and caste as brahminical patriarchy, where patriarchal codes direct the caste system which manages, and is in turn managed by gender practices. The set of rules for women vary according to the position of the caste in the hierarchy ladder, although all women were proscribed with the most rigorous control over their sexuality. Chakravarty (1993: 580)

“The safe-guarding of the caste structure is achieved through the highly restricted movement of women...Women are regarded as gateways-literally points of entrance into the caste system”.

The purity of women is indispensable for maintaining the sanctity of the caste group and thereby women's sexuality is strictly channelized into the institutions such as marriage and motherhood; where both, caste purity is preserved and patrilineal succession is assured. If these traditional structures rupture and miscegeny (the intermixing of castes) show up, the brahminical texts observe this to be *Kaliyuga*, an era of great moral degeneration characterized by collapsed families, corrupt women and intermixing of castes. To avert this from occurring, women's subservience was institutionalized in a range of ways. On the one hand, oppression was exercised by the family, religious and the state authorities. On the other hand, a philosophy of consent was inculcated. This included propagating concepts such as (*pativrata*) or the chaste wife; and duty of women towards their husbands (*stridharma*) as different to giving in to their intrinsic nature (*striswabhava*) which was fickle minded. By generating an ideological supremacy of consent, brahminical patriarchy could assure that women remain closely safeguarded thereby maintaining the caste system.

The times are changing today but these socio-cultural changes would take time to be clearly visible in our society which is deeply entrenched with disparities and discriminations. The discrimination against women stands not only in private sphere such as her home but also in public arena such as political positions. Despite noteworthy advances in political participation, women remain marginalized in leadership positions in politics throughout the world. In many countries, the policy-makers have expressed by recommending gender quotas in politics and progressively, many have articulated an interest in compelling gender quotas for corporate boards. Acceptance of quotas by countries is probably correlated with approach about women within a country. Unbiased representation of women in the utmost decision making body is an immediately required effort to politically empower the women. No nation could feel proud if it discriminates with any of its citizens, and no culture could claim to be component of the modern enlightened world unless it regard its women at par with men.

In keeping with the argument to endow women with gender equality in the political sphere, the proposal of reserving seats for female citizens was introduced by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the later part of 1980s. In 1988, the “National Perspective Plan for Women” recommended that a 30% seats for women should be introduced at all stages of elective bodies. Women’s groups asserted that reservation be confined to the panchayat level in order to encourage grass-roots political participation. The consent around this demand culminated in the implementation of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1993. In 1955, the issue of quotas was highlighted again, but this time the target was the representation of women in Parliament. In 1966, the Deva Gowda led United Front Government and brought in the reservation in Parliament. Nonetheless, it was rejected in an chaos with, some male politicians in contention that women should be staying at home where they really belong. The media had portrayed the deliberation as the ‘battle of the sexes’. The struggle to propose the reservation bill in the Parliament demanding 33% of seats for women have been opposed in the Parliament (chamber of the lower house) in 1998. The male opponents of the bill who opined that it would help only middle class urban women, constantly disrupted proceedings, forcing frequent adjournments. Roy (2005:234) writes:

“What is happening to Indian society in the contemporary times is a criss-crossing of movements of various oppressed sections. Often these movements pull in different and even opposite directions, thus defeating the process of democratization in the short run. It is a challenging task both for the leaders of these movements and social analysts to unravel the myriad oppressions that characterize Indian society and to draw out the major strand which will strengthen and contribute to the overall process of democratization of society. The levers of change have to be sought in an overall democratization of society. And this is even more so in a plural society like India where the political system has to ensure a modicum of equality between all groups if history’s longest oppression is to be seriously tackled. This would imply that the struggle for gender equality and justice will have to be woven into the struggle for emancipation of each of the oppressed groups and communities”.

The irony of Indian situation for providing reservations to women citizens was that they were already availing the reservations at local self government level but they were being denied so at higher levels. The struggle for attaining 33 percent reservations in Parliament took quite a long duration than expected. However, mere provision of reservation will amount to tokenism and no real empowerment can take place unless actual inclusive participation takes place at all levels including rural India. The rural India shapes up the entire scenario of development of our country.

The rural development plays an important role in India's development. The rural development programmes contribute towards the improvement of living conditions of the marginalized and rural population by providing ample opportunities for development with the help of active participation. These development programmes have better chances of successful implementation when the targeted population takes active participation at the multiple stages of decision making. The grassroots reality stands at striking contrast with what the official documents say. The level of participation is still low and the problem of proxy is still prevalent due to various traditional practices and cultural and socio-economic reasons. Nearly 80 percent of rural women do not have active participation in electoral process of the country except in voting. Women participation as candidates is majorly due to family pressure besides, numerous other factors. The process of development and equity can be culminated and percolated to grassroots only with the help of equal participation by both male and female members of our society.

The political stature of women is determined by the extent of freedom and parity enjoyed by her in decision making process. The acceptance of women as equal citizens by the constitution of independent India was a profound retreat from the conventional notions and practices related to women's rights in India as well as in advanced countries. The two dominant forces which contributed in the attainment of political equality for women were the foresightness of Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Movement. India followed the year 2001 as the "Year of Women's Empowerment". The 73rd Amendment Act has reserved one third seats for women at all the 3 levels so as to ensure their participation in public life but despite all these efforts and much more, women especially the rural women has remained confined within "purdas" (veil) and household boundaries.

The active and equal participation by women in public and political life has been advocated by several women activists since long. The women's suffrage contributed greatly towards achieving this equality. Even today, where women all over the world vote as equal citizens but in reality they do not hold political offices in equal numbers. Numerous efforts and recommendations came to rectify this malady during the World Conference of the United Nations Decade of Women held in Nairobi in 1985. One of the resolutions passed during this conference was the commitment from the political parties to nominate women members to political offices. India also strived hard to bring equality among all its citizens as enshrined in the preamble to the Indian constitution. Thereby, giving reservations to women for political participation through the enactment of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. The Panchayati Raj Act was an effort through the process of democratic decentralization to revive the working of Panchayats in rural India. The then Prime Minister of India mentioned "that it is for securing reservations for women so as to fully involve them in the management of Community Affairs."

In studying the role of leaders (women) at grass root level of politics, concentration will be paid on the transforming role of women in Indian rural politics. The Indian constitution assures to all citizens the right to equality of opportunity and political participation. It also acknowledges the political rights of both men and women without any distinction, qualification or discrimination to be involved in the decision making procedure at all levels.

"One of the important aspects of the political life in Indian democracy is electoral participation. The extent, nature and level of Indian women's participation are greater than in many other countries. Secondly, this participation has been more or less steadily expanding over the years. Thirdly, the gap between men and women, in the electoral turnout, is getting more and more narrowed. It is relevant to point out that the number of women getting elected to representative bodies is steadily increasing since independence" (Rajeswari, 1996:4).

Despite all this, and even after so many efforts in the form of affirmative action in the form of quotas and reservations, the participation of women as candidates tends to be low and they hesitate to come out of their private sphere.

The discussions around presentation of women in elected bodies and positions in decision making process, their participation and visibility in the political discourse, have been particularly discordant. This is not astonishing since they pressurize to unsettle hegemonic philosophy of women's 'proper' roles and position in society and family. The contours of the discussion have for a long time been framed by debates over what constitutes politics and relationship of women with it. While feminists have varied opinion over the characterization of politics, the method of 'doing' it, and the way in which women can make for themselves a more noteworthy political presence, over the previous decade, questions concerning available choices in electoral plan and their relative efficacy in assuring participation and representation of women have started to be explored with better assurance and confidence.

Feminists have at all times reminded us that the private and public can co-exist as dichotomous and oppositional categories where all citizens are not equally free. And designating the private and public as distinctive categories, in addition, without analyzing the social and historical contexts in which they get expressed, they argue, is erroneous and also not enough for explanation of social process, since it eliminates the difficulties that truly exist in social and political life. Feminists have not merely observed about the exclusionary nature of these limits, but also the manner in which diverse historical contexts, women have moreover negotiated with them to make them permeable, or demolish them and redefining their constitutive fundamentals, and their mutual relationships.

It is imminent in the rethinking of the affiliation between "private and the public is the 'relocation' and 'reconstitution' of the abstract citizen". The process of repositioning is central to the scheme of constructing democratic citizenship since the masked, unmarked and abstract citizen, is integral to liberalism, and is constitutive of the binary of political and social life. Following again the process of critique and convalescence, the appraisal of the citizen can be done on the basis that it perceive of the citizen as an unfettered,

disconnected self, who seeks realization, not through political action, but through a variety of other commitment and activities that take place in varied and loosely linked associations. Moreover, feminists, besides the multiculturalists, have also criticized the 'uniformity' and 'generality' that liberal citizenship encompasses since it overlooks the inequalities that are present in real life.

“The idea of the un-embedded and unencumbered self, the abstract citizen in the liberal framework has been rejected for advocating a context free and apolitical citizenship the floating and unconnected individuality of the citizen is not seen as conducive to building relational/democratic citizenship” (Roy, 2005: 15).

The next important issue is the tracing the journey of women's representation in India. Their long drawn struggle made it possible to finally have 33 percent seats reserved for women candidates.

The Issue of Women's Representation in India

Even seventy years of independence with 'competitive democratic politics' has been unable to give more than a token representation to women. The contemporary concern for providing special representation to women in legislatures can be understood if one traces the struggle for granting of women's suffrage during the colonial times. Jenkins (1999: 59) mentions, “The issue of women's franchise emerged in the last decades of the colonial rule when the British granted Indians limited rights to serve as representatives in legislative bodies”. The struggle for women's franchise can be divided into two phase as given by J.M. Everett (1981:44);

“The first phase (1917-1928) was primarily concerned with the issue of women's franchise. The second phase (1928-1937) of the women's campaign attempted to expand the franchise and secure special representation for women in legislatures (Ibid: 1981). The first phase began with the establishment of a number of local and provincial women's organisation which merged later to form national organisations. Women's India Association (WIA) was established in 1917 while the National Council of

Women in India (NCWI) and the All India Women's Conference was established later in 1925 and 1927 respectively. The primary aim of these organisations was to struggle for Indian women's right to vote. Franchise was demand on grounds that it was the 'entry-point' for women into the 'male world of decision making'. This struggle is said to have begun in 1917 when Sarojini Naidu led an All India Women's deputation to Montague, the Secretary of State for India. The memorandum submitted by the women's deputation urged for the extension of suffrage to the 'people of India' including women. However when the scheme of reforms was published, limited franchise was granted to Indian men while women were completely left out. The 1919 Government of India Act enfranchised 30% of the Indian adults for provincial assemblies with certain educational and property qualifications. In 1924 the Reform Committee investigated the issue of women's franchise by consulting women's organisations. In 1927 franchise was granted to a small number of women when the Madras state Provincial Legislature allowed them to vote. The second phase of the women's campaign began in 1928 when the Simon Commission visited India. While many women leaders and the Congress boycotted the Commission, a faction of the women's movement appeared before the commission. The "women uplift faction" as Everett calls them argued for relaxation of property and educational requirements and reservation of four seats for women in legislatures in order "to encourage women to take part in political affairs and to better represent women's interest in education and social welfare".

The group representation policy of British government paved the way for expanding women's franchise. There was a rift in Indian women's movement between two opposed groups supporting and discarding the demand for special representation for women and it was visible during the First Round Table Conference held in 1931 (Jenkins, 1999:60). On the other hand a memorandum was submitted by all the women's organisations against reservation of seats for women. This memorandum clearly stated that the AIWC, WIA and NCWI were against the demands advanced by small individual groups of people for temporary concession or adventitious methods of legislatures through reservation,

nomination or co-option. They further added that any form of preferential treatment would “violate the integrity of the universal demand of Indian women for absolute equality of political status” (Sharma 1998: 8). The step for representation was not taken positively and was rather seen as an instrument to create divisions in the society. Muthulakshmi Reddi opposed reservation which was seen as a device to pave “common platform” to bring Brahmins, the women citizens and the pariahs in unity (Jenkins, 1999: 60).

During the All India Women’s Conference, Sarojini Naidu stated that, “The demand for granting preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing in India as the women have always been by the side of men in council and in the fields of battle. We must rise above nationalism, above religion, above sex. This section of the women's movement forged integral links with the nationalist movement” (Sharma and Rai 2000: 151). The Congress had its own reasons to support women’s franchise as the denial of franchise would have nullified the purpose of representative government. The participation of women in large numbers in the national movement was due to the hopes raised for granting them franchise; “out of the 80,000 people arrested during the salt Satyagraha Movement in 1930, 17,000 were women. Further it was assumed that franchise to women was not a radical measure because women would not participate in democratic politics in large number or would vote along the lines of their husband” (Ibid 2000: 151). The Government of India Act 1935 had reserved 41 seats in provincial legislatures along with the few in central legislature. This decision of reserving seats was seen as an outcome of advocacy for Indian women’s rights by some British advocates. They categorized women as minorities on one hand and on the other hand, the religious minorities of India such as Sikhs, Muslims and also the untouchables were categorized as “major minorities”. The major minorities got special electoral rights in 1909 and therefore in 1935 the remaining minor minorities were also given reservation in seats. It was a deliberate attempt to subdue the nationalists and appease the minorities (Nair 1996:122). Jenkins (1999:61) opines, “The overriding concern with major minorities impinged on the reservation of seats for women and was manifested in reservation of some seats for Muslim women. This policy of group representation was one of the major tactics for implementing the 'divide and rule' policy.

The AIWC initially opposed reservations but eventually participated in the elections of 1937. Fifty-six women were elected: 41 in reserved seats, ten in unreserved seats and five in nominated seats. The growing tension between the Congress and the Muslim League affected the women's movement”.

After independence, Muslim women aligned with a separate organization as they felt that they were being alienated by the present women's movement which was Hindu dominated. The constitution of independent India retained the reservations in legislatures only for the SC/ST population. The supporters of women franchise in legislatures did not support special representation for women in legislatures. Women had taken affirmative stand while participating in the nationalist struggle and rejected the idea of being looked down upon as “victims in need of helping hand”. They wanted equal representation with men and while demanding equal representation, they never argued for special provisions.

The gender equality being accepted by the constitution of India and giving them independent identity was like the realization of a dream and the years which followed independence were seen as “silent years” in the women's movement as there was rampant perception that the primary goal of women entry into political sphere has been realised. The traditional Indian society was always embedded with the inequalities and discrimination towards women but it was presumed that the formal entry of women citizens and the access to political, economic, educational institutions will definitely lead towards changes in women's overall status and also in politics.

The Congress made only limited attempts after independence to accomplish its commitment towards women in the form of pursuing the reforms in personal laws and framing administrative bodies so as to actualize better opportunities for women. The government delegated a committee on the Status of Women in India in 1974 and the findings of this committee brought out several issues and aspects related to women. Jenkins (Jenkins 1999: 62) acknowledges that, “the report of the committee is of seminal importance because of two reasons. Firstly, it is the only comprehensive government report on women in India and secondly, the issue of special representation of women divided the committee the most”. The committee constituted for the purpose demonstrated its hard work and tried to overcome ‘paucity of data’ by collecting and

going through all kinds of sources (Kasturi, 1995:14). “The committee attempted to study 'gender roles and status', 'social, economic and cultural institutions and the structure of rights and opportunities provided by the state” (Govt. of India, 1974: 7, Jenkins 1999: 60). The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974-75) said that the state had failed to follow ‘pro-women’ policies and also had not granted their due share of economic and other benefits (Mazumdar, 2006:7) writes;

“Every legal measure designed to translate the constitutional norm of equality or special protection into actual practice has had to face tremendous resistance from the legislative and other elites. It suggests that in spite of breaking the formal barriers to women's exclusion from the political and socio-economic realm, women continued to be in a state of subordination. Gender inequality was seen in every sector within the family and the work place. The subordination of women was visible in the adverse sex ratio, low life expectancy of women, early marriage, high female mortality and morbidity rates, unequal access to health care and inadequate nutrition. Moreover vast numbers of women were illiterate and this was a great barrier in improving their position in employment, health, exercise of their rights attaining equal status. Female literacy did not increase at a rapid rate after independence either in absolute numbers or in relation to the growth of literacy among men. Further, there was a continuous invisibility of women in certain work areas where they were largely involved. The findings of the committee revealed that the developmental process had initiated a pushing out process by which large number of women suffered a decline of economic status. The varied failures only perpetuated the marginalization of women in society. These findings 'set the stage' for the debate over reservation of legislative seats in the committee. In deposing before the committee, individuals argued in favour of reservation” (Government of India, 1974: 301).

Upendra Baxi suggests that the reservation of seats will not defy the proposition for equality of sexes or the concept of representative democracy (Mazumdar, 2000:28). He

held that this reservation was of paramount importance and was a 'transitional provision' in order to fracture the 'in built' gender inequalities. On the other hand, Iqbal Narain that the political status of women is generally linked to her socio-economic status and the changes in one status brings about the changes in another. V.M Sirsikar was a staunch supporter of reservation of seats for women as he felt that it would increase their political participation and also drive them to carry their responsibilities in a better way.

It can be seen clearly that while the committee report recommended reservation of seats in institutions of local self government but on the other hand, it abandoned the similar idea for state legislative bodies and parliament. There were two basic arguments for such a decision; first being that the inequalities which were faced by other marginalized groups such as religious minorities and lower castes exceeded than those faced by women. The committee report mentioned; "though women have 'some real problem of their own they share with men the problem of their groups, locality and community. Women are not concentrated in certain areas and there can be no rational basis for reservation". The second reason, that the majority of benefits of these reservations would be availed by women from upper class, whereas the main objective of this reservation was granting equal footing to women of all classes. This was seen as an instrument which would 'encourage separatist tendencies'.

The treatment of women as subordinate and weak naturally tends to give support to the idea of differential preferential treatment. "Legislative acts and the developmental process has ameliorated the condition of women's lives in some ways but has failed to improve their position in society. The conditions of women have improved because the state has addressed the practical gender needs of women but has failed to address the strategic gender needs of women. The practical gender needs are those which are derived inductively from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gendered division of labour and are usually in response to a perceived need. Strategic gender need are derived 'deductively' from the analysis of women's subordination which entail a strategic goal such as gender equality or women's emancipation" (Kabeer, 1995:90). The Indian state has tried to implement regulations and policies which addressed employment and education related issues of women but the patriarchal mindset of women being a

weaker sex is still carried on in our society. The women movement tried to correct this mindset and made the nation realize that India is a welfare state and women as equal citizens have equal rights as men (Mazumdar, 2000:8). Mazumdar sees that Indian Women's Movement has completely changed the issue of women's reservation. They have been encouraged by fellow women members to be a rational being and understand the concept of 'nation building' which requires the real implementation of development, freedom, social progress and much more. The seats were reserved at the local level which further created a demand for similar reservations in the state legislatures and parliament. But the unsaid truth remains that the other marginalized groups such as backward classes, tribals, Dalits and others also claim their share in these reservations, which cannot be looked away from.

Women cannot be a homogeneous category. There is diversity within this category on the basis of caste, class, religion and region. The women's movement has shown that the idea of equating women with SC/ST is not well received, which holds true even for Muslim women. Jenkins (Jenkins, 1999:69) mentions that sub quota for Muslim women is the only way to make them come out in public life. Whereas, Young (Young, 2000:148) holds that the providing reservations within reservations can be seen as a trial to "pluralize group representation". The Women Reservation Bill was passed after 14 years, which in itself is testimony to the fact about the obstacles being faced by women in real life. The Bill was passed in 2010 before which it lapsed 3 times after the initial introduction in Lok Sabha in 1996. "By allowing sub quotas within the category of women, the Bill helps to bring in perspective differences that cross the group as well as the differences in individual experience, skill and judgment. This will enable the legislature to analyse social situation from the gendered perspectives of women" (Ibid 2000: 148).

The women citizens of India constitute about 49% of the total population whereas the reservation provided to them is only 33%. Dhanda (2009: 2971) writes, "Group representation is not a means to secure mirror representation or proportionate presence. Proportionate presence assumes that women's presence must be proportionate to their population. On the other hand group representation attempts to provide 'threshold

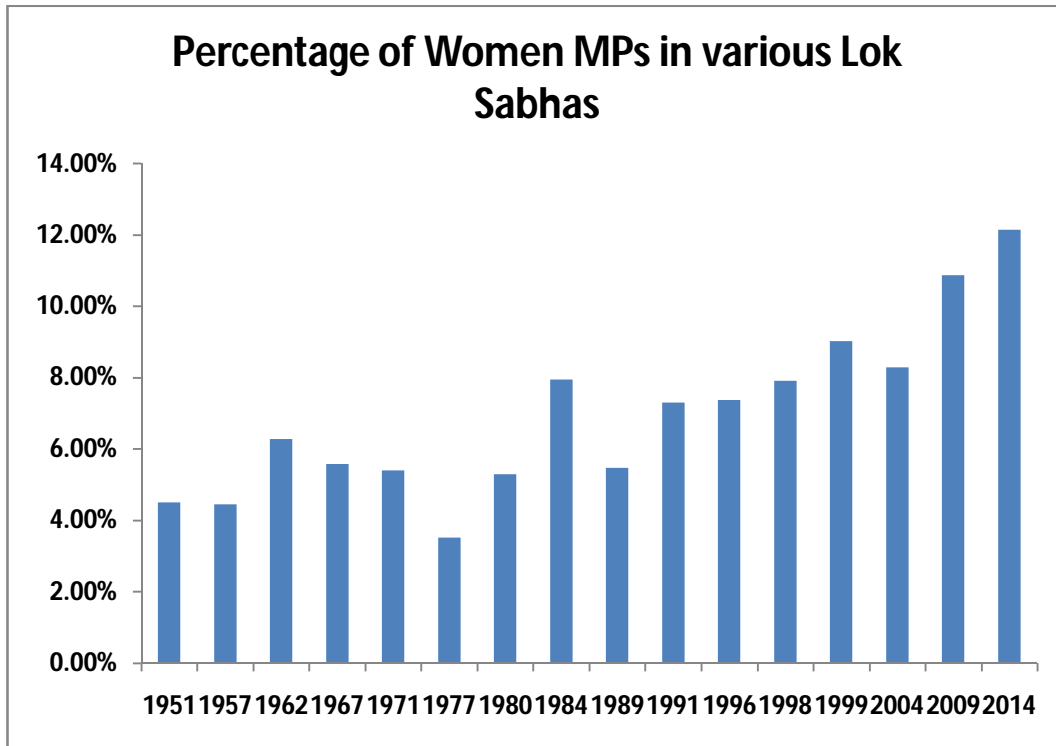
presence to women'. The idea is that thirty three percent is a 'threshold' number of seats that are sufficient to effectively express the social perspectives of women".

The reservations of seats to ensure representation of a particular group is important in a democracy where multi party system is prevalent in order to prove their efficacy towards working for the welfare of women as equal citizens. Although the women's unit was constituted long back in 1970s, then also there is no parity among different parties in having women members within their political parties. They are viewed as 'subsidiary' or 'peripheral' (Sharma, 1998:20). In order to ensure active political participation by women members, it is important to assign them more then campaigning and mobilizing women. Despite of Women Reservation Bill, there is no significant improvement in women's participation in political parties.

However, the reservation of seats in order to ensure group representation is opposed by few as their argument stands in support of providing social reform as priority rather than anything else. They opine that social reform movement will prepare the ground for women to participate in public sphere. The mere proxy presence of women members will not do any good and thereby 'political socialization' is very important for women. Kishwar mentions that, "reservation of seats by lot will lead to 'less responsible politics' because every politician will now the 'exit option' and hence not care to nurture a long term relationship with the constituency" (Kishwar, 1996:2873). Therefore, there is an argument going on for providing representation of women within political parties rather than reserving seats for them in legislatures.

However, these arguments cannot weaken the claim of women to group representation. J .S. Mill had observed, "If they (women) think for themselves, great good will be done, and if they do not, no harm. It is a benefit to human beings to take off their fetters, even if they do not desire to walk". The issue of women representation has been dodged several times at different historical moments. Women were seen as "minor minorities" compared to other religious minorities and due to fear of divide and rule policy, reservation of seats at higher level was rejected.

Figure 5.1: Percentage of women MPs in various Lok Sabhas



The first Lok Sabha constituted in 1951 had twenty two women MPs and the present Lok Sabha has sixty six. In such a long span of 54 years in which 16 Lok Sabha elections have taken place, only three fold increase in their participation is witnessed which is only 12.2%. There was a steep dip in 1977, 1989 and 2004 Lok Sabha elections but later on it regained the encouraging trend. While it is true that the percentage of women members in Lok Sabha is on increase but it is still not something which we all can be very proud of, especially when the reservation calls for at least 33% seats.

Jenkins (1999:71-75) opines, “In contemporary times the issue of reservation demonstrates that women's goals are still seen as competing with other groups rather than complementing them”. The issue of gender parity has been brought to the fore by the

Women Reservation Bill, which upholds the concept of equal franchise. “In this language of individual political rights, the continued marginalization of women in politics is interpreted as the failure of individual women to build on the foundations of political equality. The Women's Movement has pointed out that the commitment to political equality does not address the continued subordination of women in other realms of existence. 'Neither patriarchy nor social relations are confronted (Sharma and Rai 2000: 153). Mahatma Gandhi also pointed out that women should have equal legal status and votes. It can be said that in order to weed out ‘institutional inequalities’, an institutional counter measure is needed which was given in the form of reservation of seats for women (Mazumdar, 1997:14).

Women, constituting half of the mankind are being underestimated all over and one of those marginalized areas for women is the region of legislative issues. The status of women in Indian setting can't be characterized simply. So as to comprehend the way of imperatives and incapacities that influence women in the execution of their numerous responsibilities in the general public, the economy and the nation, they must be seen not as a homogeneous gathering but rather as individuals from various areas of populace as per the distinction in their position, class and group status. The Constitution of India considered that social transformation will be realized using law as an instrument of social change. The achievement of fairness of status for women was one of the particular targets, which is verifiable in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. The status of women in India is to a great extent dictated by conventional norms of caste and community.

In India the fulfillment of freedom took after by the foundation of a Republic in 1950, conveyed to women the guarantee of adult franchise and complete uniformity of opportunities in all spheres. This correspondence is indistinguishable from dynamic political support. Without dynamic and ceaseless support of women at all levels of government, equity in all spheres can't be accomplished. Further, national advancement will be more compelling if each citizen regardless of being a man or women has a active participation. The Committee on the Status of Women was selected by the legislature of India in 1971 to assess the progressions that had occurred in the status of women as a

result of constitutional, legal and administrative measures embraced since Indian independence. It was additionally to analyze the effect of the intricate procedures of social change on different sections of Indian women, especially rural women.

The Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act of 1992 brought in a novel era in the history of Indian women. The Indian women were privileged enough in getting the franchise as soon as India got independence. However, the right to vote (political right) did not help them to advance their status. Though the Panchayati Raj Act provided them a possibility to wield greater authority, for the Act which came to be effective on April 24th 1993 has a provision for not less than 1/3rd of the elected members being women citizens, not less than 1/3rd chairpersons at different tiers of Panchayat (i.e. Village, Block and Zila) being women. This also means, that about 20 lakhs females would be contesting in the elections, out of which eight lakhs females would be elected as the members and out of which eighty thousand would be chairpersons, and especially rural women could now participate in decision making process which so far remained a far cry for them. The power which was envisaged in the Act has guaranteed them Constitutional rights to debate and decide important policy making matters, which concern the people's everyday life. With the enactment of this Act, women could now stake their claim in the planning, policy formulation and execution of rural development programs and fund allotment. Further, laws can be enacted and amended, programs can be planned and executed. The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution provided innumerable opportunities to women citizens to redefine their power. An important attribute of this Act was that, it acknowledged that although females had entered political space even earlier, real authority and power had eluded them. The 73rd Amendment seeks to assure that women citizens not only actively participate in politics, but they are also in a position to wield power.

When Panchayati Raj was first introduced in the year 1953, the number of women representatives was negligible. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, which was set up in 1957 to recommend better ways of functioning of the Panchayati Raj system, suggested that there should be two women in each Panchayat Samiti. These women were to be nominated (if no women were elected) by identifying whether they are interested in

working amongst women and children or not (Krishnamurti, 1996:149) The Report of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions, submitted in 1978 also recognized the role and relevance of women in grassroots planning and decision making. It proposed the reservation of two seats for women and their cooption in cases where no woman was elected (Rajeswari, 1996: 4). The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act initiated a unique experiment in India that of giving one third of total membership and chairperson of local self government to them. The provisions of Article 243 D (3) of the 73rd Amendment Act 1992 states. Rajeshwari (1996:4) writes,

"Not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat, shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. The offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and women in such a manner, as the legislature of a state may by law provide; provided further that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women, provided also that the number of offices reserved under this clause shall be allotted by rotation to different Panchayats at each level".

It emerged as a positive influence as the rural women belonging to different caste, class and religion are now participating in governance. As per the Citizen's Report submitted in 2007 on Governance and Development by Social Watch India, the result of elections since last fourteen years at all the three tiers of PRIs have resulted in about 27 lakhs representatives being elected, where 37.5% of the elected members are women. It was seen as a ray of hope which would empower marginalized section esp. rural women in political sphere. But somewhere, even today the problem of 'proxy' remains intact and the women candidates are forced due to various reasons to contest elections on behalf of their male family members.

These are a consequence of a mix of variables that incorporate insufficient or absence of education of women, dominance of public spaces by men, presence of conventional types

of division of work that still places the whole onus of reproductive and domestic responsibilities on the women, absence of monetary freedom and control of advantages and presence of settled in religious and social perspectives that don't support a proactive part for women in legislative issues or in public spheres. Despite the fact that enhanced cooperation of women in basic leadership at the grassroots level is vital, it doesn't generally prompt a superior explanation of their interests in public space. By and large, it is seen that women citizens who are categorized as marginalized group and especially those belonging to SC/ST have participated in public life for the very first time. Subsequently, it is a major test for them to work in formal places that have been truly commanded by men. Notwithstanding enhanced cooperation of women out in the public space, there is a need to change subjectively the observation that women have restricted limit with regards to public office. Such a change would empower women to assume a bigger part in administration of the state while in the meantime sensitizing the state about issues of poverty, inequality and injustice from a women's point of view. The initial phase in realizing such a social change can be taken at the grassroots level by bringing women into places of power at that level. Along these lines, seeing this basic need to achieve gender sensitization of men and women starting at the grassroots level, the UNDP venture to build the capacity of elected women members and functionaries of PRIs was considered.

Panchayati Raj and Empowerment of Women

"Empowerment" has been differently used to pass on numerous implications. To a few, it is a method for embracing women, who generally are weak and powerless, with the important measurement of ability to act, influence and choose. For others, it is a step further in upholding and building the constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal rights through secular polity and democratic ways and means so as to encourage women's development. The human rights for women citizens could not be assured with the approaches and developmental programmes in the fields of education, financial and employment generation and hence they could not guarantee gender justice. One of the most important reasons for lack of adequate understanding of women's issues is the

absence of desirable number of women from the decision making positions and implementation levels.

Dube (1998) opines, “Women, everywhere, hold some measure of influence or informal power. The degree varies with the gender role perception of their culture, status of the class, caste, race or religious sect to which they belong, the state laws under which they live, the economic and political position their nation holds in the international structure of power and their personal attributes & life histories. Everywhere, some women may hold more power, in the sense of interpersonal influence they exert, than the men with whom they associate. However, except within rare enclaves of semi-autonomous egalitarian cultures, women as a category nowhere hold formal power or publicly recognized authority equivalent to that held by men. Women's formal power also varies by class, culture, race, religious sect and national status, but it is always less than that of men in the same position”. There is an agreement among scholars who undertook cross cultural studies, that the regulation of ‘production and reproduction roles’ in any society plays a crucial determinant in deciding the importance of women’s decision making positions. It has been observed that the changes in ancient production relations determine the cardinal transition in the arrangement of reproduction along with its cultural and economic significance. The power relations are determined by production relations depending on the caste, class, culture to which the women belong and hence the differences in the way they approach to these struggles.

The insufficient presence of women at the powerful and leadership positions had also somewhere contributed in the increasing number of atrocities against women. ‘Empowerment’ as a concept is not related only to political arena but also to social and economic spheres. Therefore, there can be three pattern of empowerment: Social, Political and Economic empowerment.

The term social empowerment refers to the development of self confidence and autonomy, carrying on duties as an individual or in group in order to bring about changes in social institutions and relationships which exclude the marginalized. The marginalized group’s capacity to hold others accountable is influenced by their assets at individual level; such as savings, land holding, housing etc. Hence, merely the political entry of

women will not change their social status. Mohanty (1995:50-59) says, “Whether such an enabling provision (73rd Amendment) will tilt the balance of social empowerment and development in favour of the poor and marginalised sections of society including women will depend on the role women themselves play in these panchayat institutions”.

A very important aspect which has come to the fore with field visit is that some of the women candidates are not content with only coming to power but they are also interested to actively participate in panchayats and their working. They are keen to learn their roles and responsibilities along with the new set of skills needed to carry out their work. They want to be aware about different developmental programmes and schemes rolled out by the government for the panchayats. Women are enrolled to fight social evils and maladies like atrocities against women, alcoholism and many others.

Therefore, PRIs can become an important source for cumulating rural women. It is hoped that that giving women citizens spaces in governance model will enable them to perceive their strengths and weaknesses and help them to come out strongly against the existing dogmatic ideologies, institutions and structures.

After the enactment of 73rd Amendment act 1992 and 81st Amendment Act, the issue of political empowerment of women has gained central importance, where the former enacted reservations for women at grassroots level of governance and the latter implements women reservations in Parliament. It is well established fact that there can be no real democracy until men and women participate actively at decision making positions as equal citizens. The participation of women in political sphere has brought in new perspective and dimension to the politics at global level. Hence, the concept of political empowerment presumes great importance at this juncture.

The present patterns are demonstrative of rural leadership. As the powers of egalitarianism and democratization are striking further roots, new inquirers of power are rising at each level of polity. At the village level the new suctions for authority are by and large drawn from the populous caste community. The existing competition between different caste groups has been somewhere replaced by new trend of political aspirations. The new leader has to be well informed and aware about the rising demands from the

leadership which can only make him/her aware about the changing scenario for which the steps needs to be taken. Rangnath (1967: 267-276) says,

“Traditional village power structure has undergone a change and new aspirants to power have emerged but the erstwhile dormant traditional group loyalties have come to the fore. The new power seekers in the rural areas have learned to utilize the group loyalties of the village folk. Secular politics and national ideals have little use for them. The emerging rural leaders are quite pragmatic in their behavior and know the source of their power and are clever enough to use his position for nourishing this source in order to retain power”.

Significant Trends in Emerging Leadership

The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act has given rise to local leadership and has encouraged large number of people to participate. The changes in leadership pattern are not sudden but slowly the old leadership has made way for new leadership. Rao (1962:322) mentions,

“True democratic leadership has not yet emerged for various reasons, poverty and illiteracy etc. Some of those who have a few opportunities are trying to hold power. A substantial number of members are of the younger age group. Truly local leadership is emerging from the age group of below 40. Weaker sections of rural population are gradually strengthening their hold on the pattern of leadership. The low caste and economically backward groups, which were hitherto kept out of the ambit of political power, had to be assimilated in the large political framework. This implied alteration in the role of the lower caste groups vis-a-vis the higher caste group in village politics. The caste panchayats are fast assuming a political role. The emerging leadership is economically better off compared to the other villagers. Better educational background is another characteristic of the new leadership, which can be strengthened if the educated persons do not settle in the urban areas”.

The new leaders of today are aware enough to carry on their responsibilities well. They visit urban centres, their touch with education system and media exposure and political knowledge make them stand at an advantageous position as compared to earlier leadership. It can be witnessed that as the village power structure is changing, the rural leadership is becoming more pragmatic and advanced. Their approach towards problem solving is changing. It is also seen that in contemporary times, although to some extent, but lineage based transfer of leadership is vanishing away. The village community is becoming aware of their rights and duties and hence the Sarpanch of today's time is accountable to his fellow village community. The basic idea behind choosing new leadership is that the leader should be development oriented.

Hindrances to the Initiatives of Women

The phenomenon of social exclusion encompasses patriarchal setting of our society including 'tokenism' and 'surrogate representation'. It also include the problem of illiteracy which has made it problematic for women citizens to participate in decision making process as planning and implementation of developmental programmes in Panchayat needs capacity building which again requires some level of education to participate and contribute effectively. The institution of caste is again a form of another social exclusion which discriminates between people belonging to lower and upper castes and women from lower castes face dual discrimination in the hands of caste and patriarchy both.

There are many forms of exclusion practised in our society. We consider these modes of exclusion under two categories of social exclusion and institutional exclusion. Social exclusion is referred to the process by which groups or individuals are partially or wholly excluded from participation in their own society. The social exclusion can take the form of gender discrimination, caste, ethnic disadvantages when institutional mechanisms deny particular group particular groups of population the resources and respect which would let them to participate completely in the life of their society.

The second form of exclusion is institutional exclusion which refers to the institutions making such rules and regulations which discriminate particular citizens from participating in the process. This form of exclusion is embedded within the system itself so as to make the population unqualified to reap the benefits. It can be seen in the two child norm policy debarring women having more than two children to participate in panchayats in some of the states. The procedure of no-confidence motion also replaces women *Pradhans* with male members. The institutional exclusion includes insufficient devolution of powers esp. financial powers, the missing link between bureaucracy and the elected representatives. These kinds of institutional constraint differ across states.

Illiteracy: Illiteracy is defined as the inability to read and write which makes one inadequate for daily living and employment. It is one of the factors which discourage women from active participation in public sphere especially political life. Majority of the rural women are illiterate which becomes a bottleneck for them to carry out their roles and responsibilities with efficacy, especially in technical matters which requires certain level of literacy. The worldly experience of these women is also limited as compared to their male counterparts as their mobility is very limited. The literacy rate of Soda village taken for the study was 60.25% whereas for Nosera it was 55.7%. Illiteracy plays a stumbling block in the path of empowerment of women.

Time constraint: Time constraint refers to the lack of adequate time to manage various activities simultaneously and it is one of the impending factors in rural women's political participation is the time constraint. The daily schedule of female members of the household starts in the early morning and ends late night including preparing food, doing household chores, fetching fodder, water and fuel wood etc. the kind of workload they have gives them little spare time to participate effectively in panchayat work. Some of the rural women also mentioned that panchayat work can be better handled by male members and they do not have decision making capacity or the kind of influence needed to work in public spaces. The respondents at the field mentioned lack of time and interest as the main reasons for non participation in gram Sabha meetings.

Caste: the institution of caste has been in existence in our society since ancient times and the discrimination based on caste is well known in Indian society. The women coming

from lower caste faces double discrimination because of patriarchy and also for being from a lower caste. It becomes very difficult for her to voice her opinion in public. One of the cases from Rajasthan proves the instance of resistance offered to leadership of ST Sarpanch as she belonged to tribal community. She was denied from hoisting the national flag as she belonged to “untouchable” caste, harassed to the extent of stripping her by upper caste males. The dominant mindset of not being governed by leader belonging to lower caste holds relevance even today with varying degrees in different regions of our country. Sukla (1996:88) holds that;

“The norms of traditional society come in the way of the effective participation of women in elected bodies. Women traditional societies are not expected to talk and debate alongside men. Similarly, women are not expected to go outside their homes at night. Even during the day many families object to their going out for settling any dispute among villagers. Rather their husbands are made to do the job. Apart from attending official meetings at the panchayats, parents'/ in laws'/husband's permission is necessary to visit any other place. All these factors place constraints on their mobility, which is extremely necessary to be effective as a representative of the people”.

Despite being always oppressed and discriminated, women who have come to leadership positions have carried on their responsibilities efficiently. The enactment of PRI Act has decentralized power and reserved seats for them at local level of governance and has given them opportunities to come out of traditional barriers and chains of power structures. The reservation of 1/3rd of seats for women at president post has empowered women to certain extent.

Women’s Representation and its consequences

The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act 1992 made several provisions for governance at local level and was designed for planning and implementation of developmental programmes based on community’s need to uphold social justice, “As local-level planning remains largely neglected, panchayats have tended to function chiefly as delivery systems, intended to more effectively implement existing, often centrally devised, development programmes” (Chakravarty, 1987:137).

It is hard to sweep away the impression of decades of centralized planning and bureaucratic accomplishment of these plans. But it is certainly all the more difficult to achieve this through chosen institutions which are inefficiently capable with the indispensable power, which live in the shadow of accessible corresponding structures of development administration, and many of whose members belong to generally deprived groups, with neither the proficiency nor the training to be able to emphasize themselves. A reassessment of the technocratic and centralized representation of growth has not, of course, been a grave governmental precedence, but the new course being revealed by women-dominated panchayats should definitely draw consideration to the numerous inadequacies of the conventional approach to development. Primary education and health obtain additional consideration at the hands of women. So also do the management, as well as sustainable use, of widespread property resources like forests and ponds.

Regardless of these limitations, remarkable successes like schemes for construction of playgrounds, drinking water and schools drinking water have been recorded by those panchayats in which women were active participants. Datta (1998:114-15) mentions, "Pre-Amendment all-women panchayats in Maharashtra already had a fine record of adopting need oriented, ecologically sustainable programmes, outside the purview of traditional politics. Thus, addressing water scarcity was the first priority, with extra schoolrooms, community toilets and smokeless stoves being the other major efforts". Mukhopadhyay (1995:1284-85) writes, "In the post-Amendment phase too, the all-woman panchayat of Kultikri in West Bengal has played a leading role in the literacy campaign of the district, effected a substantial improvement in the primary health infrastructure, raised a large sum of money by leasing some village ponds, and set up training-cum-production centers for women".

In the studies on development and women, there is a deep-rooted difference between planned gender needs and realistic gender needs. Caroline Moser (1993) argued that, "strategic gender needs are the needs that women identify because of their subordinate position to men in society. Through issues like the division of labour, power, domestic violence, and women's control over their bodies, they challenge women's subordination to men and enable them to work towards achieving greater equality. Strategic gender

needs are contrasted with practical gender needs which are a response to immediate perceived necessity. They address issues like water scarcity, health care, employment, and do not challenge the subordination of women to patriarchal structures in society”.

It is not, therefore, astonishing that a high percentage of women representatives believe that they want to contest elections again and even contest for positions of higher level than present. Even the women coming from dalit and tribal backgrounds share this belief which points towards the positive development towards women empowerment.

The data on gender and decentralization in our country thus suggests that while women citizens have played an encouraging role in addressing a range of practical gender requirements, their effect on deliberated gender needs is not very remarkable. However, even in this regard, some promising and positive transformations can be seen. It has also been observed that many women entering panchayats have done away with the practice of the veil. Family relations, in respect of division of labour within the family, are increasingly being renegotiated. Thus, women now are realising that they and their opinion receive greater respect both outside as well as within the household, and that their authority on decisions on the subject of the age of marriage of their children or dowry has increased. Also the identification of illiteracy as an insufficiency leads to a greater consciousness of the importance of female's education and higher levels of aspiration for girl child. The same women citizens who were earlier to be virtually coerced to participate and contest in the election are today quite eager to attend panchayat meetings by themselves, and to participate in process of decision-making.

Regardless of the many depressing trends (such as tokenism) witnessed in the female representation in panchayats, it is evident that panchayats are performing a positive and transformatory role. Even the women citizens who speak of their powerlessness and helplessness have, for the first time, recognised it. Therefore, as of now, this positive reception pertains to powerlessness in the outside sphere, but it is certainly only a matter of moment before powerlessness within the confines of their homes also beginning to get recognised. The endeavor to empower women through reservations in local institutions plainly does not change the pre-conditions in respect of, say, providing women citizens with accessibility to land, but it in some sense endow them with a non-material political

source through which they can, over a period of time, bring about a modification in the norms and values which govern the distribution of material resources. The recognition of the girls' education as an important matter for instance, may be the beginning of the assertion of other kind of equality-claims.

Similarly, the active participation of women members in panchayats, as much as also their repeated exclusion from the proceedings in these institutions, has created an awareness of unconventional roles and a positive self-image than those which were internalised over a period of patriarchally defined gender identity. The women respondents from the field also pointed to a sense of freedom and level of comfort with the coming of female Sarpanch as their leader. The level of accessibility and degree of communication also increased thereby solving many of the issues at hand. But this is the case only for the two chosen village at hand, whereas the majority of women leaders still remain as proxy replacements of their husbands or other male members of their family. It is this issue which needs to be resolved and resolving this needs committed efforts and implementation of welfare schemes which empower women in real sense.

The chapter discussed various issues related to women reservations and representation in detail. The political stature of women is determined by the freedom and access she gets in decision making process. The empowerment of women through the institutions of Panchayati Raj was also discussed along with the three major forms of empowerment; social empowerment, political and economic empowerment. The chapter also speaks about the significant trends in the emerging leadership pattern of the rural India which depends upon the community support which he/she gets from the masses. The chapter also discusses about the hindrances faced by such leaders especially women's initiatives, which can be structural as well as institutional constraints in the form of caste, illiteracy, time constraint and other socio-economic factors. The chapter finally ends with the consequences of women's representation in India. The real representation of women in public or political sphere will only take place only when their condition and status will improve in private and domestic spheres, which needs efforts from both the male and female citizens of our country.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The institution of Panchayat in rural India has been functioning since ancient times. The system of Panchayats however, lost its autonomy under British regime. The British Court of justice offered tough competition to the traditional role played by the caste Panchayats, thereby, contributing to their ineffectiveness and decay. These courts of justice under the British altered the traditional way of functioning of these village panchayats so as to make it suitable for the changes made in land settlement and revenue system.

The village Panchayats withstood ups and downs till the British seized India in the 19th Century. During the British regime, they carried on to function informally and preserved the Indian society from collapsing. In the initial stages of the British regime, it was the logical proceedings and inevitability which was largely responsible for the curtailing up of an arrangement of local administration. The requirement for democratic decentralization approached from the educated elite who required allocation in the exercise of patronage and power. It was restricted to grassroots bodies and municipalities and was based on the belief that local needs should be fulfilled by local taxation. This rule was integrated by Lord Mayo into the decentralization scheme, devised by the government in 1870 that made a condition for local finances to be used locally by the municipal and rural boards to meet up their local requirements.

Lord Ripon's reforms comprised of a magnum opus in the account of local self government in our country; they tried to put it for the very first time on an accepted elective basis. The nominated District Committees which prevailed had not been proved as favorable things. The resolution suggested that the sub-division or the tehsil should usually be placed under the authority of a local board. And above the local board, there should be Provincial governments which may create District Boards, with authority of co-ordination and control. But, neither the Provincial governments nor the Central government loyally carried out the plan of Lord Ripon. Later, the Royal Commission

which was set up on Decentralization advised that the rural boards should be placed below the District Officers, who do not pay attention to the elected representatives.

The Montague-Chelmsford Report which was on Indian Constitutional reforms regarding local bodies should be free from external control. The Government of India Act, 1919 left the local-self governmental institutions under the control of Indian Ministers who exercise power over all Transferred Subjects. The Government of India Act 1935, promised to give autonomy to provinces. So the popularly elected governments in provinces enacted legislations to democratize institutions of local-government.

The partial revival of power and autonomy of Panchayats in India could be seen only after it got independence in 1947. The nationalists like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were among those few who fought for the revival of grassroots democracy. Gandhi ardently believed that “for freedom to be meaningful, real power must rest with the rural communities. India's independence, he maintained, must begin at the bottom.” It was due to their endeavor that a special provision was incorporated in the constitution of India initially in the form of Directive Principles of the State Policy and it was mentioned “that the state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government”.

The Government of India started off the Community Development Programme in the year 1952 for the betterment of the poor. But unfortunately the programme failed to achieve the desired results. To review the situation the government appointed a team under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta. The Committee suggested the setting up of a three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj system for the country. The proposals of the Committee were acknowledged by the Central and the State governments. Thereby, in accordance with the suggestions of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, the state government of Rajasthan, for the first time instituted the Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1959.

But soon after the implementation of the programmes, numerous problems arose in different parts of the country. Some states did not display any enthusiasm either in enhancing or the extension of these local bodies. The elections were not conducted

regularly in many states and by the year 1970, the local self government was subdued under the stagnation and inactivity. In order to invigorate the rural local self government, the Janata Government selected a Committee under the Chairmanship of Ashok Mehta in the year 1977. The Committee proposed the introduction of a two-tier system of Panchayati Raj in the country. But, with the fall of the Janata party Government, the recommendations of the report were not implemented by Congress Government.

Later in the year 1985, a twelve member committee was also appointed under the Chairmanship of Dr. G.V.K. Rao for assessing the administrative measures for rural development and abolition of poverty. The Committee emphasized the requirement for regular elections to the Panchayats. In June 1986, another Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of L.M. Singhvi. It recommended that the village Panchayats must be reorganized to make it viable for Panchayats. The P.K. Thungon Committee constituted in 1988 felt that the PRIs must be constitutionally reorganized.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 was a milestone in the history of rural self-government. It introduced a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj throughout the country. It proposed that direct elections must be conducted at the village level for the Gram Panchayats and the indirect elections at the District and Block levels. It assigned list of 29 activities and responsibilities to the PRIs. It also prescribed reservations for SCs, STs and women.

The institution of Panchayati Raj became the linking element between Gram Sabha and Lok Sabha. On October 2, 1959 Nehru inaugurated India's first Panchayati Raj in Nagaur district of Rajasthan and therefore, Rajasthan became the first state to implement this institution according to the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommendations, followed by Andhra Pradesh. Nehru declared it as "the most revolutionary and historical step in the context of new India". Democracy at the top would not be a success unless it was built from below". The Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan is a statutory institutional structure based on two enactments of the Rajasthan legislative Assembly, viz. (1) the Rajasthan Panchayat Act, 1953, and (2) the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad Act, 1959.

The success of any institution and especially of Panchayati Raj depends on the freedom, power and autonomy granted in the field of decision making and financial issues. But in Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act itself, there are several provisions which limit this autonomy. Some of them being like Section 92-107, which states that on specific grounds, the state government have the power and authority to dissolve Panchayats. The introduction of new programmes is also done with the prior approval of the government. The understanding and solving of village level problems require micro level planning which suits the particular village and therefore there should be financial autonomy for carrying out the responsibilities.

The turning point in the historical evolution of the panchayati raj in India since British time by the enactment of 73rd amendment act 1992 giving constitutional status to village panchayats. It is an advocacy more for the empowerment of the people in general and the marginalized section viz., SC, ST, and women, of the rural population. By devolution of power through the process of democratic decentralization which delegate powers to the local at the village level with the implementation of the Act, it rather draws the rural masses to the mainstream within the domain of power structure.

Introducing the democratic decentralization in the state of Rajasthan, which been comparatively backward in education, economic development and consequently in socio-political consciousness brings hopes for the upliftment of the unreached population within the state. The state is composed of a large number of former princely states. Rajasthan was the first state in India to launch Panchayati Raj Institutions on 2nd of October 1959. The introduction of three tier structure was a welcome step towards rural development in the state. The structural pattern of Panchayats is also discussed in the above chapter which talks about Gram Panchayat being a constitutional body constituted for a term of five years. Today the excluded and marginalized communities are also participating in the development process. The increasing number of women participants has given positive hopes of penetration of democracy at local levels and despite their weak educational, social, political and economic status, today they are ready to take the responsibilities and carry them with efficacy. Today, although few instances but, there are changes in power relations of our society. The two elected women Sarpanches

selected for the study differs in terms of their caste, education, and economic backgrounds, still both manages to bring their respective villages to development. The local self-governance or grassroots democracy can never succeed without community participation. Therefore, the kind of leadership along with the participation from the entire village community plays an important role in bringing about real democratic decentralization.

To reach the unreached as well as to harness the potential of the people for their own development, the focus has been shifted to the villages. The Indian villages are one of the important institutions of our society. Gandhi has been rightly known as the ideologue of the village. After Gandhi, Nehru was perhaps the most important and influential leader of the Indian nationalist movement. Apart from being an important ideologue of the Indian National Congress, he also became the first prime minister of independent India. He was the catalyst of the approach India chose for its development after it achieved independence from colonial rule. Though Nehru worked under the leadership of Gandhi and gave him a good deal of respect, his ideas on the nature of India's past and his vision of its future were different from those of Gandhi. These differences were also reflected in his views on the Indian village. Unlike Gandhi, Nehru perhaps never identified himself with the village and referred in technology driven development for the developing countries like India. However, to really realise the true values and spirit of democracy by the people, the focus has been shifted to the local level for a participatory democracy.

This has resulted into emergence of leaders at the grassroots level and change the leadership pattern in rural India and it being the source of empowerment not only for the masses but also the marginalized and deprived sections of our society including women. The implementation of the constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 has empowered women and the marginalized sections like SC, ST population through reservations in the local elected bodies. So women who are customarily discriminated and denied involvement in political and public spheres, have initiated participation in such forums because of the reservations and quotas specially enacted for their welfare. The responsible leadership plays a crucial role in determining the successful implementation of various schemes and programmes at the grassroots. The community participation in

Panchayati Raj Institutions also to a considerable extent depends upon the kind of leadership administered. Not only women citizens but also other disadvantaged communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes have been gradually involved in the process and the results of democratic decentralization can be realized and the change in the power structure at the third tier of local governance.

Further, it can be very well asserted that the political stature of women is determined by the freedom and access she gets in decision making process. In the case of India, empowering women through legislation really empowered them. However, due to the social structural setup constructed in the premises of patriarchy ideology poses staunch challenges. Beside, there is always social, institutional constraint in the form of caste, illiteracy, gender, etc., which will be much more difficult for women leaders. The representation of women in public or political sphere will be effective with participation of women is improved, which needs efforts from both the male and female citizens of our country.

This study has attempted to understand local self-government through the study of Panchayati Raj Institutions as it evolved since British Raj to present day, along with the main focus on the importance, role and participation of women in PRIs. The study dealt with broader view of empowerment of women, which receives little or no attention in most studies restricting themselves to mere presence in PRIs and stresses on the role women played in and the resultant change occurred in their knowledge, skills and attitudes. The study has been conducted at micro level by taking two villages (Soda and Nosera) from different Gram Panchayats from Rajasthan. The main focus of this study was to measure the people's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. In this study, participation has been discussed in various ways, such as looking at the participation in the voting process, reasons for voting particular candidate, reasons for non-participation and attendance in gram Sabha meetings. Besides this, the study also seeks to look into the governance pattern and differences in the governance of two female sarpanches having entirely different social and cultural capital. The Sarpanch from Soda village belongs to dominant caste and is highly educated whereas the other Sarpanch from Nosera village is a dalit and illiterate.

The organisation and conduct of periodical and fair elections in Panchayati Raj Institutions provides scope for choosing and changing unresponsive leader. These elections are the essence of real democracy. From the present study, it can be observed that the electoral participation in the form of voting in elections is 90 percent and 97 percent from Soda and Nosera villages, there was high percentage of respondents who attended gram Sabha meetings and those who did not attend these meetings cited the lack of time or interest as the main reasons for non-participation in such meetings. The factors which influenced the voting pattern ranged from the caste and kinship ties to influential and resourceful personality to family pressure. Voting is a democratic right which one should exercise according to one's own judgement. But in the Panchayat election, it is found that most of the voters have not exercised their voting right independently. Their voting rights are largely governed by primordial ties viz., caste, kinship loyalties, and money and muscle power of the rich and influential people, family pressure and resourceful personality of the candidate. Women voting behavior is often influenced by family members. It is also found that no time and lack of interest were among the prime reasons for non-participation in the Gram Sabha meetings. Gram Sabha is a manifestation of direct and participatory democracy. It provides an opportunity to all people to participate in developmental process.

It is quite evident from the field that women seldom participate in the electoral procedure or in the interaction of the Panchayats. This research shows that women previously had very little knowledge about the electoral procedure and they have no knowledge about their rights, prerogatives and their own situation in the society. But, this situation is changing with the coming of new female Sarpanches. During the research a very interesting point was observed from the respondents that is, their responses show that by political involvement and participation they only identify with as casting their votes. They have very little knowledge about provisions like the minimum age of voting, the age limit of a candidate to contest in the elections, the provision of fundamental rights, the period of elections, the reservation of seats for women in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Assemblies and Parliament etc. Their interaction with the gram panchayat is very less and they never put forth their demands before the Gram Panchayat about the privileges and facilities meant for them. This is only because of their lack of

awareness and low levels of education. So, in the light of the above analysis, it is quite evident that numerous reasons are there for their indifferent approach towards political partaking. The reasons like poverty, illiteracy, conventional pattern of society, and narrow thinking of the family members and to some extent, the neglected and irresponsible approach of the Gram Panchayat. The women, as a result, in these villages were not only socially, but also politically, culturally, economically and educationally weaker but on the other hand, the changing trend was visible as compared to earlier times. Today, the women from these villages have at least little knowledge about the value of voting and choosing their representatives as they can now see the difference of having a female Sarpanch.

The leadership of women has to come forward from the grassroots level to gain self-confidence and to claim authority at higher positions. Therefore, this study has analyzed if the formal changes brought about by the 73rd Amendment Act by assuring a minimum status to women but without altering the structures and institutions effectively resolves their marginality. Can women's numerical existence bring about changes in institutions and structures and make them open to women's needs and concerns. There are aspects of authority and power, hierarchy and control which will bring about the alteration in gender and power relations.

There are hopes that the path of empowerment and emancipation of women in local governance would facilitate them to re-analyze their lives, to distinguish the structures of power and of their own suppression and subservience and initiate accomplishment to confront the existing ideology as well as institutions and structures. They would change from situations of silence to gaining opinion. We may see their evolution from uneducated, unhesitating citizens to inquisitive individuals, who value their own understanding and learn to demand gendered divisions of labor. They may transform from having limited mobility and permission to move about only if escorted by men, to gaining greater independence and mobility attending meetings, going to public offices without male escort and, most importantly, from politically passive persons to active agents in the political process.

The discrimination based on caste and gender has always existed in our Indian society. The power relation between upper caste and lower caste and between male and female members of our society is not of equals. There has always been dominance of one over another. The initial reasons for discrimination between men and women started long back but the origin of it cannot be traced and therefore, even in today's time women irrespective of caste, class and religion, stand as powerless members of our society. The denial of financial and educational independence along with basic decision making powers have subordinated and oppressed them further.

According to the observations of M.L. Sharma, there is general perception among people belonging to lower socio-economic strata that only the contestants belonging to upper socio-economic status would win elections. But on the contrary, Iqbal Narain's study points to the fact that few people from the lower strata have started participating in politics through Panchayati Raj and these lower castes who could somehow succeed economically and had numerical strength have thrown away the ritually high caste people from the power positions. "Jats in Shekhawati and Marwar region have been particularly effective in this respect. Other peasant castes like Gujjars, Kumhars and Meena are also coming up to follow the precedent set by Jats. There were also cases in which lower castes have challenged supremacy of the higher castes." As is the case in present study, where one of the elected Sarpanch belongs to reserved category but she won election from an unreserved seat.

The earlier preference for higher ritual status for choosing leadership has given way to orientation towards development and growth. The development of Panchayati Raj Institutions also contributed towards raising political awareness and making rural population conscious of their rights and duties. This enactment gave rural population power to choose their local leader and also opportunity to rural women to voice and share power positions through one third reservations at each level. Therefore, slowly but steadily social transformation for women at grassroots started with the coming of 73rd Amendment Act 1992.

The issue of women empowerment and emancipation is not one-dimensional. It involves social, cultural, economic and political empowerment at the same time. Thus, the entry of

women members in grassroots politics is a development in positive direction which needs tremendous will power and efforts to be successful. The inclusive and participatory politics through democratic decentralization ensures the political empowerment of rural women but the real implementation remains a setback even today.

The new century threw an obvious challenge which was to bring back the people in the process of democratic governance specially feminization of the political space. Making the institutions more representative and inclusive is the key task of this century. The democracy can be saved from the vices of intimidation and authoritarianism only after bringing the people back specially women in role play. Hunger, war and violence are the major challenges of this time and have an overwhelming effect on mankind specially women.

There are efforts being made at the national as well as international levels to increase the participation of women in politics which will beget changes and add new dimensions to the global as well as local politics. Women have started coming on forefront questioning their absence from the political forums and dominance of men in the same.

It is fateful that marginalization of women in political space has been vivid enough for the political elites to ignore. The continuous absence of women from the process of decision making has been the problem all the democracies in the world; be it the largest or the smallest; oldest or the strongest. The situation of women in these democracies can be highlighted through few examples. In UK, the oldest democracy, the right to vote was given to women in 1918 and today their representation is only 17.12 percent. The right to vote to women was given in 1920 in USA and today they represent only 13.6 percent. The story of the largest democracy of India is full of disgust with women reaching only 8.8 percent even after more than sixty years of independence.

There are different factors which check the participation of women in South Asian politics; religion being the foremost. The patriarchal norms combined with socio cultural beliefs; lack of economic independence makes the women more dependent on men for their needs which in turn work against them and in favor of men entering politics. To add

to their grievances the biological factors of low health indices and increased maternal mortality inhibit their entry into larger political space.

South Asian countries have been a witness to violence in the election process and this political build up functions to work against the entry of women into politics. Violence is not only confined to physical violence but also targeting the character of the women which weakens them and leads them to withdraw their candidature. Women are short of experience and expertise to contest elections in these countries which can be traced to the lack of education and uneven access to power structures. The political parties also set a bias when they allocate the seats to men and conveniently ignore women participation.

The choices available to the women in the political space, economic and social well-being can be reduced to the recognition of their efforts in the society, their equality within the family and the freedom to hold on to their choices in life. Women in the countries where equal status has been given to them enjoy more political and economic space and get assistance for recognizing their participation in country's decision making process. When women are short of such support and motivation, it acts as a hindrance for them to enter the political process of the country. It is a two way relationship between power and politics irrespective of the nature of politics. It does not matter whether the politics is of governmental kind made of political parties or economic kind consisting of bureaucracies or interpersonal in its structure.

The various dimensions of power and its concept including authority establish a relation between the powerful and the powerless. This clearly lends out that only a small fraction of people who have inherited power can rule. As far as women are concerned there is development of ideological skeleton which legitimizes power. Today we are witnessing a "political inheritance syndrome" which means that a widow or daughter in law of a political leader is seen as a powerful candidate to enter politics. The son of a politician is also a politician, meaning that there is concentration of power in the hands of few. These examples show the feudalistic mindset which still rules the politics of South Asia.

The participation of women in politics is an extension of the democratic space given to them in the family, society and political outline of the country. The obstacles encountered

by women in the family, society and politics sends out a strong message of enlarging of democracy at these levels too. Women can enjoy more power at the national level provided these structures are more democratic in nature.

Other factors of gender insensitivity in the party politics and electoral system, gender stereotyping contributes considerably to the invisibility of women in politics. The obvious disinterest in the women's movement, the slow-moving political culture and the regressive socio cultural barriers add to the problem. The precipitation of level of confidence of women acts as another factor as it is seen that there are specific professions which provide potential leaders to the nation.

As already mentioned there are various factors which are responsible for the lack of women participation in national politics. These are no different when we talk about women in Indian context. The socio cultural norms, lack of economic status, low level of literacy, assault on character, high maternal mortality, gender insensitivity of political parties, religious norms and lack of encouragement from women already in politics play a deciding factor in entry of women in political space. The absence of a political quota, political inheritance syndrome and power to vote to field a prospective candidate are some other factors which work against entry of women in politics. Although political participation is being seen as an important means to address the concerns of women by women yet their representation is not adequate enough to fulfill these concerns. As a matter of fact legal rights in South Asia do not automatically translate into citizenship rights.

Patriarchy has always portrayed women as being weak to men in physical, intellectual as well as social dimensions. Resultantly women face many constraints on social front due to overabundant expectations and suppositions. There are numerous social indicators to specify how disadvantaged girls are as compared to boys and their contribution as well as presence in the society does not hold any value. The upbringing of a child in the society is different and is largely dependent on the gender of the child which affects their right to basic education and gives shape to inequalities in future. The place of women in these boundaries becomes invisible and nonexistent.

These inequalities leave men in the society in an insensitive condition and they cannot understand the role of women in decision making process. Women also believe the same or are made to believe the same and it restricts their role playing to family care and necessary labor at home. Their involvement is not considered important in the family processes as well as in deciding what is best for community.

There are women who break these shackles and want to be involved in the political space but only expression of desire is not sufficient to enter the decision making and governance. There are certain psychological barriers which women should confront before entering this space. In India women who seek power are labeled as prostitutes and this creates a stigma in the minds of the women as well as their families leading to situation where it is hard to overcome this stigma. The male members of the family have to be convinced if the female wants to participate in the politics at local or national level. Most of the time the women lack support of their own family, the extended family as well as the neighbors who have a pre conceived notion of what is right and wrong for them.

Not only the psychological restrains but the physical barriers in Indian society also hold back women from entering politics. Kamal Nath and Milly Chatterjee carried out a study and found that Indian women who participate in politics have to cope with multiple roles which end up conflicting with each other. The expectations with the women in family wants to them domestic role; with those in politics requires them to play a civic role. This new role playing in the civil environment often clashes with the role which society has inferred upon them. Addition of the political responsibilities to the existing family and financial responsibilities add an extra burden and makes entering politics less attractive and less practical.

Indian society gives preference to a son's education and many women are not able to educate themselves satisfactorily to perform political functions. This functions against the entry of women in politics. The political awareness holds no importance if their education is not enough to get them respect at the local level and certainly a great blockage at the national level.

A good election campaign particularly at the state level and the national level politics can be very financially demanding. This is a challenge for women for two evident reasons. First, the political parties invest their money on male candidates than female candidates as former have more chances of being elected. As put by Nadezha Shevoda, it is an “old boys club” which holds no respect for the potential of women to enter political arena. Thus more resources will be put on male candidates than female candidates. Secondly, if the women think of independently running their campaigns, they need to manage their own finances. If the women belong to a political family it is easier for them to manage economics. But if the money belongs to non-political background it becomes a herculean task for her to fund her campaign.

The call for reservation of 33 percent for women in local governing Panchayats was a result of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993. This has resulted in women entering the political space more and more which can be numerically enumerated to 1.3 billion. This will help them create policies which will affect them and their community. It has been studied by Malene Lindenmayer that reservation was responsible for the women at local level to participate in politics; 97 percent of the women contesting for Panchayats were first time participants and they fought due to security given by reservations. Around 14,000 women were included in the development council in Karnataka; 22000 in Orissa and women in Kerala and Rajasthan won more seats than reserved after the implementation of 73rd and 74th Amendments.

The research done by Stephanie Tawa Lama Rewal on the Calcutta Municipal Corporation(CMC) and quota implemented for women showed encouraging results in that not only it increased the women representation but also increased the number of women in the non-reserved seats after the implementation of quota. Thus reservations acted as stimulating factor for women participation.

There have been doubts on the effects of reservations when there have been reports that some women act as substitutes for their ousted husbands, uncles or brothers. But these studies also demonstrate the positive effects of reservation for women in India at the local level and even if there were few female proxies there were new female leader being born. The growth of women at the local level politics will certainly pave a path for other

women in the society to join leadership at local as well as national level. The Indian women movement during the 11th Lok Sabha elections demanded that the more women may be represented at State and National Legislative Assemblies. As a result two major political parties BJP and Congress promised to give reservation to women and made it highlights of their election manifesto. In September 1996, 81st constitutional amendment regarding Women Reservation Bill was introduced by United Front Government.

The Women Reservation Bill defines the role of women as a political equivalent in need of political representation which can only be achieved through reservation which guarantees a separate quota. The bill proposed to reserve one third of the seats in the house of people and state assembly for women. It also stipulated the amendment of Article 330 and 332 of the Indian Constitution which called for a sub reservation for women in schedule castes and schedule tribes and rotation of the seats that were to be reserved. But these promises by parties were never saw the light of the day and the Women Reservation Bill is still waiting for another debate in the Parliament. It always takes a set back on its introduction reducing it to all party meetings or sending it back for revision in select committees.

Had the issue of bill been black and white it would have been much easier to solve. The opponents of this bill in both the genders see it as a demeaning step to existence of women. Some women groups, who opposed the reservation, later went on to realize that it was a last resort to provide women a fair contact with politics. Constitutional provisions do no good to women when it is a matter of their entry into politics. Fairness before law does not guarantee fairness at societal level. An optimistic approach is required to facilitate and mitigate the opportunity to equal access and equal opportunities. It is ironical for the parties talking of women reservation and then opposing it within and outside the house when the procedural movement starts.

Women are subjected to various challenges in all spheres of life be it in their socio cultural or political arena. They can excel in all the fields provided they are provided adequate resources and support to carve a niche for their own selves. Women should be a part of everything not because they are better but because their life experiences shape them in different ways which can act as another dimension in the way the things are

conceived on political ends. It is important to consider these views to make the functioning at societal as well as political level more equitable. Women in India are trying to abolish the factors which limit their participation in politics by adopting a three pronged strategy. Firstly it calls for establishing unity for women at regional, national and international levels. Secondly, training should begin at the grass root level to achieve larger aims. Finally, it calls for a partnership with judiciary and media to alter the mindsets which have been hindering the progress of women in public sphere as full citizens.

The message which Mahatma Gandhi gave aptly suits the Indian woman which says “Woman is a companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of man and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he...By sheer force a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not have.” Women should create large social coalitions to push themselves into the world of politics and establish inclusive culture for revitalization of democracy. The quest for gender justice globally can help to maximize the participation of women in decision making and helping them to establish their existence with full strength.

The amplification of democratic decentralization can be successful only when a holistic approach to development is taken into account. A revolution which encompasses issues of gender justice, social and political equality, self-sustenance of villages, basic education for all and sustainable development is needed to make any country a real democracy. The role of leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions is of extreme importance, as one of the objectives of giving constitutional status to this institution of local self-governance was to develop proper leadership suitable for the developmental needs of the rural masses and bring about social change. The growth and penetration of democracy at local level depends a lot on the quality of leadership offered.

Therefore, eventually we can say that the Panchayati Raj Institutions grants the probability to rural masses to feel the real democracy at the grassroots and experience local self-governance. It also bestows the chance for local leaders coming from different socio-economic backgrounds both males and females to be a part of this inclusive and

participative democratic process. It is in the real sense, “governance of the people, by the people and for the people.” The bottom-up approach plays a significant role in our democracy. The political and social equality has been targeted simultaneously through this institution of Panchayati Raj.

Need of the hour

The advocacy for local democracy stands has been established due to interconnections among the social equality and democratic process. The idea established during 73rd and 74th amendment regarding the representation of the local institutions in the electoral process lead all the state governments to introduce certain legislative measures for the same. These measures consist of obligatory elections at regular intervals, reserving the seats in village Panchayats and municipal bodies for women and SCs and STs and decentralization of power to local bodies. The amendments which came into force in 1993 lead to a plethora of interesting activities being done in different parts of the country and saw involvement of not only the state government but also political parties, NGOs , women groups and various activists.

The practice of equality in India can be only realized if there if greater level of democracy is achieved at the local level. Local Government, quintessentially, refers to the government at the grassroots level for ‘promoting and encouraging the well-being of the masses’. It provides a sound foundation for the organization of healthy democratic society in India. Its development and advancement has been fostered and encouraged by the State to enable the population to participate in the administrative and other areas of community life. Local democracy is a means of establishing access to the disadvantaged and a step towards achieving participatory democracy. It can enhance the efforts towards social equity by transforming the relation between employer and employee, man and woman, high caste and low caste. The equitable management of local public services can act as a base for establishing participatory democracy. The services of schools and health centers, drinking water facilities and fair price shops depend a great deal on the sensitivity of the authorities to popular demands.

There are various studies whose positive findings can be enumerated regarding the acceptance of participatory democracy by the authorities. Firstly, there is enough substantiation of the vigorous commitment of Indian citizens with new promises of local democracy. The elections at the level of Panchayats keep the interest of the public intact. It is evident that women turn out in elections has increased making it a case of larger political education and awareness. When it comes to politics at the level of villages people are becoming more structured in their approach and are questioning the political legacy and corruption. This process of learning is making them move in the direction of participatory with understanding of its ideology and processes.

The main concern for the Indian socio political system after liberalization and globalization has set in, is the involvement of the common man in the decision making process. The 1980s-90s have seen success of various movements like Bargadar movement and other movements of land reform in West Bengal, anti-arrack campaign in Andhra Pradesh, Right to Information movement in Rajasthan, schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh and gradual reach of local democracy in India. These illustrations indicate that India is not repulsive to the change and practice of democracy and the success of participatory democracy is much more than its failures. There have certainly been certain drawbacks in accomplishment of the goal of participatory democracy. These include lack of social equality in local democracy, incomplete involvement of people in local governance, lack of powers in certain spheres and misuse of public resources provided for development under the Panchayati Raj and latent form of Gram Sabhas. Despite the above mentioned there are numerous other reasons for celebration and not leaving hope for a better future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adishesiah, M., Hegde, P., Ramkrishna, Dasgupta & Fernandes. (1994). *Decentralised Planning and Panchayati Raj*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company for Institute of Social Sciences.

Aiyar, M. S. (2002). Panchayati Raj: The Way Forward. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(31), 3293-3297.

Alsop, R., Krishna, A. & Sjoblom, D. (2000). Are Gram Panchayats Inclusive? Report of a Study Conducted in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. World Bank's unpublished Overview of Rural Decentralization in India, 3(3).

Andersen, J. and Siim, B. (2004). *The politics of inclusion and empowerment: gender, class, and citizenship*. London: Palgrave/ Macmillan.

Altekar, A. S. (1927). *The History of Village Communities in Western India*, Bombay: Bombay University Economic Series, 1(5).

Ambedkar, S. N. (2008). *Role of women in Panchayati Raj*, University of Virginia: A.B.D Publishers.

Ambedkar, B. R. (1947) 1989b. States and Minorities. In V. Moon (Eds.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, 1, 381–449. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.

Ambedkar, B. R. (1982b). On Village Panchayat Bill. In V. Moon (Eds.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, 2, 104–112. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.

Astha. (2000). *Voices from the Roots of the Grass*. Udaipur.

Atal, Y. (2003). *The Studies of the Village in India in Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

- Bailey, F.G. (1963). *Politics and Social change: Orissa 1959*. London: O.U.P.
- Bajpai, A. (1997). *Panchayati Raj and Rural Development*, New Delhi: Sahitya Prakashan.
- Baviskar, B.S & Mathew (Eds.), (2009). *Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance: Field Studies from Rural India*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Beteille, A. (1965). *Caste, Class and Power: Changing pattern of stratification in a Tanjore village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1974). *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bhalerao, C.N. (1964). Some Social, Political and Administrative Consequences of Panchayati Raj. *Asian Survey*, 4(4), 804-811.
- Bhardwaj, P. R. (2005). (ed.) *Gender discrimination: the politics of women empowerment*. New Delhi: Anamika.
- Bhardwaj-Badal, Sangeeta. Gender, social structure and empowerment: status report of women in India. Jaipur: Rawat, 2009. 217p.
- Bhargav B.S. (1979). *Panchayati Raj Systems and Political Parties*. New Delhi: Ashis Publishing House.
- Bhat, K.S. and R. Venkata Ravi. Empowerment of SCs, STs and women in panchayati raj institutions. New Delhi: Kanishka, 2012. 350p.
- Breman, J. (1997). The Village in focus. In J. Breman et al., (Eds.), *The Village in Asia Revisited*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Buch, N. (2000). Women's Experience in New Panchayats: The Emerging Leadership of Rural Women. New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies. Available at: <http://www.cwds.ac.in/OCPaper/WomensExperienceNirmalaBuch.pdf>

- Catherine, A. M. (1982). Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An agenda for theory, *Signs*, 515-544.
- Chakraborty, D. (1981). Panchayati Raj and Decentralization of Political Power: A Comment. *Social Scientist*, 9(5/6), 71-75.
- Chakraborty, K. & Bhattacharya, S.K. (1993). *Leadership, faction and P.R.* New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Chakravarty, A. (1975). *Contradiction and Change*. Delhi.
- Chakravarty, S. (1987). *Development Planning: The Indian Experience*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chandrashekar, B.K. (1989). Panchayati Raj Bill: The Real Flaw. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(26), 1433-1435.
- Chattopadhyay & Duflo. (2004). Impact of Reservation in Panchayati Raj: Evidence from a Nationwide Randomised Experiment. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(9), 979-986.
- Chattopadhyaya, K.D. (1975). Indian Women's Movement – Then and Now. In D. Jain (Eds.), *Indian Women*, New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
- Chaturvedi, T.N. (1969). Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4(25), 999, 1001-1002.
- Cheema, S. G., & Rondinelli, D.A. (Eds.), (1983). *Decentralization and development: policy implementation in developing countries*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Citizens' Report on Governance and Development* (2007). Social Watch India. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Cohn, B. (1955). Changing status of a depressed caste in village India. In M. Marriott (Eds.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Collins, C. & Green, A. (1994). Decentralization and primary health care: some negative implications in developing countries. *International Journal of Health Services*, 24(459—75), 10.

Crook, R.C. & Manor, J. (1998). *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa*, Cambridge University Press.

Das, B. & Khawas, V. (2009), *Gender Issues in Development: Concerns for the 21st century*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi.

Datta, B. (Eds.), (1998). *And Who Will Make the Chapattis? A Study of All-Women Panchayats in Maharashtra*. Calcutta: Stree.

Datta, B. (Eds.), (1998). *And Who Will Make the Chapattis?* Calcutta: Stree.

Dayal, R. (1977). *Community Development, Panchayati Raj and Sahakari Samaj*. New Delhi: Manohar Book Service.

Deshpande, R. (2004). How Gendered was Women's Participation in Election 2004. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 18.

Dey, D. & Kumar, P.A. (Eds.), (2007). *Women Empowerment: New Dimensions and Experiences*. Hyderabad. ICFAI University Press.

Dhanda, M. (2000). Representation for women: Should feminists support quotas? *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 2969-2971.

Dube, L. Pocock, Eleanor, Ardener, Shirley (Eds.), (1988). *Visibility and power- Essays on Women in society and Development*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Dube, S. C. (1955). Indian Village. *Reserve Bank of India, All India Rural Credit Survey, Report of the Committee of Direction*, 11, 54-85.

----- (1968). *Caste Dominance and Factionalism: Contributions to Indian Sociology*. NS, II.

----- (2007). *Ties that Bind: Tribe, Village, Nation*. India: Permanent Black.

Dumont, L. & David, P. (1957). *Village Studies in Contributions to Indian Sociology*.

Everett, J.M. (1981). *Women and Social Change in India*. Delhi: Heritage.

Gandhi, M.K. (1946, July). The Harijan. *Kurukshetra*, XII(9), p.36.

Gaventa, J. (2006). Triumph, Deficit or Contestation: Deepening the Deepening Democracy Debate. Working Paper No 264, Sussex: IDS.

Ghosh, A. (1989). The Panchayati Raj Bill. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(26), 1429-1431.

Ghosh, B. & Kumar, G. (2003). *State Politics and Panchayats in India*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors.

Ghosh, B. (2000). *Panchayati Raj: Evolution of the Concept*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Ghosh, B., Mohanty, B. & Jacob. (Eds.), (2011). *Local Governance: Search for New Path*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company for Institute of Social Sciences.

Ghosh, R. & Pramanik, A. (1999). *Panchayat System in India: Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*. New Delhi: Kanishka Publications.

Ghurye, G.S. (1932). *Caste and Race in India*. London: Keagan Paul.

Goode & Hatt. (2006). *Methods in Social Research*. New Delhi: Surjeet Publications.

Gulati, I.S. (1994). Financial Devolution to Local Bodies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXIX(40), 2622.

Gupta, D. (2000). *Interrogating Caste: Underlying Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Gupta, D. (2005). Whither the Indian Village. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(08).

Hazel, D.L. (1983). *Women in Local Government: A Study of Maharashtra*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing.

Hirway, I. (1989). Panchayati Raj at Crossroads. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(29) (Jul. 22), 1663-1667.

Hockings, P. (1999). Replication in Village level studies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(34), 2821-2831.

Hust, E. (2004). *Women's Political representation and empowerment in India: A million Indiras now?* Delhi: Manohar.

Imandar, N.R. (1991). Panchayati Raj Leadership: Emerging Dimension. *Journal of Rural Development*, Hyderabad: NIRD. 10(5), 561-573.

Iyer, K. V. R. (1989). Panchayati Perestroika? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(37), 2051-2054.

Jacob, J. (Eds.), (2004). *Women in Governance: Road to Success*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Jain, S.P. (1997). The Gram Sabha: Gateway to Grassroots Democracy. *Journal of Rural Development*, 16(4), NIRD, Hyderabad.

Jayal, N.G. (2006). Engendering Local Democracy: The Impact of Quotas for Women in India's Panchayats. *Democratization*, 13(1), pp. 15-35.

Jenkins, R. (1999). *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*. U.K:Cambridge University Press.

Jeyapal, P & Dravidamani, K. (1997). Women Panchayats President, *Social Welfare*, 44(1).

- Jodhka, S. S. (2002). Nation and Village. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXVII(32), 3343-3353.
- Jodhka, S.S. (1998). From Book View to Field View: Social Anthropological Constructions of the Indian Village. *Oxford Development Studies*, 26(3).
- John S. M. & Jos, C. (2015). Theoretical Perspective of Decentralization. *Mainstream*, LIII(26).
- Kanango, S.D. (1996). Panchayati Raj and emerging women leadership: an overview. *Social Action*, 46, p.88.
- Kapur, P. (Eds.), (2001). *Empowering the Indian Women*. New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- Kashyap, A. (1989). *Panchayati Raj: Views of founding fathers and recommendations of different committees*. New Delhi: Lancer Books.
- Kaur, S. (1987). *Women in Rural Development: A Case Study*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication.
- Kaushik, S. (1998). *Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj in India: A stock taking study of six states sponsored by the National Commission for Women*. New Delhi.
- Kaviraj, S. (2000). Democracy and Social Inequality. In Frankel, Hasan, Bhargava & Arora (Eds.), *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Khanna, B.S. (1994). *Panchayati Raj in India: Rural Local Self Government*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publishing house.
- Kiran, S. (2000). *Women and Politics*. New Delhi: Gian Publishing house.
- Kishwar, M. (1996). Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 2867-2874.
- Kothari, R. (Eds.), (1986). *Caste in Indian Politics*, New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Kulkarni, M. (1996). Threats to Panchayati Raj. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(19), 1098.

Kumari, R. L. (2006). *Women in Politics: Participation and Governance*. New Delhi. Authors Press.

Kymlica, W. (2002). *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. India. OUP.

Madan, T.N. (1991). Dumont on the Nature of Caste in India. In D. Gupta (Eds.), *Social Stratification*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Madhu, K. (1996). Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 2867-2874.

Maheshwari, S.R. (1985). *Rural development in India: Approach*. New Delhi: Sage Publication.

Mahipal. (1997, August). Panchayati Raj in India: Issues and Challenges. *Kurukshetra*.

Majumdar A.K & Singh (Eds.), (1997). *Historical and Conceptual Development of Panchayati Raj*. New Delhi: Radha Publications.

Malaviya, H.D. (1956). *Village Panchayat in Ancient India*. New Delhi: AICC.

Mallik, S. N. (1929). Local Self-Government in India. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 145(2), 36-44.

Manikyamba, P. (1989). *Women in Panchayati Raj Structures*. New Delhi: Gian Publishing House.

MARG. (1998). They Call me Member Saab: Women in Haryana Panchayati Raj. New Delhi: Multiple Action Research Group.

Mathew, G. & Baviskar. (Eds.), (2008). *Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance: Field Studies from Rural India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Mathew, G. & Nayak. (1996). *Panchayats At Work: What It Means for the Oppressed?* New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Mathew, G. (1994). *Panchayati Raj from Legislation to Movement*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company for Institute of Social Sciences.

----- (1994, June). Women in Panchayati Raj: Beginning of a Silent Revolution. *Kurukshetra*, pp.25-28.

----- (1995). *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States of India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company for Institute of Social Sciences.

----- (1995). Will reservation ensure participation. *Social welfare*, 42(5-6), 34.

----- (1996). Panchayats at work: what it means for the oppressed. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(27).

----- (1999). *The Panchayati Raj Factor: Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

----- (2000). *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company for Institute of Social Sciences.

----- (2005). Panchayat elections and empowerment. *South Asian Politics*, 4(6), pp. 19-27.

Mathew, P.M. (2004). Panchayati Raj and Rural Governance: Who Cares for Economics? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(14/15), 1540.

Mathur, M.V. & Narain, I (Eds.), (1969). *Panchayati Raj, Planning and Democracy*. Part II&III Asia.

Mazumdar, V. (1994).Panchayati Raj. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29(44), 2867-2868.

Ministry of Rural Development. (2001). Report of the Task Force on Devolution of Powers and Functions upon Panchayati Raj Institutions. Unpublished report, Panchayati Raj Division, Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

Mishra & Mishra, S. (1995, April). Future of Panchayati Raj after 73rd Amendment. *Kurukshetra*.

Mishra, S.N. (1977). *Pattern of Emerging Leadership in Rural India*. Patna: Associated Book Agencies.

----- (1989). *New horizons in rural development administration*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication.

Mishra, V.B. (1952). The administration of the Pratihars. *Journal of University of Guwahati*, Vol. III.

Mohan, G. & Stokkes, K. (2000). Participatory Development and Empowerment: The Dangers of Localism. *Third World Quarterly*, 21(2), 247-68.

Mohanty, B. (1995). Panchayati Raj, 73rd Constitutional Amendment and Women. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(52), 3346-3350.

Mohanty, B. (Eds.), (1995). *Women and Political Empowerment*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences,

Moser, C. O. N. (1993). Practical and strategic gender needs and the role of the State. In Moser. (Eds.), *Gender, Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*. London: Routledge.

Mosher, T. (1997). Thinking About rural Development. In K.R. Dasgupta, *Rural Development Programme in India-Concepts and Strategies*. *Kurukshetra* (1997, August).

Mukarji & Datta. (1996). *New Perceptions on Local Government*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Mukarji, Y, Mukherjee & Meenakshisundaram. (1995). *People's Representatives and Bureaucracy: The interface in Panchayati Raj*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Mukherjee (Eds.), (2000). *Methodology in Social Research*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Mukherjee, R. (1995). Gandhi: A reader. In B. Mohanty. (Eds.), *Women and Panchayati Rai. Some Issues*, New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Mukherjee. (2002). *Participatory Democratisation: Panchayati Raj and the Deepening of Indian Democracy*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

Mukhopadhyay, A. (1995.) Kultikri: West Bengal's only all-women Gram Panchayat. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXX(22).

Mukhopadhyay, M. (2005). *Decentralization and Gender Equity in South Asia*. Ottawa: IDRC.

Mukhopadhyaya, K. (1988). *In the Question of Women's Emancipation: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin*. Calcutta: National Book Agency Pvt. Ltd.

Narain, I. (1965). The concept of Panchayati Raj and its institutional implications in India. *Asian Survey*, 5(9), 456-466.

Narain, I. Panda, K.C. & Sharma, M. (1976). *Rural Elite and Elections*. New Delhi: National Publishing House.

Narayan, I. (Eds.), (1970). *Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan: Readings on Panchayati Raj*.

Nehru, J. (1959, April). Speech at Madurai. *Kurukshetra*, XII(9).

----- [1982(1946)]. *Discovery of India*. Calcutta: Signet Press.

----- [1996 (1934-1935)]. *Glimpses of World History*. New York: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund.

Oommen, M.A. (1995). *Devolution of Resources from the State to Panchayati Raj Institutions: Search for a Normative Approach*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

----- (1999). Panchayat Finance and Issues Relating to Inter-governmental Transfers. In S.N. Jha & P.C. Mathur (Eds.), *Decentralisation and Local Politics: Readings in Indian Government and Politics* (pp. 142-172). London: Sage.

Pai, G.S. (2012). *Handbook of Women Studies*. Jaipur. Mark Publishers.

Pai, S. (1998). Pradhanis in New Panchayats. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXIII(18), pp. 2-8.

Pal, M. (2002). A people oriented Panchayati Raj Framework. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(8), 700-704.

----- (2004). Panchayati Raj and Rural Governance: Experiences of a decade. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(2), 137-143.

----- (2005). Agenda for Panchayats. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(24), 2405-2406.

----- (2009). Why Rethink Rotation of Reservation in Panchayats? 44(23).

----- (2011). Lohia's Thinking on Local Governments. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVI(6).

Pathy, J. (1980). Panchayati Raj and Decentralization of Political Power. *Social Scientist*, 8(9), 36-41.

Patnaik & Patil. (1994). *Panchayati Raj, Parliamentarians and Legislators*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

- Patnaik, K. (2008). *Issues and Challenges in Local Governance*. Bhubaneswar: Institute of Social Sciences.
- Phillips, A. (1998). *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pillai, S. (2001, August). Narir Kshamatayan O Panchayati Raj. *Yojana*, 31-33.
- Pinto, A & Reifeld, H. (Eds.), (2001). *Women in Panchayati Raj*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.
- Prasad, V. S. (1981). *Panchayat and Development*. New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers.
- Puri, B. (1989). J and K Panchayati Raj Bill: A Critique. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(28), 1567-1569.
- Raj, K.N. (1971). Planning from below with reference to District development and State Planning. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6(30/32), 1609-1611+1613.
- Raj, S.J, Sebastil & Edward, M. (Eds.), (1998). *People's Power and Panchayati Raj: Theory and Practice*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.
- Rajeswari, A. & Palanithurai, G. (Eds.), (1996). *Panchayati Raj Institutions and women in empowering people*. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- Rao, K.V. (1962). Democratic Decentralization and the quest for leadership. *India Journal of Political Science*, XXII(4), p.322.
- Reddy, R.G. (1970). Some aspects of Decision Making in Panchayati Raj. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5(41), 1699-1704.
- Reddy, S. (1983). Panchayati Raj reform. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18(45/46), 1915-1916.
- Retzlaff, R. (1962). *Village Government in India*. New York: Asia Publication House.
- Rhodie, E. M. (1989). *Discrimination Against Women: A Global Survey of the Economic, Educational, Social and Political Status of women*. North Carolina, London: McFarland & Co. Inc. Publishers.

- Rondinelli, D.A., & Nellis, J.R. (1986). Assessing decentralization policies in developing countries: The case for cautious optimism. *Development Policy Review*, 4, 3-23.
- Roy, A. (2005). *Gendered Citizenship: Historical and conceptual explorations*, New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Roy, B. & Basu, A. (Eds.), (1947). Panchayati Raj Institutions and Women. In *From Independence towards Freedom: Indian Women Since 1947'*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ryle, R. (2012). *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Samoff, J. (1990). Decentralization: The politics of interventionism, *Development and Change*, 21, 513—530.
- Sanwal, M. (1989). Panchayati Raj: The Next Steps. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(42), 2365-2367.
- Sastry, K.R. (1955). Panchayati Raj Act: Without Substance. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(30), 1909-1910.
- Schoenfeld, B. (1965). Studies in Panchayati Raj. *Pacific Affairs*, 37(4), 476-477.
- Setty, E.D. (1994). *Participatory Rural Development in Asia: A Critical Survey*. New Delhi: Inter India Publication.
- Sharma, K.L. (2001). *Reconceptualising: Caste, Class and Tribe*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Siim, B. (2000). *Gender and Citizenship: Politics and agency in France, Britain and Denmark*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Singh, H. (1994). Constitutional Base for Panchayati Raj in India. *Asian Survey*, 34(9), 818-827.
- Singh, R. (Eds.), (2000). *New Panchayati Raj – A Functional Analysis*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Singh, Y. (1969). The Changing Power Structure of Village Community: A Case Study of Six Villages in Uttar Pradesh. In A.R. Desai (Eds.), *Rural Sociology in India*, Bombay.

Sinha, N. (2000). *Women in Indian Politics*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

Sireiker, V.M. (1970). *The rural elite in a Developing Society*. New Delhi.

Sirsikar, V. M. (1966). Political role of Panchayati Raj. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1(14), 581-584.

----- (1970) *The Ruling Elites in Developing Society: A Study in Political Sociology*. New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd.

Smith, B.C. (1985). *Decentralization: The Territorial Dimension of the State*, London: Allen and Unwin.

Smith, D.E. (2004). Women's perspective as a radical critique of Sociology. In S.N.H. Biber & M.L. Yaiser (Eds.), *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research* (pp. 27-37). New York: Oxford University Press.

Sodhi, J.S. & Ramanujam, M.S. (2006). Panchayati Raj System: A Study in Five States of India. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*. 42(1), 1-41.

Srinivas, M.N. (1955). *The Social Structure of a Mysore Village in India's Village*. University of Michigan: Development Department.

----- (1962). *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

----- (1963). *India's Villages*. India: Asia Publishing House.

----- (1984). *Social Change in Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient Longman.

----- (1991). Varna and Caste. In D. Gupta (Eds.), *Social Stratification*, Oxford New Delhi: University Press.

----- (1994). The Social system of Mysore Village as mentioned in Dominant Caste and Other Essays. University of Michigan: O.U.P.

----- (1996). *Caste: It's Twentieth Century Avatar*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Sylvia, B. (2004). Democratic Decentralization and Local Participation: A Review of Recent Research, Development in Practice. *Taylor & Francis*. 14(6), 780-790.

Task force on PR, 'Revitalization of PR in India, problems and prospects', Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, New Delhi.

Thakur, M. (2004). The Village Revisited. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(10), 1037-1038.

Thakur, R. (2000, June). *Women and Political Empowerment*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India: Publication Division, XXV(13), pp. 1-3.

Tod, J. (1829). *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Venkatarangaiya, M. & M. Pattabhiram (Eds.). (1969). *Local Government in India: Selected Readings*. Bombay: Allied Publishers.

Venkatesan, V. (2002). *Institutionalizing Panchayati Raj in India*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

World Bank. (2000a). Overview of Rural Decentralization in India. Volume I. Unpublished report. World Bank.

----- (2000b). Overview of Rural Decentralization in India. Volume II: Approaches to Rural Decentralization in Seven State'. Unpublished report. World Bank.

----- (2000c). Overview of Rural Decentralization in India. Volume III: Background papers. Unpublished report. World Bank.

Yadav, Y. (1999). Electoral Politics in the time of change: India's third electoral system. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2393-99.

Zelliot, E. (2001). *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications.

Zwick, P. (1970). Panchayati Raj, Planning and Democracy. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 29(4), 962-963.

APPENDIX I

The Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992

The salient features of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1993 Act are;

- A. Formation of gram sabha at village level;
- B. Uniform three-tier system at village, block and district levels with exemption for intermediate level in states with a population of less than two million;
- C. Direct election to all seats for all members at all levels;
- D. Indirect elections of chairpersons at intermediate and apex levels; however, mode of election for the lowest level is left to the state;
- E. Reservation on rotational basis for the SCs and STs in proportion to their population both for membership as well as chairpersonships of panchayats at all levels;
- F. Reservation of not less than one-third of the seats and offices for women;
- G. Five-year term;
- H. Fresh elections within six months in case of suppressions or dissolution;
- I. Devolution of powers and responsibilities by the state in preparation and implementation of plans for economic development and social justice including implementation of schemes relating to the subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Act;
- J. Setting up state finance commission after every five years to review the financial position of these institutions and to make suitable recommendations to the state on the distribution of funds among panchayats;
- K. Setting up state election commission for holding panchayat elections under its superintendence, direction and control;
- L. Seventy-fourth Amendment to the Constitution providing for constitution of district planning committee to prepare a draft plan of the whole district comprising panchayats and municipalities.

APPENDIX II
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Caste:
5. Literate / illiterate:
6. Did you cast your votes in the last panchayat election?
7. Does your ward member inform you about gram sabha meetings: yes / no.
 - (a) If yes, (i) regularly, (ii) now and then.
 - (b) If no, why.
8. Do you regularly attend gram sabha meeting: yes / no.
 - (a) If no, why.
 - (b) How do you know about various development programmes carried out by the panchayat.
9. Did your ward member inform you about various programmes in the panchayat, yes/ no / no response.
 - (a) If no, why
10. What is the difference between earlier and new Panchayati Raj system? Do you think it should be given more powers?

11. Does education plays any role in choosing the Sarpanch?

12. Difference between educated/uneducated Sarpanch?

13. Difference between male/female Sarpanch?

14. Major developments/ changes in recent past (within 5-10 yrs):

- Toilet construction
- Safe drinking water facility
- Water Conservation/Rain water harvesting
- Public health centre (sub centre)
- Panchayat Office
- Records of birth/death /marriages
- Primary schools
- Secondary schools
- All weather roads
- Bank
- Electricity/ No. of hours available
- Connectivity to main road from the village
- Transport: public/ private/ shared jeeps

15. What is the major problem m your area that hinders the development?

16. Has the condition of the marginalized changed after the coming of female Sarpanch. If so, then to what extent?

17. Even now some people believe that the PRIs are not responsive to the needs of the people, especially to the poor. Do you agree with this: yes / to some extent/no.

- (a) If yes, why it is not responsive.
- (b) Do you have any suggestion for making them more responsive: yes / no.
- (c) If yes, what.

18. There is a general complaint that woman, SC and ST members in the PRIs face certain constraints in carrying out the functions in the panchayati raj institutions. Do you agree with this observation: yes / to some extent / no.

- (a) If yes, reasons.
- (b) Do you know any one of your colleagues is having this problem: yes / no.
- (c) Do you have any such problem in your experience: yes / no / no response.
- (d) How do you overcome these problems