

Minor Research Project
on
“Study on the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution in
Anand District”

Submitted to
UGC

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INTRODUCTION

Panchayati Raj is not a new phenomenon in the country. Its illustration in history goes back to more than a 1000 years. It has its roots in Ancient Indian Institutions when the villages were little republics governed by their Panchayats. During this period, it was not that women could not join politics, but the fact was that they did not take interest in it due to a patriarchal set up. The British through their ruthless method of revenue collection and the introduction of zamindari land tenure system almost destroyed these ancient republics and as well the involvement of women in politics. The British were of the view that "Vote of Women" would be premature in the Indian Society and continued to enforce purdah and prohibition against women's education. (Bhagat 2005). After Independence, despite having a constitution, which embodies lofty, ideals like equity and equality, social justice could not be achieved so far. Even when India had a woman Prime Minister for quite a number of years, the situation of women at large did not change for the better. Women's participation in politics remained quite insignificant in India even after 59 years of self-rule. (Nanda 2006)

From October 2nd 1959 when the first Panchayati Raj was inaugurated, on April 24, 1993 after the 73rd Amendment Act came into force it has been an uncertain and undulating journey for Panchayats. The structure and process of Panchayats are equally pivotal as they bring to bear and entitle role member therein to perform. If the overall scenario of Panchayats was largely despairing, another disquieting aspect is that almost one half of rural population was virtually kept out of Panchayat arena. In the traditional Caste Panchayats, Village Panchayats and in the British Scheme of local governments women remained entirely excluded. (Nagendra 2004) In establishing Panchayats most state government apprehend the provision of co-option of two women in case no women could come through direct elections. Prevalent practice during 1960's and 1970's was the co-option of two women at best for each PR body, as women could not come through direct elections, even though the requirement of co-option of women was not followed uniformly for all PR bodies and in every state, for instance Uttar Pradesh Jammu and Kashmir, did not follow the scheme (Institute of Social Studies Trust 1995). From the outset, women's involvement in PRIs was dominated by two inter-related themes:

representation of women in these bodies and effectiveness and outcome of their participation. Co-option of few women was the only available option for women to participate and it was a travesty for it could not produce the desired and verify no results at all. The co-option method, of course provided one convenient scope for the dominant caste/class leaders to install their family women such as wife; mother as their yoke and the very purpose of the policy was led to fall flat. It took 43 years to realize and recognize that women are yet another disadvantaged group and they also require a solution to their discrimination. Women have received a preferential consideration and that too only in the sphere of political representation and that again in local governments (Rao 1996). Women are changing the governance in India. They are being elected to local councils in an unprecedented numbers as a result of amendments to the constitution that mandate the reservation of seats for women in local governments. In India, we call this new system the Panchayati Raj Institution System (PRI). The women whom PRI has brought into politics are now governing, be it in one village, or a larger area such as 100 villages or a district. This process of restructuring the national political and administrative system started as recently as January 1994, and thus it is too early to assess the impact of women's entry into formal structures of the government. The sheer number of women that PRI has brought into the political system has made a difference. The percentages of women at various levels of political activity have shifted dramatically as a result of the constitutional change, from 4-5 % before to 25-40 % after. But the difference is also qualitative, because these women are bringing their experience in the governance of civic society. In this way they are making the state sensitive to the issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice Palanithuri (1997) in a case study 'New Panchayati Raj System at Work: An Evaluation of Tamil Nadu' reported that they were not informed or invited to the meetings in male headed Gram Panchayat. Women members have always projected the issues relating to women. It is common that the husbands of the members used to accompany them (women) when they come to attend the meetings. Pai (1998) according to his field notes in Meerut District 'Pradhanis in New Panchayats' revealed that many of the Pradhanis were illiterate and only able to put their signatures on official papers. Regarding their roles, the study revealed that they were almost insignificant in the functioning of Gram and Block Panchayat bodies. As they belonged to better off families

in the villages, they do not work outside their homes. They agreed to stand for elections due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because they were keen to do so. The reservations provided by the Government had forced them to contest elections; provision of reservation has not led them to participate in decision-making in local bodies. Nambiar (2001) in her study of 'Making the Gram Sabha Work' noted the difference utilities in organizing the Gram Sabha. Majority of women reported that they were not informed or invited to the meetings. While other were hesitant in participating in meetings in the presence of a large number of elder members. However, they have to forego their day's wages or household duties just to identify beneficiaries as to convey what the gram Panchayat would do in future. In this context, the present study was undertaken.

To Know the Leadership Qualities

- (i) To know the obstacles for women in Panchayat and role performance in Panchayat.
- (ii) To highlight the factors which overtly or covertly tend to promote or prevent women members from performing their roles.
- (iii) To know the nature and extent of participation and role performance in decision-making

Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical factors hold women back from active political involvement. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned. A democratic country cannot progress if energies of its half population are concerned in the kitchen only. After attaining independence Indian constitution ensured gender equality through various provisions and regulations. It was presumed that these rights would automatically get translated into political development of the women in the country. The issue of women's participation in politics cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in a society but despite their vast strength, women occupy a marginalized position in the political system.

This step was based on the premises that there can be no true democracy or no true people's participation in governance and development without equal participation of women in all spheres of life and at different levels of decision-making and then the goals of development cannot be fully realized without women's full and active participation not only in the development process but also in the shaping of its goals. It is well known that parliamentary democracy is the rule of majority and by ignoring nearly fifty per cent of women's population; no country can march towards attaining the goals of justice, liberty and equality under the socialist, egalitarian and democratic framework of India's Constitution.

Political status of women implies a degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in sharing of power and importance given by the society to the role of women in the political system. The equality and active political participation are inseparable. Participation of women in political arena is integral to the advancement of women. Their political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also power-sharing, co-decision-making, and co-policy-making at all levels of governance of the State. Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development. Political participation of women in India has been neglected even since independence. Though our country has adopted democratic system of government and the women constitute 48.9 per cent of population of the country, but their political participation is very low. Due to various constraints they could not occupy the positions of power and assume leadership roles. Women's participation has been increasing rapidly but it is not satisfactory. They are also denying opportunities to participate in the administration, even in the making of decisions that affect their life and welfare. Though Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi had believed that women had a positive role to play in the reconstruction of society and the recognition of their equality was an essential step to bring about social justice. This added to the massive participation by the women in the freedom movement and had a direct impact on the political and social elite, including women. After independence, when the constitution was adopted women like Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Renuka Roy, Durgabai Desmukh etc. took part in the constitution-making. In our Constitution there is guarantee of equality and dignity of the individual and it claimed the fundamental rights of women to political and legal

equality and guaranteed non-discrimination in employment and office under the states. Our Constitution had provided many channels for the development and progress of the women. The preambles of the Constitution, the chapters of Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of the State Policies etc., are the specific objectives of this purpose. These constitutional provisions are meant to empower 48.9 per cent women population in India. Many government and non-government agencies are working for the development of women but in practice we find a wide gap between the stated social objectives and achievements, between the legal framework and imperical realities, between the symbolism and actuality. And this is the reason that after these constitutional safeguards and legal frameworks, the participation is still very low. There are three indicators to assess the political participation of women. i. Participation in the political process as the voters and candidates in election. ii. Political attitudes such as awareness commitment and involvement in politics and autonomy in political action and behaviour. iii. Their impact on the political process. The credit goes to Narsimha Rao government when 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 Panchayati Raj Act, which not only, provided autonomy to the grassroots but it also provided reservation of one-third of seats for women in every Panchayat and municipality, not less than one-third seats shall be reserved for women belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. This may be allotted by rotation from the constituency to constituency. Till the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments no one was sure about the role to be played by the women in the process of development of the society and women themselves. Since the PRIs have potential to start the process of women empowerment from the village level, it can change the social scenario of the village. The PRIs provide village women, the opportunities for leadership and to take part directly in the decision making in the process of development. It will also help in managing the violence against women. So the following factors had attracted to take the problem of women empowerment through PRIs for this work. These are: i. To create a healthy environment to exercise women's rights equal with men in rural areas. ii. For equal participation of women in decision making bodies for their development and welfare. iii. To prepare women for political participation in Parliament and Assemblies also with 33 per cent reservation. iv. To adopt an integrated approach for empowering women through

effective convergence of the services, resources, structures and man power in related sectors. v. To organise women into groups as self help groups for economic empowerment of rural areas. vi. To generate political awareness and political participation in village politics by women through PRIs. Constitutional provisions: The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard. Constitutional Privileges: i. Equality before law for women (Article 14), ii. The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i)), iii. The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)), iv. Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16), v. The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)), vi. To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A), vii. The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42), viii. The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46), ix. The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47), x. To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)) xi. 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 to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)), xii. Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4)), xiii. 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 Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3)), xiv. Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4)).

Women's Position in Society:

In India, during the Vedic and the Upanishadic period, women enjoyed equal status with men. The Indian civilization produced great women ranging from Brahma Vadinis (Lady Rishi) to stateswomen, from ideal wife to warrior queen. Hindu mythology showed that the status of the Hindu women during the Vedic period was honorable and respectable. In the same age, women had sufficient freedom to attend fairs, festivals and assemblies. During the post-Vedic period, they started losing their status in the society, which they attained in the Vedic age. They lost their independence and became a subject of protection. Manu, the progenitor of the Hindu race stated that a woman should be kept day and night in subordination by the males of the family- the woman had to be protected by her father in childhood, by her husband in young age and by the sons in old age. He did not treat woman on par with man. He believed that there was a vital structural difference between men and women, each suited for different types of work. He regarded women as more emotional and less rational by nature than men. Men were responsible for hard work, earning the bread and women for household duties. The rigid institution of caste reinforced these notions.

During the Mughal rule, the socio-economic status of women was further deteriorated. Social evils like purdah system came into force. Child marriage was prevalent. Incidents of female infanticide and the custom of sati could be witnessed. Lack of education, early

marriage, absence of absolute property rights, non-existence of employment opportunities were the main causes of inequality of sex in the socioeconomic field. Basically, economic dependence made the women socially more backward. In the successive periods, the existence of joint family system and caste considerations made the social position of women more critical.

With the initiation of the British rule in India during the second half of 19th century, the newly educated section of the Indian society realized that the western society was dazzling with the idea of equality, whereas that of India was full of discrimination based on caste and gender. The most vulnerable component of the society was the women section. Even the colonial rulers themselves criticized the Indian social system. With the assistance of a handful of Indian educated elite, the British ruler took up the task of bringing out the more orthodox dimension of rigid Indian cultural life and thus women's issues became important. The social reform movement about the status of women started in India in the latter half of the 19th century. The reformist group realized that without uplifting the position of women, it was not possible to attain the all round development of the society. They crusaded against the evil practices like sati, purdah, child marriage, female infanticide, widowhood, polygamy, Devadasi and the like as well as deplorable condition of formal education. Prominent among them were Raja Rammohan Rai, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Durga Ram Mehtaji, Behramji, M. Malabari, D. K.Karve, M. G. Ranade, Gopal Hari Desmukh, Karandas Mulji, K. Altaf Hussain Hali, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, R. Venkata Raman Naidu e.t.c. They were inspired by the liberal ideas of the West and the glorious traditions of ancient India. It was during that period when Jyotiba Phule raised his voice against the tradition of tyranny over the education of the oppressed classes and the women. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar also took up the right of women on ground of equality. The colonial ruler adopted certain progressive legislations like the Abolition of Sati Act, 1829, Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, Age of Consent Bill, 1893 etc. Those legislations played a great role in ameliorating their deplorable conditions. Eminent women reformers participated in that movement as well as religious reform movement of that period. Pandita Ramabai's crusade for the upliftment of women in the field of education and for widow remarriage was a glorious chapter1 . Sarla Devi started the Bharat Stree Mahamandal for the education of women. Swarna

Kumari Devi started the women's organization "Sakhi Samiti" in 1886 for widows and she was one of the two delegates elected from Bengal to represent the state at the 1890 Congress session. Those were some of such examples. Those activities accelerated women's participation in public spaces which paved the way for their entry into the independence struggle.

Women's Struggle for Political Rights:

Participation in Freedom Movement: Indian women's entry into politics started like their male counterparts with India's independence movement. However, the Indian women's entry into political arena was more a matter of design and accident than a matter of plan and premeditation². The active participation of women in the freedom struggle simultaneously developed among them an increasing sense of awareness to organize themselves and lead the cause of their liberation from oppression and subordination. The struggle for freedom, broadly speaking, marked the beginning of a political awakening among the women in India. In the revolution of 1857, when the Indian soldiers protested to follow the orders of the British officials, Queen of Jhanchi Laxmibai fought bravely against the British soldiers and laid her life for the cause of the nation. At the initiative of Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant, Indian women got encouraged to participate in the various stages of the freedom struggle right from the Swadeshi movement in 1905.

Post Independence Situation:

In the post independence period, when the Constitution of independent India was adopted, gender inequality was sought to be eradicated by providing equality for both the sexes in all the spheres of state activities. However, in reality in spite of the promises incorporated in the Constitution in terms of political participation, a big gap was distinctly visible between the male and the female halves of the population. Now in independent India, women are holding important political and administrative positions like those of the President, Prime-minister, Governors, Chief Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Justice of the Apex Court and other top officials. But still their representation in the national parliament and the state legislature remains at a very low level. As V. Rajalaxmi writes, "an enormous disparity exists between women's formal political

equality and their meaningful exercise of political power.” After six decades of national independence of India, women are still in a marginalized position in state politics. A woman’s individual identity or independent personality is not easily recognized. Although population wise women have a large stake in politics as large as that of men, they do not have their appropriate share in exercising political power. However, since 1952, Indian women have been participating in formal political structures as voters, party workers, candidates and legislators and even as ministers. However, only a very few women have been able to achieve the decision making position.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES

The present study is going to focus

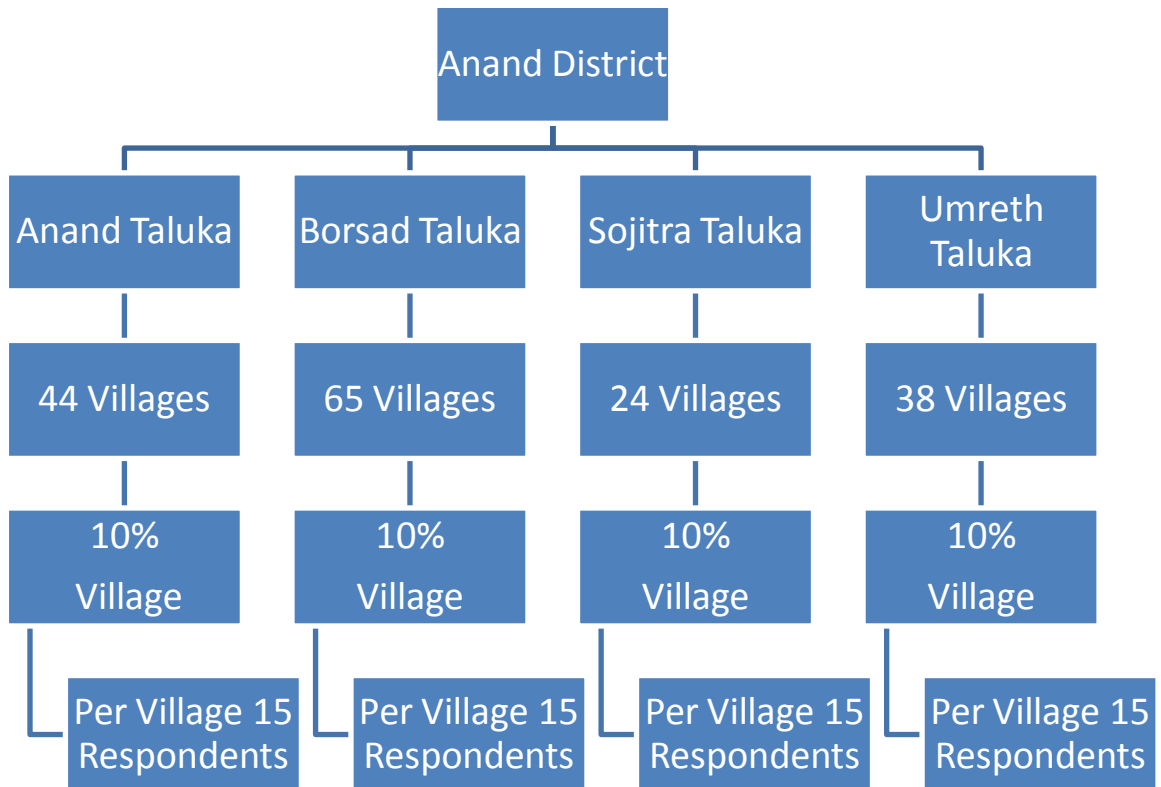
- To Know the Leadership Qualities of Women
- To know the obstacles for women in Panchayat
- To highlight the factors which overtly or covertly tend to promote or prevent women members from performing their roles.
- To know the nature and extent of participation and role performance of women in decision- making

- **Significance of the study**

Through Present study, I want to investigate the present condition of Women in Local Self Government after 73rd and 74th Amendment. Due to this study I wish to study the present scenario of Women’s of Anand District. The study will try to justify the above stated questions.

Methodology:

Research Design : As mentioned below.



Universe : Anand District

Sample : Four Taluka out of Eight Taluka

Sample Size : 250 Women

Tools of Data Collection : Questionnaire

Criteria of Measurement :

1. Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj.
2. Women's Participation in Decision Making.
3. Role of Women in Development of Village.

Procedure of Collection of Data: Visit the Village; convince the respondent, aware them about

research and collecting data

Method of Analysis of Data : Using appropriate statistical method, T- test

Results and Discussion : Finding as per the analysis.

(i) Year-wise Plan of work and targets to be achieved

2013-2014 : Introduction, Review of Literature and collection of Data.

2014-2015 : Analysis of data, finding and conclusion and report writing.

Major Findings

- The majority of the respondents i.e. 59.38 per cent of the respondents belong to the age group of 31-40 years of the age.
- The majority of the respondents belonged to OBC category i.e. 56.26 per cent.
- The maximum respondents i.e. 28.12 have obtained up to SSC level of education.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 51.57 per cent belong to Congress Party.
- The occupation of majority of the respondents i.e. 89.07 per cent is House Wife.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 98.43 per cent are married
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 98.43 per cent earn less than 1 Lakh per annum.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 81.25 per cent are the members of the of the Panchayat.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 93.76 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that they are interested in Politics.
- The majority i.e. 90.62 per cent of the respondents do participate in the programmes.
- The majority i.e. 84.38 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that women participate less in politics due to unawareness.

- The Majority of the respondents i.e. 81.26 per cent are of the opinion that political participation gives admonition regarding ones rights and duties.
- The majority i.e. 81.26 per cent of the respondents state that they enjoy the political participation.
- The majority i.e. 89.07 percent of the respondents state that they vote during election.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 79.69 per cent of the respondents state that they vote on the base of political matter.
- The majority i.e. 54.69 per cent of the respondents state that cent per cent voting should take place.
- The majority i.e. 89.07 per cent of the respondents stated that they vote for the party they like.
- The maximum i.e. 35.93 per cent of the respondents consider education of the candidate for voting.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 59.38 per cent of the respondents do take interest in success and defeat of the candidate.
- The maximum i.e. 40.62 per cent of the respondents have the contact with the candidate of political party.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 51.57 per cent state that it is fair to keep relation with the person working in politics.
- The maximum i.e. 40.62 per cent of the respondents negate the politics being heredity.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 53.12 per cent of the respondents say that Government is worrying about political participation of the women.
- Majority of the respondents have no answer in the saying family pressure reduces the participation of women in politics.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 64.06 per cent are of the opinion that women show unconcern while voting.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 67.19 per cent state that women do consider party while voting.

- The majority i.e. 50.00 per cent of the women guide women for voting.
- The majorities i.e. 56.26 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that women do intensively run away from the political participation.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 67.19 per cent of the respondents feel that women are incompetent for political participation.
- Majority i.e. 56.25 per cent of the respondents are satisfied with 33 % of the reservation for women in politics.
- Majority of the respondents i.e. 56.25 per cent of the respondents agree that there is improvement among women due to getting 33% reservation.
- Majority of the respondents i.e. 64.06 per cent of the respondents do discuss about political matters.
- The majority i.e. 56.26 per cent of the respondents say that political proportion should be more or less according to age.
- Majority of the respondents i.e. 56.26 per cent trying to increase political awareness of women.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 93.76 state that the political participation of women is increased year by year.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 89.07 per cent are of the opinion that it is essential for every woman to participate in politics.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 84.38 per cent are of the opinion that proportion of women participation in politics is increased in present time than ancient times.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 59.38 per cent feel that efforts are not made to increase women participation in politics.
- The majority i.e. 54.69 per cent of the respondents experience difficulty in participating in policies while taking benefit of 33% reservation seats in politics.
- The majority i.e. 84.38 per cent of the respondents state that less education is responsible for less participation of women in politics.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 59.38 per cent are of the opinion that education is a basis for political awareness.

- The majority of the respondents i.e. 70.31 percent are of the opinion that it is becoming difficult for illiterate women for participation in politics.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 68.76 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that economic position is responsible for political accountability.
- That the majority of the respondents i.e. 64.06 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that political participation of women is a global problem and not only of India.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 64.06 per cent are of the opinion that political participation of women is essential to maintain democracy.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 64.07 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that that political participation of women is essential for political development.
- Majority of the respondents i.e. 78.12 per cent are of the opinion that women should participate in Panchayat.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 70.31 per cent are the opinion that women are safe who participated in Panchayat.
- The majority i.e. 87.05 per cent of the respondents have not answered the question.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 68.75 per cent are of the opinion that it essential to have educated women in district Panchayats.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 71.87 per cent are of the opinion that woman should participate in politics from Panchayat to national.
- Majority of the respondents i.e. 70.31 per cent are of the opinion that women enjoy real power in Panchayats.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 67.18 per cent are of the opinion that women should also be given important place in political field as other fields.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 70.31 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that political participation of women is less in Tehsil/ District Panchayat compare to village Panchayat.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 62.5 per cent are of the opinion that it is essential to have family guidance and inspiration if women have to participate in Panchayats.

- The majority of the respondents i.e. 56.25 per cent are of the opinion that political participation is essential to gain social status.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 71.88 per cent agree that the information regarding political participation of women in Panchayati Raj should be given to students from primary level.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 65.25 per cent are in the need of the respondents of husband, father or brother in travelling to attend panchayat meetings.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 64.06 per cent of the respondents assert that women of their area come to you to present their problems.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 56.25 are of the opinion that officers of Panchayati raj give sufficient cooperation.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 65.62 per cent of the respondents do ask questions regarding women in Panchayat meeting.
- The majority i.e. 65.62 per cent of the respondents stated that they have studied laws and bye-laws of Panchayat.
- The majority i.e. 75.00 per cent of the respondents felt that they get respect in Panchayat.
- The majority i.e. 70.31 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that there should be educational qualification to obtain political post.
- Majority i.e. 60.93 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that person connected with crime should not be allowed to participate in politics.

CONCLUSION

In Indian Constitution, there are provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status. However such provisions exist only in pen and paper for millions of economically and socially disadvantage people in India especially SC's, ST's and Women. In India women are in much worst position than men not only in terms of sex ratio, literacy rate, work force participation, life expectancy, but also in terms of their access to power structure which controls and guides the development programmes of a society. Since access to political opportunities and participation in political decision making process are important components of capability and autonomy, discrimination in

this respect leads to wastage of women's talent and efficiency which are necessary for all around development of the country. One of the three variables used in the construction of the Gender Empowerment Index (GEM) is the relative share of women in administrative and managerial position (UNDP 1995). Women need to be involved in decisionmaking process in order to bring their demands in the national agenda. In order to ensure empowerment of women in political arena, the issue of reservation of 1/3rd of the seats for women in grass root levels of the organizations was taken up by different women's organizations and social thinkers. Accordingly, the Government of India passed the 73rd constitutional amendment, which was followed by the 74th amendment mandating reservation of 1/3rd of the seats of women in all village block and district level elected bodies. The role of female Panchyat members in the political decision making process has been examined critically on the basis of data collection by interviewing the WER's of seven blocks of District Jammu, J&K. The present study entitled "Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions" is a study conducted to know the extent of women's participation in decisionmaking and stumbling blocks for women in their respective roles. The study shows that the significant number of WERs attended Panchyat meetings regularly but few members have full freedom of speech and expression in the Panchyat meetings and they usually raise their points. Ten respondents mentioned that their views were not considered. The major reason being patriarchal set up and thereby non co-operation. As a reaction the respondents got frustrated and choose to abstain from the further meetings. However a fraction of members from within the Panchayat thought of overcoming the awkwardness of the situation by organizing themselves to attend meetings as usual to face and challenge the somewhat a critical face. They build confidence among themselves to establish their self-entity. A minimal number of the WERs revealed that they no doubt received support from the government officials and administration. Whereas a majority held the opposite view reason being that the male members would not encourage any progressive measures for the women and they were not in any way prepared to reconcile with either a superior or even an equal position for their women members. However, it is gratifying to observe that women representatives ignored the non co-operative behavior of their colleagues and pushed further their own efforts to resolve the problems of the area. The data indicates how the panch members

feel about increasing and accelerating the efficiency of working in the Panchayats. They feel that there should be practically no interference from the family and community stalling the independent functioning of the panch women members. The panch members complained that they get no assistance and help from family members in the discharge of their domestic work. A majority of the respondents revealed that financial assistance is a necessary ingredient for their self esteem, their independent functioning and their committed concern and approach to the needs and urges of the people of the area. In conclusion it may be considered that to achieve the women empowerment, advancement can be facilitated with the co-ordination of different sections of the society such as male gentry, religious heads, political leaders who should come forward and shun their interpersonal interest even ego to understand and appreciate that the women are equally as important segments of society as men. Male chauvinism must go the sooner so much the better. Unless the male ridden society is transformed and replaced by a better socio-economic set up where men and women are equal co-workers, the future of human set up appears to be bleak.

SUGGESTIONS

1. It is evident that men's attitude towards women's entry into politics has begun to change from that of total rejection to limited encouragement and in some cases even to active encouragement. This trend needs to be strengthened through orientation courses and training programmes for officials and elected representatives, both men and women. Besides there is a need to train the women leaders at regular intervals to enable them to manage the responsibilities assigned to them in the Panchayats at all the levels. Since the hard up women members found it difficult to forgo their wages for attending training programmes, these must be organized at their doorstep and some of the articulate Panchayat leaders should be involved as the trainers
2. Another important effort required for real empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and rearing children needs to be transformed into a feeling of equal partnership of women and men. To inculcate this they

should be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both.

3. Studies on women in politics have emphasized that contact with outside world makes women more alert and also active in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly, interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected one's should be encouraged. Secondly, these women could be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged.
4. The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. The Mahila Mandals in the village can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize them for this purpose. Some successful women's organisations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging the women's participation in social and political activities. The Government should provide finances and infrastructure to some of the deserving and successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives. The leaders of women's movement in the country could also take up this task. They too can provide support to sensitize the rural women
5. Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayats, who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honouring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will get replicated.
6. The media both print as well as electronic can play an important role in creating awareness in the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.
7. An important requirement for bringing about empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and bearing children needs to be

replaced by a feeling of equal partnership of women and men. To inculcate this, they should be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both.

8. Studies on women in politics have emphasized the contact with outside in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly, interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected women leaders been courage. Secondly these women could be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged.
9. There should be increased emphasis on ensuring the participation of women in the meetings of Panchayats at all the levels. This is needed to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and self-confidence. It will help them to perform better in the Panchayats to ensure their participation in the meetings. Attendance of all women must be made compulsory from Gram Panchayat to Zilla Parishad.
10. The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. It can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize women of the village. Some successful women's organizations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging women's participation in social and political activities. The Government should provide financial support and infrastructure to some of the successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives. This task could also be taken up by the leaders of women's movement in the State. They can also provide support to sensitize the rural women.
11. Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision making. It has been noticed that there are very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayat, who have been successfully implementing the developmental scheme and have ensured over all development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will get publicised.

12. The genuine NGOs be identified for entrusting them the tasks of training, encouraging, organizing, emblazing and guiding the elected women representatives.
13. National Literacy Mission and other organizations engaged in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan should also be assigned the responsibility of educating the rural men and women regarding the significance of Panchayati Raj and empowerment of women.
14. The media, both print as well as electronic can play vital role in restructuring the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.
15. The curriculum for the students at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels should be so modified as to promote gender sensitivity among the students. There should be chapters on Panchayati Raj and Women Empowerment in all the classes at the school level and compulsory questions be set on these in the examination
16. The unfinished agenda of Women Empowerment be finished by enacting an Amendment for providing reservation for women in the National Parliament and State Legislatures. The reservations at local level are not enough for the Women Empowerment.

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