

CHAPTER-VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Women empowerment and issues related to it have attracted the attention of the academicians, political thinkers and social scientists both in the developed and developing countries of the world. The concept of women empowerment is generated by the women movement throughout the world and it is that outcome of several important critique and debates which the feminist raised across the world. Empowerment means process of acquiring rights, personality development and deciding by self-independently. The term women empowerment is used to describe a process whereby the powerless women or disempowered women gain a greater share of control over their own lives, resources and decision-making. Empowerment of women involves many things e.g. economic opportunity, social equality, political power and personal rights.

It is believed that if women are given power they would rise on par with men. The whole gender problem which has become much pronounced in Europe and USA has also come to India. The nature of problem at both the places is different. In the western countries women are highly educated. They stand neck to neck in fields of education, technology and management with men. In our country, the hiatus is very wide. There are millions of women in rural India who live below poverty line. Though they work in the fields, they are not economically independent. However, in urban India the elites and the high caste women have a different problem. In India, empowerment of women started in the 19th century through external inducement. After independence, the Constitution incorporated several welfare programmes for women. But the thrust on genuine empowerment was visible after 1975.

The empowerment of women has become a reality only after the entry of Indian women in PRIs. The Panchayati Raj Institutions, which are the grass-roots units of self government have been proclaimed as the vehicles of socio-economic transformation in rural India. The effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of its citizens, both male and female. The provision of reservation of one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj bodies incorporated in the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India should be viewed in the broader context of the attempts made in our country since independence to improve the social, economic and political status of women.

The establishment of PRIs all over India through the mechanism of 73rd Amendment is indeed a great experiment and a novel idea in the annals of social engineering. In varying measures, this experiment is proving to be a big success particularly by enabling women to come out of their homes and hearth and participate in the administrative and political spheres of their lives. The 73rd Amendment has made a powerful impact on women by enabling them to enter into the decision-making process at the lowest level of democracy. The women's involvement in political activities at the Panchayat level has risen dramatically from 4-5 percent before the 73rd Amendment to about 33 to 50 percent after the establishment of PRIs under the 73rd Amendment. The entry of women in large numbers in PRIs have also ushered in qualitative changes in the process of governance at the grass-roots level. The PRIs have infused awareness and confidence among women folk and inculcated a sense of empowerment among them by enabling them to exercise control over resources, officials and decision-making process by challenging the men folk.

The implementation of the provision of 73rd Amendments and H.P. Panchayati Raj Act have completed about two decades in Himachal Pradesh. Thus, it is pertinent to know whether it has provided the expected benefits to the rural people, especially to that of women or not? Whether or not the PRIs have provided a platform to rural women, from where they could empower themselves socially, economically and politically in the state? What role women are playing in the decision-making process of PRIs? What are the main hindrances in the empowerment of women? These are some of the questions which instigated us to undertake the present study. In the present study, an attempt has been made to explore such questions in depth with special reference to the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the empowerment of women in Himachal Pradesh. The existing review of the literature pertaining to the present research problem under study has been given in the introductory chapter so as to understand the research problem in a broader perspective.

The main objectives of the present study are as under:

- To analyse the socio-economic and political background of the elected women represented of PRIs.
- To analyze the nature and extent of women representatives participation in the functioning of PRIs.
- To study the participation of women representatives in the decision-making process of PRIs.
- To analyze the role of PRIs in the socio-economic and political empowerment of women.
- To analyze the various problems and hindrances being faced by women representative while participating in the functioning of PRIs.

- To suggest some remedial measures for enhancing the women's participation in PRIs and making their role more effective in the functioning of PRIs.

To achieve the objectives of the present study, the following hypothesis have been put to empirical test:

- Participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has empowered them socially, economically and politically.
- Women representatives from better socio-economic status are likely to be more empowered than the women representatives from lower socio-economic status.
- Women representatives from political family background tend to be more empowered than the women representatives from non-political family background.
- Educated women representatives tend to be more empowered than the less educated and uneducated ones.
- Women's entry in Panchayati Raj Institutions has changed the nature of rural power structure.
- Reservation to women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has empowered women politically.

The main focus of the study is on the analysis of empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions. The data collected are based on the 2005 General Elections of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the state. The data were collected in the months of July, August and September, 2010, when the representatives of PRIs were about to complete their term of five years and the next elections to PRIs were due in December 2010. By the time, these women representatives were well acquainted with the functioning of the PRIs.

The present study is a micro-level empirical study confined to the women representatives of three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions in district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh. There are twelve districts in Himachal Pradesh namely Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kangra, Kinnaur, Kullu,

Lahaul-Spiti, Mandi, Shimla, Sirmour, Solan and Una. Since it was not possible for the researcher to cover all the districts of the state, one district namely Mandi has been selected for the present study purpose. We have selected Mandi district purposely as it is one of the oldest of the four districts (others were Mahasu, Chamba and Sirmour) which were created in 1948, when Himachal Pradesh came into existence. Geographically, Mandi district has plain as well as hilly areas. The people of all the castes, communities and classes reside in this district. This provides a distinct geographical and socio-economic setting for research. Beside this, no substantial study of such nature has been attempted so far in this part of the hill state. Moreover, the researcher himself belongs to this district and thus has the advantage of effective communication with the people in general and the respondents in particular.

District Mandi consists of total ten developmental blocks viz. Karsog, Dharampur, Sadar Mandi, Sundernagar, Gopalpur, Gohar, Seraj, Drang, Chauntra and Balh. The present study has been carried out in four blocks of Mandi district i.e. Karsog, Gohar, Gopalpur and Drang. These blocks were selected mainly because the Panchayat Samitis of these blocks were headed by women as Chairpersons. Further, from these four blocks only those gram panchayats have been selected which were headed by women as Panchayat Pradhans.

The present study is conducted on the women representatives elected to three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions in the third General Elections of 2005 in district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh. In this election, total 1417 women representatives were elected to PRIs in district Mandi. Out of these, 12 women were elected as members of Zila Parishad, 81 as members of Panchayat Samiti, 162 as Panchayat Pradhans and 1162 as Panchayat members. However, owing to the practical problems and

limitations imposed by time, funds and topography, it was not possible to contact all the women representatives of PRIs in the area under study. Hence, we resorted to a multi-stage sampling technique in order to select the sample for the present study.

As per the office records of State Election Commission 2005, in these four blocks, there were total 530 women representatives in PRIs (Zila Parishad member 7; Panchayat Samiti members 31; Panchayat Pradhans 62; and Panchayat members 430). Thus, these 530 women representatives of the three tier PRIs of these four selected blocks constituted the universe of our study.

In order to keep our sample size manageable so as to have an indepth study, we selected representatives of only those Gram Panchayats of these four blocks which were headed by women as Panchayat Pradhans. In these four selected blocks, there were total 178 Gram Panchayats (Karsog 60, Gohar 37, Gopalpur 41 and Drang 40), out of which 62 Gram Panchayats were headed by women (Karsog 20, Gohar 14, Gopalpur 14 and Drang 14). In these 62 women headed Gram Panchayats, there were 143 women members / panches (Karsog 48, Gohar 28, Gopalpur 33 and Drang 34) and all these were included in the sample. Thus, the size of the sample in the present was supposed to be 243 women representatives which included 7 members of Zila Parishad, 31 members of Panchayat Samiti, 62 Pradhans of Gram Panchayat and 143 members of Gram Panchayats. However, 4 women members of Panchayats, 3 women Pradhans, 5 Panchayat Samiti members and 2 Zila Parishad members could not be contacted by the researcher due to their non-availability during the course of data collection. Therefore, the actual size of the sample remained 229 women representatives of PRIs in the study area.

Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were used in the present study. Primary source consisted of interview schedule designed for the purpose of ascertaining information on the different aspects of research problem. The data were collected through interview schedule from the women representative of the three-tier PRIs viz. Gram Panchayat, Block Samiti and Zila Parishad. It was supplemented by close observations, interviews and discussions with the key informants who provided relevant informations about problem under study. The major sources of secondary data were books, magazines, journals, newspapers, census reports, office records of state and district concerned departments etc. The collected data have been subject to statistically operational started from the coding, scoring, tabulation, analysis and to the writing of the thesis. The data have been analysed and discussed in detail in the preceeding chapters. The data pertaining to the different aspects of the women empowerment through PRIs shows certain peculiar features which are summed up in the following pages.

The present study acquires an important place, as it provides empirical evidence about the empowerment of women through PRIs in Himachal Pradesh. This study would be of a great help to the planners, policy makers and administrators in making efforts to ensure effective participation of rural women in PRIs. This study would also help the students and research scholars to understand the complex dynamics of the phenomenon of women empowerment. The study would also have an added significance from the academic point of view as not much research work has been done earlier in this direction in this hilly state of the country.

The second chapter relates to women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India and Himachal Pradesh. The self-governing institutions at the

local level are essential for national development and effective for participation of people in democratic process. Self-governing rural bodies are described in the Indian context as institutions of democratic decentralization or Panchayati Raj. Democratic decentralization and Panchayati Raj aim at devolution of power and authority to the people at the lowest level in matters of political decision-making, financial management and administration management without any interference from the top levels. The Panchayati Raj Institutions have their roots in our country since the time immemorial. These are the oldest administrative units in the country. The tradition of having panchayats has been one of the fundamental concepts of Indian culture.

According to the Vedic literature, the national life and activities in the earliest times were expressed through popular assemblies and institutions known as Sabhas and Samitis. The administration of the Indian villages witnessed the existence of the Gram Sabha for several centuries. With the course of time the Gram Sabha were started to be controlled by the zamindars or landlords. This control of zamindars declined the existence of Panchayati Raj Institutions during medieval period. It is a historical fact that local self-government in India, in the sense of an accountable representative institution, was the creation of the British Raj. But, the panchayats had never been the priority of the British rulers. They were interested in the creation of controlled local bodies which could help them in their trading interests by collecting taxes for them. Lord Mayo's Resolution of 1870 on decentralization of power at local levels was the first significant step to develop the local self government in India and revive the traditional village system. The real benchmark of the British Government's policy on decentralization was Lord Ripon's famous resolution of May 18, 1882, on local government,

under which he recognized the twin considerations of local government i.e. administrative efficiency and political education. He proposed the establishment of a network of rural local bodies. But his resolution met with resistance from colonial administration. The progress of local self-government was tardy with only half hearted steps taken in setting up municipal bodies. Another significant steps which marked the evolution of Panchayati Raj in India were Royal Commission on Decentralization (1906), Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919), and Government of India Act (1935).

After Indian independence, with the direct interference of Mahatma Gandhi, Article 40 was included in Part IV of the Constitution (in Directive Principles of State Policy) regarding Panchayati Raj which lays down that the state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endows them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. The state legislatures have been empowered under Article 246 to enact any law regarding any aspect of local self government. The government (at the centre and state level) have made various efforts to improve the village life by setting up Panchayati Raj Institutions. The first such effort was the Community Development Programme (CDP) inaugurated on 2nd October 1952 and the second experiment was the National Extension Service (NES) launched in 1953. On the recommendation of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (November 1957), a formal three tier system of Panchayati Raj was introduced in the country as a part of Community Development Programme on 2nd October 1959, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, in Nagpur district of Rajasthan. Andhra Pradesh followed the suit in the same year and thereafter, a majority of the states passed the necessary legislations to setup the Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, by mid-

1960's it started losing its appeal for reasons such as the increasing tendency towards centralization in the state government, lack of resources with Panchayats and repeated postponement of elections to these bodies.

With a view to explore the possibilities of reviving and strengthening Panchayati Raj, the Janata Party Government appointed a Committee in 1977 under the Chairmanship of Ashok Mehta which recommended a two-tier structure for Panchayati Raj Institutions, one at the district level and other at a Mandal level, but the recommendations of Ashok Mehta Committee were not accepted and adopted except in a few cases. After that, G.V.K. Rao Committee and L.M. Singhvi Committee were appointed to suggest appropriate structural mechanism to activate the PRIs and 64th Amendment Bill was introduced in the Parliament to revitalize the PRIs in July 1989 but the bill could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha.

In 1990, the issue regarding the strengthening of the PRIs, once again comes in the national level, and ultimately Narsimha Rao government was successful in enacting the Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act 1992. This act gives Constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj System in India and prescribes for a regular, direct elections for the PRIs after every five years. The empowerment of the weaker sections of the society including women is one of the fundamental provisions of this Act. The 33 percent reservation of seats to the women with scheduled caste, scheduled tribe is a historical step in this Act.

In Himachal Pradesh, Panchayati Raj System was established under the provisions of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act 1952, and with a view to bring uniformity in the Panchayati Raj System of old and newly merged areas, the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1968 was enacted on November 15, 1970 and two tier Panchayati Raj System

was established throughout the state. After this, with a view to bring law relating to the Panchayats in conformity with the provision of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1968 was repealed and the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 was enacted on 23rd April 1994. As per the requirements of the provisions of the Constitution and the State Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, the three tiers Panchayati Raj System (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad) was established in the state in 1995-96. In 2008, the Act has been amended to provide 50 percent reservation to women in PRIs, whereas earlier provision was for 33 percent reservation for women.

If we see women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India in a historical perspective, we find that during colonial period, women were neither voters nor candidates for the Panchayat elections even where these bodies had elected members. Only the state's Gram Panchayat Act of 1946 included eligibility for voting by every adult male resident and adult female resident who were literate and holding immovable property. After independence, we find that the committees which recommended the creation and improvement of PRIs had nothing much to say on the role of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Balwant Rai Metha Committee (1957) recommended co-option of two women amongst those who were interested in works among women and children in each Panchayati Raj body in the suggested three tier Panchayati Raj System. The Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) also persisted with the incorporation of two women either through election or if necessary through co-option.

It was the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which gives 33 percent reservation to the women in PRIs. This is the first and historical step for the participation and empowerment of Indian women at

grassroots level. It is the main effect of this Act that today, in India, there are 36.82 percent women representatives at panchayat level, 37.1 percent at intermediate level and 37.08 percent in Zila Parishad. In Himachal Pradesh also, women's role at the grassroots level politics was very negligible till the enactment of H.P. Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. This act follows the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, and reserved 33 percent seats for women at all the three levels of PRIs for the posts of members as well as Chairpersons. In 2008, the H.P. Panchayati Raj Act was further amended in order to provide 50 percent reservation to women in PRIs. After the enactment of the H.P. Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, till date four general elections have been held to PRIs in Himachal Pradesh in 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010 and it is found that the representation of women in PRIs has enhanced considerably in the last panchayat elections. The representation of women is more than the reservation provision and they are even winning from the unreserved / open seats. After 2010, the proportion of women in PRIs in Himachal Pradesh is more than that of men. This increasing trend in women's participation at grassroots level politics in Himachal Pradesh is an indicator of women's political empowerment in this hilly state which is in conformity to our hypothesis that reservation to women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has empowered them politically.

The third chapter deals with the socio-economic profile of the study area and the respondents. Himachal Pradesh came into being as a Chief Commissioner Province of the Indian Union on 15th April, 1948 as a result of merger of 30 erstwhile princely states of Punjab and Shimla hills. In 1951, it was made a part 'C' state, in 1956 it was made a union territory. Himachal Pradesh got full statehood on January 25, 1971 and became the 18th state of Indian Union.

Himachal Pradesh is a hilly and mountainous region which extends over an area of 55,673 sq.kms. According to the Census of 2011, the total population of the state is 68.56 lakh persons, out of which 34.74 lakh (50.67 percent) are males and 33.82 lakh (49.33 percent) are females. The density of population is 123 persons per sq.km. and the sex ratio is 974 females per 1000 males. Himachal Pradesh is one of the most literate states of the country. The literacy percentage in Himachal Pradesh has increased from 76.5 percent in 2001 to 83.78 in 2011 as against the All Indian literacy rate of 74.0 percent. For males, it is 90.83 percent and for females, it is 76.60 percent. The mainstay of the majority of population in Himachal Pradesh is agriculture and horticulture and a sizeable population is also involved in service sector. According to the quick estimates, the per capita income of Himachal Pradesh in 2010-11 (Advance) stood at Rs. 58,493. In the last few decades, the state has achieved an impressive growth in agriculture, horticulture, industry, tourism and power generation sectors and today Himachal Pradesh is one of the most progressive states of the country.

The present study has been carried out in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. The Mandi district was formed with the merger of two princely states, 'Mandi' and 'Suket' on 15th April, 1948 when Himachal Pradesh came into existence. Ever since the formation of the district, it has not witnessed any changes in its jurisdiction. The area of the district is 3950 square kilometers, which is 7.09 percent of the total geographical area of the State. According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of the district is 9,99,518 persons with a density of 253 person per square kilometers. The population of the male and female is 4,96,787 and 5,02,731 respectively. The literacy rate is 82.81 percent which is 91.51 percent for males and 74.33 percent for females. The district is

predominantly an agricultural tract and bulk of the people depends on agriculture for their livelihood. There are 473 Gram Panchayats, 10 Panchayat Samiti and one Zila Parishad in Mandi district. Mandi district consists of total ten developmental blocks viz. Karsog, Dharampur, Sadar, Mandi, Sunder Nagar, Gopalpur, Gohar, Seraj, Drang, Chauntra and Balh. The present study has been conducted in four blocks of Mandi district i.e. Karsog, Gohar, Gopalpur and Drang.

An analysis of the socio-economic profile of the respondents, who are also representatives of PRIs reveals that most of the women became members of PRIs in the age group of 31-40 years when they were somewhat free from child bearing and rearing responsibilities. It is found that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (95.63 percent) are married and half of them are having two children. This shows that married women prefer to become the members of PRIs than the unmarried, widowed and divorced ones and in Himachal Pradesh rural people are adopting two child norms. It is found that the average number of children of the respondents in the sample is 2.31 children and more than 90.00 percent children of the respondents are above five years of age which shows that women having less number and grown-up children can spare time to take part in the activities of PRIs. Hence, those women have less number of children and less child caring responsibility are becoming representatives of PRIs.

It is also found that a vast majority of the respondents (80.35 percent) belong to nuclear and small families. The average family size of the respondents in the sample is 4.9 members. Further, the cent percent respondents in the sample are Hindus by religion and most of them belong to the Rajput Caste (48.91 percent) followed by Scheduled Castes (31.88 percent). This indicates that the women representatives of Rajput

and scheduled castes are playing important role in the panchayat politics of Himachal Pradesh. Regarding the educational levels of the respondents, it is found that the maximum number of the respondents (84.27 percent) are educated between primary to plus two level. The study, thus, indicates that the basic education is considered important to become the members of PRIs in the study area, however, some illiterate women are still the members of the PRIs. Regarding the educational levels of the husbands of the respondents, it is found that the majority of the respondents' husbands are having basic education between primary to ten plus two standard like that of the respondents. The level of education of the respondents' husbands is not much high as compared to the respondents. It is also found that the cent-percent respondents have their own income as they get some remuneration as being the members of PRIs, but the level of their income is not very high. The reason may be that a very vast majority of them are housewives and are engaged in agricultural and horticultural pursuits. In case of total annual family income, it is found that the majority of the respondents in the sample have low annual family income and the economic status of their families is not very good.

Further, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (96.93 percent) have landholdings but the size of the landholdings is not very large. As far as the exposure of the respondents to mass media is concerned, a vast majority of the respondents (above 90.00 percent) read newspaper, listen to radio and watch television. However, they are not regular newspaper readers because in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh daily distribution of newspapers from village to village is yet to be achieved. Regarding urban exposure, it is found that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (93.88 percent) visit the cities and majority (60.94 percent) of them visit the city/cities once in a month. This shows

that the women representatives of PRIs are quite exposed to mass media and urban places.

The fourth chapter focuses on the participating of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The political participation of women in a democracy is necessary because it makes a positive and significant impact on the rights and living conditions of women. But, for political rights women all over the world have waged a long and valiant battle. European women had to endure a long wait before they were given voting rights whereas women in South Asia were given voting rights at the same time as their male counterparts. We find that the most of the countries of the world have failed to give due space and representation to women in political life.

The participation of women in the politics is not as good as provided in the statutes of the constitutions. The highest representation of women in the lower/single house of national legislatures is found in the countries like Rwanda, Andorra, Sweden, Finland, South Africa, Netherland etc. whereas in developed countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Italy, France, Japan etc. women representation in the national legislatures is quite low in comparison to men. In India, the representation of women remained between 3.50 and 10.82 percent in Lok Sabha and between 6.12 and 15.15 percent in Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 2009, which is a matter of great concern. In Himachal Pradesh also, after the attainment of statehood in 1971, women's representation remained between 1.4 percent and 8.8 percent in the 68 members State Legislative Assembly. Keeping in view the low participation of women in Parliament, State Legislatures and various decision-making bodies, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 is a revolutionary step in increasing women's participation in decision-making at the grassroots

level, which ensures at least 33 percent of seats for women in all the three tiers of PRIs.

After about two decades of the implementation of new Panchayati Raj Act, it is a high time to assess the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. An empirical analysis of the data regarding participation of women in PRIs, reveals that more than half of the respondents in the sample are panchayat members and the cent percent respondents have been elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions from the seats reserved for women. More than half of the respondents are elected to PRIs from the seats reserved to general women and rest are elected from the seats reserved to scheduled caste and OBC women. This shows that women are becoming members of the PRIs due to the reservation provided to them.

Further, it is found that a vast majority of the respondent (86.90 percent) are new entrants in PRIs and have been elected for the first time. However, there is a considerable number of respondents (12.23 percent) who are members of PRIs, for the second term and thus have experience in the functioning of the PRIs. Regarding political family background of the respondents, it is found that there is no involvement of the family members of a vast majority of the respondents (96.07 percent) respondents in active politics. Further, a very small number of respondents' family members (7.42 percent) earlier remained the representatives of PRIs.

It is also found that majority of the respondents contested the elections of PRIs on their own and on the inspiration of their family members. Further, reservation of seats for women in PRIs is the most important factor which motivated them to contest the elections of PRIs. Thus, reservation is playing a very significant role in the political

empowerment of rural women. The main issues put forth by the respondents during the Panchayat elections were related to the general development of the area and the village community and the development and welfare of the women folk.

It is found that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (96.07 percent) attend the meetings of Gram Sabha and PRIs, regularly and they try to resolve the conflict, if there arise any, in the meetings of Gram Sabha. Further, the cent-percent respondents not only take part in the meetings of PRIs but they also raise their voices on the important issues concerning the general masses in the meetings of PRIs and cent percent of them have accepted that they are heard in the meetings of PRIs. The finances play an important role at grassroots level, and women representatives of PRIs make their efforts for the same. Women primarily have to bear home and hearth responsibilities and it is found that after their entry in PRIs, though to some extent yet their domestic work has got effected. The husbands and family members of an overwhelming majority of the respondents (97.82 percent) are found to be very supportive to the women members of PRIs, while they perform their panchayat work and duties. The study indicates that women representatives of PRIs in Himachal Pradesh generally do not face any problem while getting the things/works done. The vast majority of respondents (93.89 percent) get sufficient time to discharge their duties as members of PRIs. The majority of the respondents are of the view that participation of women in PRIs and local bodies will not disturb the peace/harmony of homes and family life as women can maintain a proper balance between home and public life. They also opines that the interference of male members of the family especially that of the husbands in the functioning of women in PRIs is decreasing day by day and women representatives of PRIs are now

exercising their powers by themselves. The cent-percent respondents altogetherly rejected the notion that women members of PRIs are handicapped in getting the things done in comparison of the male members. They said that women are as competent and capable as men.

As far as the participation in the decision-making process of PRIs is concerned, it is found that a vast majority of the respondent (92.13 percent) take part in the decision making process of PRIs to a great extent and a big majority of them (89.08 percent) take decisions on their own. There is less interference in their decision-making by others including the male members of the family and panchayats. Regarding contributing factors in decision-making, it is found that information about the structures, functions and various provisions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, education and better understanding of the rules, regulations and procedures are perceived as more important factors by the respondents which contribute in the decision-making process of PRIs. Further, in view of a vast majority of the respondents (85.15 percent), all the women representatives are treated alike in the decision-making process of PRIs. However, women from better economic status, having political family background and those who are educated also play a significant role in the decision-making process of PRIs. A vast majority of the respondents (83.85 percent) stated that they have a say in the decision-making process of the PRIs. It is found that the women representatives from educated and middle economic status groups participate more effectively in the functioning and decision-making process of the PRIs.

The vast majority of the respondents (89.08 percent) have denied the interference of husbands / other male members of family in their decision-making whereas a considerable number of respondents (10.92

percent) have still accepted the interference of husband/male family members in their decision-making. A big majority of the respondents (about 89 percent) have appreciated the attitudes of the male members of PRIs and bureaucracy towards women representatives of PRIs, but some accepted that in some cases the bureaucracy remained indifferent and rude towards women in PRIs. Very surprisingly, more than half of the respondents have not ever attended any training programmes organized by the government for women representatives of PRIs.

It is also found that the women representatives of PRIs participate actively in the activities related to the welfare and upliftment of women. The cent-percent respondents are found to be satisfied with the rural development schemes going on through PRIs including MNREGA. Further, the cent-percent respondents accepted that rural development schemes can be implemented effectively and successfully by the participation of women in PRIs, because women feel more concerned about the development of their area and the various problems faced by the people especially that of women and children. So far as the corruption and favouritism in the implementation of various rural development schemes is concerned, a vast majority of the respondents (94.32 percent) have denied about it.

An analysis on the empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions in Chapter V reveals that reservation for women in PRIs provided through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has political, social and economic implications. After the implementation of this Act, many 'household women' have become political women. The participation in grassroots organizations have given women an experience in democracy and integrated them into the political system. While analyzing the participation of the respondents in the political activities, it

is found that the cent-percent of the respondents have casted their votes in the last three general elections held for Parliament, State Assembly and Panchayats. While casting their votes, a vast majority of the respondents keep in mind the achievement oriented factors like, individual merits and education of the candidates. They give less importance to the ascriptive oriented factors like religion, caste, region, family status and gender of the candidate while casting their votes. There is less influence of the male family members on the voting choice of the women representatives of PRIs. The women members of PRIs in Himachal Pradesh are conscious and aware about their voting rights and they exercise their franchise independently.

Regarding participation in election campaigning, it is found that majority of the respondents take part in election campaigning, and door to door campaigning and addressing public meeting are most common campaign activities among them. Further, it is found that the respondents are little concerned with active politics. It is only because of the reservation for women in PRIs that they have entered in PRIs and have raised some possibilities for them to adopt politics as a career in future. It is also found that majority of the respondents are not affiliated to political parties. They are away from the party politics. A big majority of the respondents are not the office bearers of political parties. Those who are office bearers of political parties are mainly at block level. It may also be mentioned here that the respondents are mainly the office bearers of the women wing of their respective political parties. The study also reveals that a very vast majority of the respondents were not active in politics before becoming the members of PRIs. The reservation to women in PRIs is providing an impetus in women to take part in politics even at higher levels. It is also found that about 2/3 majority of the respondents are the

members of NGOs/SHGs/Co-operative societies which shows that the women representatives of PRIs are also participating in non-governmental voluntary organizations for the welfare and upliftment of women and village community.

As far as the awareness and knowledge of the respondents regarding the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and H.P. Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 is concerned, it is found that a vast majority of the respondents (82.97 percent) know about these new Acts relating to PRIs only to some extent and majority of them knew about these Acts mainly after their entry in PRIs. This reveals that majority of the respondents are not much aware about these Acts. However, it is found that on the whole, they are at least aware about some of the basic provisions of these Acts regarding PRIs. Regarding awareness about the powers and functions of PRIs, it is found that a big majority of the respondents (76.41 percent) are aware only to some extent about the powers and functions of PRIs. The respondents are found to be aware about the sources of the income of the PRIs. Further, it is found that the Panchayat Secretary, government notification, print and electronic media and family members are the main sources from where the respondents get information about PRIs.

An analysis of the role of PRIs in the empowerment of women reveals that an overwhelming majority of the respondents accepted that empowerment of women has taken place only after the implementation of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, and this Act has played an important role in changing the outlook and status of womenfolk in rural India to a great extent. A vast majority of the respondents (88.65 percent) are of the view that the participation and representation of women in PRIs has empowered women to a great extent in political as well as social and economic spheres. The cent-percent respondents have agreed that

reservation to women in PRIs has empowered them politically as it has enhanced their participation in the democratic process of the grassroots level. Due to reservation, a large number of women have entered in PRIs and their participation in decision-making process at grass-roots level has increased. Further, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (96.51 percent) accepted that women's entry in PRIs has changed the nature of rural power structure. Now power positions in PRIs are also occupied by women from different sections of society. These findings are in conformity of our hypotheses that reservation to women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has empowered women politically, and women's entry in Panchayati Raj Institutions has changed the nature of rural power structure.

For the political empowerment of women, the cent-percent respondents are also in favour of reservation for women in elected bodies at the higher levels i.e. State Legislatures and Parliament. They rejected the notion that reservation leads to proxy politics and women members act as puppets in the hands of male members. All the respondents are of the view that the reservation will help potential women to enter into the mainstream of politics.

Regarding the role of PRIs in the socio-economic empowerment of women, the cent-percent respondents accepted that the social outlook towards women has changed after their participation in PRIs. All the respondents accepted that they are getting more respect in the society and now they have also more say in the decision-making process of the family in important matters. The cent-percent respondents appreciated the various developmental schemes undertaken through PRIs like MNREGA for empowering rural women economically. The cent-percent respondents

accepted that the economic independence is important for women's empowerment in Indian rural society.

The women representatives are also facing many problems while participating in the functioning of PRIs. The main problems which women representatives generally face while participating effectively in the functioning of PRIs include lack of knowledge about the rules and procedures of PRIs, lack of time due to earning livelihood, lack of time due to family responsibilities and caring of children, and lack of funds to undertake developmental activities. The other problems faced by women representatives are non-cooperation of the family members, village community, govt. officials/bureaucrats and male members of the PRIs. Thus, there are multiple problems which hamper the effective participation of women in the functioning of PRIs. The respondents have also given some meaningful suggestions to enhance the effective participation and representation of women representatives in the functioning of PRIs.

An examination of the findings of the present study reveals that after the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the women's participation and representation in PRIs has increased and this increasing participation of women in PRIs has empowered them politically at grassroots level and has also changed the nature of the rural power structure. The democracy has become more participatory than before at least at the grassroots level. Not only the numerical strength of women has increased in PRIs but have also ushered in qualitative changes in the process of governance. The PRIs have infused awareness and confidence among womenfolk and inculcated a sense of empowerment among them. They are now the part and parcel of decision-making process. They are now taking decisions on their own and being a woman

is not a hindrance in getting the things done. They not only participate actively in the meetings of PRIs but also raise important issues especially related to women and are also heard in the meetings of PRIs. Women representatives of PRIs are highly concerned with the general development of the village community and the development and welfare of the womenfolk.

Now women have got a platform to solve their problems and raise their issues. The reservation for women in PRIs have empowered the rural women socially, economically and politically. After women's entry in PRIs a change is visible in the socio-economic and political status of rural women. There is a change in the societal attitude towards women. Our society is now accepting the participation of women at the grassroots level. They are getting more respect in the society. They have now greater say in the decision-making process of the family. The patriarchal nature of our rural society is gradually changing. Earlier politics was considered as a masculine activity but now it is seen that husbands, parents, parents in laws do not object them to contest the elections of PRIs rather than encourage them to contest the same and even provide full financial as well as moral support. After getting reservation in PRIs, women themselves are also aspiring to come out of their traditional roles and take part in public life. They are desiring to get engaged in certain economically gainful activities. Many self-help groups have been formed by women in rural areas and various developmental schemes like MNREGA are empowering them economically by providing them some source of income.

In nutshell, after 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and almost two decades of women's entry in grassroots politics is proving positive and effective for the empowerment of women in India. It can be called as

the first and an important step in the overall empowerment of Indian women. The participation in grassroots organizations is also providing rural women an experience in democracy. The reservation for women in PRIs has set in motion a process of politicization of rural women. The participation of women representatives of PRIs in the political activities by way of voting, election campaigning, membership of political parties and NGOs/SHGs has increased to some extent after their entry in PRIs.

Thus, a good beginning has been made to achieve the long neglected gender justice. A very important step towards the political empowerment of women has been initiated under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. This Amendment has given Indian women innumerable opportunities to redefine their power but now it is upto them to make use of this new opportunity. The reservation for women in PRIs has created a space for women's needs within the structural framework of politics at the grassroots level.

To enhance women's representation and their effective participation in PRIs, the following remedial measures may be suggested:

- There should be spread of education especially among rural women so that the educated rural women come forward and participate more effectively in the functioning of PRIs.
- Education and training need to be provided to women representatives of PRIs so that they are made aware of their rights and duties as Panchayat representatives. It is important to educate rural women especially with the help of the National literacy mission. The NGOs can also play a vital role in this regard.
- Government should organize training programmes, camps, workshops, seminars, orientation programmes etc. to educate the elected women representatives of PRIs. This will help these

women to acquire knowledge and skills about the functioning of PRIs and they would be in a position to discharge their duties and roles more effectively.

- There should be a positive familial and societal attitude towards women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The male family members should encourage and co-operate women to take part in the politics at the grass-roots level and in the functioning of PRIs.
- Supportive attitude of the male members of Panchayati Raj Institutions is also essential for the effective participation of the women representatives in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Women themselves should take interest in the functioning of PRIs. They will have to be more aware and knowledgeable about the political affairs and happenings around them, about the rules, regulations and procedures of the functioning of the PRIs and also about their roles and responsibilities as members of the PRIs.
- There is also an urgent need of the co-operative and positive attitude of bureaucracy/government officials towards women representatives of the PRIs. The women development programmes should be linked with PRIs for more effective participation of women and also for establishing links between women representatives and government functionaries at the grass-roots level.
- To check the practice of not attending the meetings, women members can be motivated by giving them honorarium and TA/DA to attend the meetings regularly. Further, the meetings of the PRIs should be fixed in consultation with women representatives. Their conveniences should never be ignored.

- Seats in PRIs should be reserved for women at least for two consecutive terms so that women representatives of the PRIs may gain more experience and confidence in the functioning of PRIs on the one hand and may take-up developmental activities effectively on the other.
- Economic independence and access to resources is also essential to encourage women's participation and involvement in the grassroots politics.

Thus, education, awareness, experience, exposure, competence, willingness, confidence, self-motivation, encouragement and co-operation from the family, society and government officials mainly contribute in the effective participation of women in PRIs and their empowerment as well. If these suggested measures are considered on the priority by the women and by the all masses of society, it will benefit our society and polity, and will also empower the rural women to a greater extent. However, the whole issue of women empowerment is not yet achieved and only PRIs cannot be the total base of women empowerment. There is much to be achieved in the area of women emancipation and empowerment. The dream of empowering women can only come true when each and every section of the society will be free from gender bias. There is a need to adopt an integrated approach towards the upliftment and empowerment of women which will bring about gender equality and distributive justice in the society.

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