

# Chapter - 7

## **CHAPTER - 7**

### **SUMMARY AND FINDINGS**

The present study entitled “Women Empowerment and Panchayati Raj System : A Sociological Enquiry & A Study of Two Blocks of Kanpur Nagar” is an exploratory cum descriptive research undertaken with a view to study and understand the real status of female representatives of panchayat, their performance in the field, extent of their empowerment and further those constraints that hinder their way towards empowerment. The study also make a sincere effort to suggest feasible suggestions, which further can help these females to enhance their competencies and performance.

Women have been an integral part of every social structure. Her role in society is very prominent on account of fact that she is perpetuator of human race and significant contributor to socio-economic progress within and outside the family. And a developing democracy like India needs the wider participation of people irrespective of caste, colour, creed and sex. Though 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 not only in terms of sex ratio, literacy rate, work force participation, life expectancy, but also in terms of their assess to

power structure which controls and guides the development programmes of a society. As women constitute a sizeable portion of the total population, their participation in grass roots politics is essential to make democratic governance successful.

The constitutional amendment providing one-third representation to women in elected bodies as well as reserving one-third of the offices of chairpersons for them will have far reaching consequences in Indian political and social life. This is indeed a welcome, though delayed, gesture for we cannot make democracy meaningful in a traditional society like ours without the full involvement of women. A constitutional provision is only a necessary step which should be followed by effective measures for women's uplift in the country. But mere reservation of seats cannot bring their empowerment.

In spite of participation in panchayats, they have been merely considered as passive beneficiaries rather than active contributors. On the political front women largely remain as inactive and indifferent due to various socio-economic constraints and also due to the absence of serious political and social motivation. For a longtime, a certain image has been given to them. The household status the women hold, their health status and the burden of work they have to bear are some of the factors that affect the decision – making ability of women.

Women are working hard to adjust with their new role and prove their capabilities. Women take up political career as an extension of their domestic role. Though it has always been observed that women representatives are honest and accurate in presenting issues to the decision making bodies and authorities. Women are bringing new ideas in local governance and the most important thing is that they don't indulge in corrupt practices.

Women members were found quick learners and are learning the procedural details and other rules of the game. After initial hesitation and indecision, they are conducting meetings and taking decisions of the village council effectively. They have their own agenda and priorities which included provisions of drinking water, sanitation facility, immunization for children, implementation mother – child care program, primary education to ensure that females complete school, construction of roads, repair of chaupals (public meeting places), arrangement of street lights etc. They also tackle the menace of alcoholism. They also became aware of and attempted to limit the sources of corruption at the village level. Thus lots of better performances have been marked from women side. Women's participation in panchayats provided opportunities to women to participate in the decision-making process. Women's participation proved to be the most effective instrument in bringing about a change in their way. Women's entry into PRIs, both as

members as well as heads of panchayats, has pushed them into the policy-making and policy implementation process in a very big way. Whether their husband, father, brothers or other relatives compelled them to take up these roles, or whether they assumed these roles as dummy incumbents, one thing is certain: they crossed the rigid boundaries drawn through their households by the same male relatives. Today, even the semi-literate panchayat pradhans and members have proved no less inferior to their literate counterparts in implementing developmental schemes and providing leadership to the community. The women panchayat members and chief regularly exchange views and air their grievance at interface meetings.

Although women are working hard and doing efforts to prove them selves, but they are neglected Gender discrimination is a universal phenomenon. Both inside and outside the households women are excluded from positions of power. They are denied opportunities to participate in the decision – making process. Even when the decisions are to affect their well – being, they are only passive observers. They don't receive communication from the gram panchayat to attend the meetings. Even sometimes male pradhans and husbands of some pradhans, do not allow them to attend meetings, even the training programmes, as they don't want them to learn about their rights and powers.

Women are believed as place holders only and the de-facto power rests with the male members of the family or in few cases, it rests with the dominant castes. Women are regarded as rubber stamp and they work as proxies. Female representatives suffer from various constraints. Women find it difficult to participate in politics due to limited time available to them because of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive sphere. With the primary roles as mothers and competing domestic responsibilities and care work, they are left with little time to participate in politics.

Another constraint is the mechanisms of sex segregation and purdah are used to restrict their mobility. Yet another constraint is the political atmosphere which is unfavorable for women. Today's political situation where corruption has become a phenomenon in politics, money in some way or the other has played an important part. Further the atmosphere of growing violence, character assassination and unscrupulous struggle for power, have become a serious deterrent to women's participation in political process.

Inspite of so many constraints and non-appreciation of women's participation in development programmes, we have to admit that there participation is considered as an essential pre-condition for the success of development programmes.

Those time have gone when women were looked merely as puppets and passive beneficiaries. Recent years, attitude of society is changing women development has been on top priority of society. Many researches and studies have already been conducted on this cause of developing women and emphasized their effective participation in the panchayati raj system. The need of the hour is that women representatives imbibe in them various qualities needed for effective participation in panchayats overcome their limitations and weaknesses. Researcher was thus motivated to take up research work in the area of women's empowerment through panchayats. The present study had done a sincere effort to find out the performance of elected women representatives and even politically active women and how far they are empowered by participating in panchayats. Attempts were also made to understand the problems faced by the women with reference to their participation. Thus through this research work researcher have sincerely tried to explore the ground reality of women empowerment through panchayats.

### **Findings of the Study**

Interpretations drawn through various data offered by the respondents in the form of responses of questions asked by them, a quest has been made in this chapter to summarize and conclude the major findings of the study with a view to attempt at a few suggestions based there on, which if incorporated

have been of lasting impressions. Researcher hopes that these findings may help in future studies as well as knowing the real facts related to the empowerment of women through Panchayats. The findings are under given : Socio-economic profile of the respondents of the research work is a matter of great interest, it reveals various aspects of the personal life of the respondents. Respondents selected for the study were of two categories, first were those females who directly are participating in panchayats while second those females who are politically active and are not directly involve in panchayat. It is logically assumed that the socio-economic profile of the respondents could have a significant bearing on the outcomes of women participation.

A significant socio-economic data to begin with is Age which is a very important variable. It is observed, **that the highest frequency females belonged to the age – group 31-45 years ie, 159 (49.68%)** where as second highest frequency respondents of both blocks ie, 102 (31.87%) belonged to the age-group 21-30 years. There were negligible females above 60 years of age. Only 07 (2.18%) females belonged to this category. As these females have more leisure and free time during which they involve in panchayat activities freely. They are free from family responsibilities and so indulge with panchayat working.

Education is next important variable to be studied which indicates educational background of female representatives. **Majority of females were qualified till middle level i.e., 119 (37.18%)** while second highest category ie, 104 (32.5%) belonged to primary level. Though the illiteracy level was low ie, 18 (5.62%) only yet few respondents inspite of being illiterate were actively participating in panchayat working. To researcher's surprise, 11 (3.43%) females were educated above graduation but they belonged to general and OBC category with sound economic background. **The average education level of respondents was low which further increases their dependency on their male family members or male – counterparts of panchayat.**

Marital status is another prominent variable. **The findings reveals that majority of females were married ie, 286 (89.37%).** Followed by this category 21 (6.56%) females were unmarried who were residing in their parents house and entered politics due to motivation of their father or brother. Only 13 (4.06%) female respondents were widow. **Majority of representatives were forced by their husband to contest for elections.**

Nature of family to which women representatives belonged was another important variable. **Findings revealed that as many as 182 (56.87%) females belonged to joint family.** Whereas not much difference 142 (44.37%) representatives belonged to nuclear family. **This finding**

**suggested that nuclear family is also becoming a common feature of rural society.**

Caste-wise distributions of women representatives was also analyzed as caste plays a very significant role in panchayat election and working.

**A new observation came forward that the majority of representatives belonged to OBC category which is no doubt a impact of reservations.**

Second category was no less than first one ie, 113 (35.31%) females belonged to SC category. General category female representatives were at third position. There were no respondents from ST category. This change in scenario is the result of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment.

Religion has been another variable, majority of women representatives of the total sample were quite understandably ie, 301 (94.06%) belonged to Hindu religion. Second position went to Muslim religion women ie, .19 (5.93%) and few among them inspite of religions obligations were to some extent working in panchayat successfully. **Majority of respondents belong to Hindu religion.**

Occupational Status indicates economic empowerment of females. **Female representatives of both blocks majorly were housewives ie, 270 (84.37%)** and came to politics due to their husbands. They were financially dependent on their husband. Very few of them were in service ie, only 5

(1.56%) females and they were teachers .39 (12.18%) representatives were involved in agriculture while 6 (1.87%) had their own business. **Thus majority of them were financially dependent on their husband and family.**

Financial status is an essential variable so the family annual income of the respondents was studied. Majority of respondents belonged to the income level of Rs. 40,000 and above ie, 152 (47.5%) females while representatives having low family income were also there ie, 14 (4.37%) females. **Thus the financial position of maximum females was average.**

Economic Status to which women representatives were belonging to was another important variable determining the status of respondent in panchayat. **The highest frequency females belonged to low status ie, 138 (43.12) as these females mainly belonged to OBC and SC category.** Almost equal number of respondents belonged to middle class ie, 126 (39.37%). Representatives belonging to high status were few ie, 44 (13.75%). This category mainly belonged to general and OBC category females. Though females below poverty line were very less ie, 12 (3.75%) yet their existence is a shame for development schemes started by government. Among these females few were working under MGNREGA scheme.

The attempt of understanding the other findings begin with a quest of analyzing the performance of elected women representatives and politically active women in political activities. **The finding outlined that majority of female representatives were very much excited to attend the panchayat meetings ie, 138 (43.12%)** while 97 (30.31%) female representatives were neutral on this question. It was observed on field that they looked at their husband for answering this question and were not clear what to reply. 85 (26.56%) females were not excited for attending the meeting. Few informed that due to official obligation or pressure from husband or family they attend the meetings.

Women representatives informed regarding their attendance in Panchayat Meetings. **Majority of them ie, 226 (70.62%) informed that sometimes only they attend the meetings.** On some specific occasion only they go for meeting. While 88 (27.5%) representatives offered positive response with regard to the issue of attendance in panchayat meetings. They assured that they willing go for attending the meetings specially women who are in panchayat. Only 6 (1.87%) females responded that they never go for attending meetings but among these women were politically active women only.

Accompany to the panchayat meetings was an essential issue to be questioned. **Highest frequency females ie, 155 (48.43%) informed that they are accompanied by their husband or family member.** These females were those who acted as proxies only. They attend panchayat only as formality and the real work is conducted by their husband or male family member. One interesting thing observed was that 113 (35.31%) respondents informed that they are accompanied by other females of village who can be regarded as politically active women. To researcher's surprise 30 (9.37%) females said that they go alone for panchayat meetings as it is very against the traditional orthodox society. Among these females were mainly those who were aged or belonged to OBC or SC category.

Another query to which responses were obtained was in reference to role playing in decision making in panchayat meetings. **Majority of females ie, 131 (40.93%) responded that only sometimes they are able to play role in decision-making.** While almost equal females ie, 115 (35.93%) females responded that they always play role in decision-making. Maximum among them were experienced females who already were attached with panchayat since long back. One note worthy point is, many among them belonged to SC category. **Another aspect also came to light ie, 74 (23.12%) females informed hesitatingly that they never play any role in decision making in panchayat.**

Mere participation is not important but the type of participation female representatives were taking is also essential. **Majority of them ie, 139 (43.43%) females informed that their participation in panchayat is only a formality.** They are only faces to be shown in meetings, the real powers bestows in others hands. Second highest frequency respondents ie, 111 (34.68%) females said that their existence is negligible in panchayats. But 70 (21.87%) respondents confidently informed that they play significant role in meetings and their participation is very important. Representatives whose responses were mainly negative were specially asked along with others for reasons of not participating in meetings. **Majority of females ie, 154 (48.12%) responded that their thoughts are not given importance during panchayat meetings.** They are not allowed to speak and if any female dare to do that then her thoughts are neglected by male-counterparts. 70 (21.87%) representatives said that due to lack of confidence they avoid attending the meetings. 37 (11.56%) females gave many other reasons like family responsibility, pardah system, male dominated society etc. for not attending the panchayat meetings.

It was further discussed regarding neglection of thoughts in panchayat meetings. **Without any doubt majority of females ie, 167 (52.18%) responded in affirmation that their thoughts are always neglected in the panchayat due to which many of them avoid going to meetings.** 132

(41.25%) said very often their thoughts are neglected. Only 3 (0.93%) respondents gave response in negative that their thoughts are never neglected in panchayat. These are those females who are second entrants and politically experienced member belonging to influential family.

It was also a matter of great concern regarding the reaction of female respondent on neglection of thoughts. Though as expected majority of females ie, 134 (41.87%) remained quiet on neglection of their thoughts but **a change that was observed that at least 29(9.06%) females raised their voice on neglection of their thoughts and another 83 (25.93%) raise the issues with the help of other members which is a positive sign of empowerment.** Women are trying to break the old traditional dogmas and learning to adopt the new norms of life. On another question of raising issues in panchayat meetings, the responses were very close ie, 164 (51.25%) said that they raised issues while 156 (48.75%) never raised any issue. Yet situations which were solely favouring males are gradually developing soft corner for females also is a good sign.

The appreciating part of performance of females is the findings of the issues on which female representatives are concentrating. Majority of them 165 (51.56%) raised issues related to drinking water and sanitation. All the other issues are given almost equal attention like agriculture and animal

husbandry women and child care, malnutrition and health, social evil and crime and other issues etc. A significant feature of empowerment is opposing others decisions or thoughts if you feel that wrong. Thus this aspect of female representatives are tried to be studied in this study. **Majority of females ie, 158 (49.37%) informed that they never opposed the decisions of panchayat clearly showed that still females are bounded by the traditional norms of society.** Almost same number ie, 146 (45.62%) respondents said that very rarely they oppose panchayat decisions. Nothing worst can happen than this, that not a single respondent said that they oppose panchayat decisions except for few ie, 16 (5%) females who said that very often under specific conditions they opposed decisions of panchayat.

Empowerment is a multidimensional issue which is not solely related to political empowerment but also social and economic. Mere participation in panchayat does not give women that status which is actually expected for her after 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment. Women representatives while taking decisions are free or not. **Majority of them ie, 107 (62.94%) informed that very rarely they are free to take decisions.** They are only called for signing the orders or decisions as instructed to them by their husband or any male family member. 34 (20%) females gave positive response of often taking free decisions. 28(16.47%) females even responded negatively. Thus still the decision-making is not bestowed in the hands of females. They are merely

used as rubber stamp for any decision. **Practice of proxy is still prevalent which has to be removed.**

Another query regarding the view on implementation of panchayat decisions was asked. **Majority of representatives ie, 191 (59.68%) informed that they keep view on implementation of panchayat decisions.** A good number ie, 60 (18.75%) females gave positive response of always keeping an eye on implementation of decisions. These women were experienced females and whose family was also involved in panchayat since long time. Thus they were already aware of various working of panchayat. Only 17 (5.31%) responses were in negative.

Rural India still follows traditional norms of purdah system so **majority of females positively responded they carry veil during panchayat meetings ie 219 (68.43%).** So still this custom is followed by rural society but there are newcomers also 65(20.31%) representatives refused carrying veil in panchayat meetings. Though among these females mostly were aged ones but still new air had started blowing in rural land.

Most controversial feature of empowerment is male interference in decision – making. **As expected majority of respondents ie, 157 (49.06%) informed that male members interfere in panchayat decisions and females views are neglected. An interesting feature was observed that**

**no response was there which informed no interference of male members.** This finding is very important as it brought to light real scenario of female decision – making and male dominance in decision making.

Women by nature are shy and have lack of confidence in working with men. **Majority of females ie, 170 (53.12%) informed that they always face problem in working with men.** Few females informed that their male- counterparts interfere in their work and create an environment in which they are uncomfortable. Very few 11 (3.43%) females informed that they face no problem in working with men.

Another query was raised whether husband or family member directs in meetings. **Majority of representative ie, 78 (45.88%) females informed that sometimes they are directed by husband or male family member in the meetings.** 45 (26.47%) females informed that always they are directed in panchayat meetings by their husband or family member. Male dominant society still does not tolerate strengthening of females in the society. This mentality of males have to be changed if real empowerment of females is desired.

It is found through the study that **majority of females ie, 90 (52.94%) accept advice of their husband or male family member during panchayat decision** while 22 (12.94%) always accept advice during decision. Females

are not confident enough to take decisions themselves and even today they are dependent on others. **A positive indicator was the response of 53 (31.17%) females who never accept advice of anyone and are trying to become self-reliant in taking decisions.** If properly being trained these females can be good options for better panchayat working in future. Even today female representatives are depending on their husband or family for helping others. **Majority of females ie, 182 (56.87%) to some extent depend on their family for helping others.**

With regard to **the male counterparts reaction towards any suggestion given by female representatives majority of females informed in negative.** 139 (43.43%) females responded that males have very negative reaction on any suggestion given by them. Only 26 (8.12%) female gave answer in positive. Thus this reaction of male-counterparts is further effecting the attendance and performance of female respondents.

Panchayati Raj Officials regularly keep in touch with the panchayat member but normally this meeting is done with the male-members of the panchayat. Officers even avoid meeting with females due to their ignorance of facts and rules. Even females avoid meeting them due to shyness and hesitation of meeting an outsider official. **87 (51.17%) females very often met the panchayat officials** while 11 (3.43%) never met with them. Meeting

with officials no doubt will increase their knowledge regarding rules and working of panchayat and this should be done on top priority.

For efficient working in panchayat members must be updated properly and they should do self-effort for seeking information regarding various development programmes going on in village. **Majority of females 177 (55.31%) seek information regarding development programmes through male family members** and 106 (33.12%) females derive this information through other males of panchayat. Inspite of so many efforts female representatives still have not become efficient enough to do any self effort for seeking information. Only 4 (1.25%) female do self-effort for deriving information regarding development programmes. Interest in females for panchayat working have to be developed then only females will climb one more step on empowerment ladder.

Real test of the women representative's strength lies in responding to women's needs and problems. Because a common saying is in vogue that women problems can better be understood by women only. **As many as 100 (31.25%) women representatives of both blocks responded that only sometimes they are able to solve female problems.** However, rest of other ie, 57 (17.81%) have opined that they were very often successful in solving problems related to females. Thus it may be gratifying to note that all women

representatives are not able to solve problems related to women always. So this tendency have to be changed.

Progress and development in any area depict the picture of development. Similarly participation of females in panchayat have brought change in their social prestige. **A query was raised regarding this whether social prestige of female representatives was effected due to participation in panchayat or not. As many as 173 (54.06%) females gave positive response.** The second highest frequency ie, 138 (43.12%) accepted increase in social prestige to some extent. Socially people respect them more due to their post in panchayat inspite of belonging to reserved category. Hardly 09 (2.81%) females informed that their prestige decreased due to participation in panchayat.

Further an enquiry regarding the financial dependence on husband or family was done. **Majority of respondents ie, 220 (68.75%) revealed there financial dependence on husband and family.** Only 16 (5%) females informed that they were self-dependent and were not dependent on their husband or family. **Thus inspite of reservation respondents are not economically empowered.** There financial dependence is still present.

Women empowerment is most attention seeking term these days, both the government and NGO's are pledging their commitment towards this

aspect. **Majority of females ie, 135 (42.18%) responded that panchayat empowered women** while 128 (40%) females informed empowerment of females to some extent. Very few females ie, 44 (13.75%) females informed that they are not empowered by panchayat as they are only faces and real power lies in the hands of males. Few females informed that they are looked down in society for being a part of panchayat and opposing their male counterparts.

Women always remained dependent on men since her childhood and they fail to see their life without assistance of men. This scenario of dependence made men feel dominant. Now when she is trying to come out from the shackles of men they could not tolerate this and the result is exploitation. Majority of females are facing this problem of exploitation done by men on females in panchayats. Though the results in study area were different from the above view. **Majority of respondents ie, 183 (57.18%) informed that no exploitation is done by men, as maximum of them were accompanied by their husband or male family member.** While almost equal number ie, 137 (42.81%) females accepted exploitation by men during panchayat working.

Another important constraint hampering empowerment of females were the individual factors. **136 (42.5%) females accepted that sometimes their**

**individual traits hamper panchayat working** while second highest frequency ie, 127 (39.68%) females positively accepted the impact of their individual factors on working of panchayat. Very few 57 (17.81%) refused any effect.

When queried regarding those individual factors creating problem in panchayat working the responses were very mixed. **Majority of them 89 (27.81%) informed for family responsibilities while almost equal number ie, 86 (26.87%) responded for illiteracy as the reason for problems in panchayat working.** Few other factors stated were low status 2.5% and patriarchal society (20.31%) etc.

Although women are elected members but they sought assistance from males but men try to keep things in their hands and start interfering in panchayat work. **Majority of females 173 (54.06%) accepted male interference in panchayat work** while only 35 (10.93%) gave response in negative. **Thus inspite of participation in panchayat, women are not free from male interference and dominance.** And when she opposes this dominance violence is used against her. Though in our study area not a single response came in direct favour of violence. But **112 (35%) females informed about verbal violence to some extent ie, use of abusive language, eve teasing, indecent comments on character of female representatives and**

**specially politically active women.** One noteworthy thing here is verbal violence is faced more by politically active women than women in politics and these politically active women belonged to OBC and SC category. Majority of them 205 (64.06%) refused any kind of violence.

One more obstacle faced by women is Opposition which keep on creating problems in panchayat working. **Majority of females ie, 172 (53.75%) responded in positive that opposition always create problem as they could not tolerate existence of females in public arena and their loss of power and position in village.** Such reactions make female representatives afraid of politics and they normally avoid attending the meetings.

Caste and Religion are two major founding pillars when we talk of rural social structure and play very significant role in determining the status of a person in society. Traditional norms of caste and religion don't allow liberty for females. Thus when queried regarding interference of caste and religion in panchayat working **majority of females 132 (41.25%) accepted that caste and religion always obstruct panchayat working.** Many times females of low caste faced restrictions due to their caste. Few Muslim females informed that religion sensitive issues are consciously not discussed before them which is not appropriate. Very few 58 (18.12%) females accepted no interference of

caste and religion. Among them mainly females of general and OBC category of sound families belonged. Women members have their own agenda and priorities for development and they even attempt to limit the sources of corruption atleast at development programmes but many objections are raised to pull their efforts down. When queried regarding problems during implementation of development programmes, the responses were mixed. 54 (31.76%) informed objection of panchayat members while 39 (22.94%) informed objection of villagers. 32 (18.82%) informed objection of husband or family. **Still majority of people are uncooperative with women.**

Women responded to another query regarding passing of no-confidence motion against women representatives. **Majority of females. ie, 169 (99.41%) stated that never any no-confidence motion was passed against them.** Moreover hardly any of them go against the flowing current of panchayat. Only 01 (0.58%) female accepted that no confidence motion was passed against her but later it was taken back after internal discussion of panchayat members.

Another query put forth before, respondents was regarding adjustment in their dual roles. Females have to manage their household work, look after their children and fulfill their responsibilities as panchayat member also. Even many of the respondents were engaged in working for earning their livelihood.

Thus adjustments in dual roles becomes tough. **Majority of respondents ie, 168 (52.9%) informed that to some extent they were able to adjust in their dual roles** while 83 (25.93%) females responded in negative. They are not able to adjust in their dual roles and majority give priority to personal life than panchayat working which further effect their empowerment.

Women facing dual roles rather multiple roles face problem of role conflict and when they fail to adjust, they prefer to go for first priority thing which is majorly family in rural women's cases. When asked regarding the query that family responsibility effect panchayat work, **majority of females 117 (36.56%) informed that family responsibilities always effect the panchayat working and this becomes a major reason for non-involvement in panchayat working.** 88 (27.5%) females gave response in negative and informed that they are successfully able to manage their dual roles and their family responsibilities does not effect their panchayat working.

In order to know the extent of empowerment female respondents were enquired whether they gave punishment to anyone. **Majority of respondents ie, 155 (91.17%) informed that they never gave punishment to anyone during panchayat meetings.** Only 15 (4.68%) females gave punishment during panchayat meetings. **These findings clarified that still females have not empowered so much that they can take decision to punish anyone.**

Few cases of punishment were not their sole decisions. They only signed the orders as rubber stamp and nothing else.

Now we may test the hypothesis taken for this study mentioned in chapter two. Those five hypotheses may be evaluated in the light of the findings of the study.

- The first hypothesis to be tested is that economic self-sufficiency has not been met by women inspite of participation in Panchayati Raj Institution. In context of our findings this hypothesis is valid. As majority of respondents studied were housewives and were financially dependent on their husband or family. They were restrained from opposing the opinions and interference of their husband or family in panchayat decision making also. In this reference we can say that economic self sufficiency is an important aspect of women empowerment which has not been met by our respondents.
- The second hypothesis to be tested is that the role performance of upper caste women is better in comparison to women pertaining to lower caste. In context to our findings this hypothesis is not valid. As majority of women who are member of panchayat and even who are politically active belonged to OBC category and SC category. After evaluating the performance of respondents it can be assured that

women belonging to lower caste have more involvement in panchayat working and decision – making in comparison to upper-caste females. Higher caste females were found strictly following the old orthodox thinking of purdah system and non-socializing with other members of panchayat. They mainly were front faces being used only for name sake and occupying of seat reserved for females. While many females of lower caste were found participating in decision-making, raising issues in meetings etc.

- The third hypothesis to be tested is that Role-Conflict has emerged as an obstacle in empowerment of women. In reference to our findings this hypothesis is only partly valid as more than 52.5% respondents were to some extent only able to manage between their dual roles.

Women during study were found giving priority to their household chores, neglecting the panchayat working. 83 (25.93%) females honestly accepted that they are unable to adjust between their dual roles. Few respondents were working ladies also and so for them this adjustment became tougher and so there panchayat working was mainly looked after by their husband or any male family member which later boosted the concept of proxy. Thus we have to admit that only partially females are able to adjust between their dual roles and this

hypothesis is only partially valid and role-conflict to some extent has emerged as an obstacle in empowerment of women.

- The fourth hypothesis to be tested states that women have not been empowered inspite of political participation. In context of our findings this is partly valid hypothesis. Women who have been blocked in the four walls of house with no liberty of any kind have been brought to such a position of power suddenly. Inspite of that, findings of our study reveals that majority of them are to some extent playing significant role in decision-making, inspite of male interference and opposition, raising issues during panchayat meetings and then trying to solve them, though with the help of others but are trying. No doubt majority of them are working as puppets in the hands of their husband or male family member and dependent on their advice also. But there was found a section of females who were coming forward to accomplish their new responsibilities with great valour and enthusiasm. Even they are gradually learning to go alone without any company for attending the panchayat meetings. Therefore on this note we can say that the present hypothesis is partially valid and partially not valid.
- The fifth hypothesis to be tested states that ignorance of rules and regulations due to illiteracy has become a hindrance in empowerment

of women. On the basis of our observation and findings we can say that this hypothesis is valid. A large number of respondents studied were not aware of the rules and regulations and a major reason for that was their illiteracy. Inspite of participation in panchayat meetings they lacked knowledge about its working and procedures. Thus it is clearly visible that this hypothesis is valid.

### **Suggestions**

The panchayati raj system has given women a platform to make their collective voice heard and boosted their participation in the process of development at the grass-roots level. The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment has transformed the dynamics of rural development and provided women with opportunities to demonstrate their leadership qualities and abilities and widen their representation at the political grass-roots level. But rural women have had to battle cultural dogmas and taboos passed on over generations that have hitherto hindered their empowerment and progress. Therefore in order to remove various drawbacks of women empowerment under given suggestions can be given.

#### **1. Bring Attitudinal Change**

An important step for bring empowerment of rural women is to bring attitudinal change both men and women. Men's attitude toward's women's entry into politics has begun to change from that of total rejection to limited

encouragement. This trend needs to be strengthen. Similarly women's feeling that they are meant for household activities and rearing of children needs to be transformed into a feeling of equal partnership of women and men.

## 2. **Enforce Special Quorum of Women in Panchayat Meetings**

Mere reservation does not ensure active participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Illiteracy, family responsibilities, lack of confidence, patriarchal values etc. keep women away from panchayat meetings and so majority of decisions are taken in their absence leaving their concerns unaddressed. Thus to overcome such obstacles government has made provision of minimum quorum of women mandatory in meetings. Though such provision is there but practically it is not followed by the members. It must be very strictly followed so that positive perception in women for themselves could develop and they may gain sense of empowerment.

## 3. **Ward off Proxy Participation of Male Members in Panchayat Meetings :**

Husband or relatives of elected women representatives many times participate in panchayat decision-making on behalf of women and finally sideline them. They interfere in official working of panchayats and this practice can not be allowed. The answer can be change in mindset of men through

counseling and promoting confidence of women to carry on panchayat working. Even the panchayat officials should strictly prohibit proxy participation and may initiate strict action against people violating this norm.

**4. Special Adult Literacy Programmes for Women Representatives :**

Illiteracy is the most important obstacle that effects the efficient working of female representatives. Due to illiteracy many times they are ignorant of the rules and regulations of the panchayat. Findings of the study revealed the majority of females were educated till middle level. Therefore special adult literacy programmes should be organized specially for females in general and women representatives in particular. They should be taught in such way that they become efficient enough to perform their duties confidently and efficiently.

**5. Strengthening of Gram Sabha :**

Gram Sabha is endowed with lot of powers including social welfare, development, village management and monitoring etc. So it can play a significant role in empowering females. As it meets twice a year only so this could be changed to atleast one meeting in two months can make gram sabha more transparent in its functioning. Even presence of government officials should be made mandatory.

**6. Rotation of Reserved Seats to two terms for women :**

Seats are reserved for females only for one term and even if they have performed effectively in their first term, they are unable to reap the benefits of these achievements in next elections. Findings of the study even revealed that females contested election only one time in their career. Solution to this condition can be reservation of seats for women can be extended for two terms which will give time to females to enhance their efficiencies and utilize their authority in right direction without depending on others.

**7. Additional Honorarium for Elected Women Representatives :**

It was observed through the findings that many female representatives were wage earners and being involved in earning their livelihood, they devoted less time for panchayat activities. Few respondents even belonged to below poverty line category, thus there first priority was earning money. Though they get some remuneration in terms of honorarium monthly/daily wages allowances, sitting fees, TA/HRA etc but there is no provision for any separate additional honorarium to elected women representatives. If some additional honorarium is provided to women representatives, their active participation can be increased.

**8. Support of NGO's and Local Women's Groups to Strengthen Females :**

Involvement of local women's group and NGOs in an extended level can be done to help the common females, particularly females of poor households who can come into the mainstream overcoming their limitations and later contribute to grass root level development. Though many NGOs like Jan Chetana Sansthan, ASHA : The Hope etc are working but no such organizations were found in study area. Therefore such NGO's and their coordination should be developed. NGO's can act as facilitators and catalysts in providing information, skill and resources to women. Even services of gram sevikas can be used to enhance women's participation in meetings and other women's forums.

**9. Emphasis on Training Facilities and Capacity Building Programmes for Females :**

It is found through study that training is not given within a year of elections due to various constraints. Separate and exclusive training programmes based on the principle of continuous and comprehensive training for women representatives should be planned and it should be made compulsory for the women representatives as through training they will learn governance process. There can be some Mobile training as well as counselling sessions which can care after members specially, women members. And some follow up session after each training, which can recover the training gaps of the women members. Even the resource centres for

capacity building must be established at every district, block and if required at village panchayat level also. Gender Sensitization should also be emphasized not only for men of village but also for bureaucrats working at different levels of government.

10. **Social Awareness Programmes should be organized :**

In today's decentralized planning top priority should be given to education, health, water and sanitation facilities as these directly effect society's welfare and the women of society at large. Awareness of rural women for basic amenities along with sensitive issues like female education, female infanticides, domestic violence etc through mass-media especially radio and T.V. Pamphlets and booklets in local language can be used for rural community mobilization and awareness generation. The Mahila Mandals in village can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize women.

11. **Microfinance And Economic Empowerment :**

Easy arrangement of micro loans so that females of village can easily start there earning source. Many researchers have shown a clear link between women's participation in Self Help Group (SHG) and their empowerment. Many places females of SHG contested for election and won. Thus SHG should be developed as they pave route for economic self-sufficiency of females and further her economic empowerment. SHG's be

given additional incentives so that women can engage more and more in numerous activities.

12. **Devolution of Functions, Funds and Functionaries to Panchayati Raj Institutions :**

Lack of proper devolution of functions, funds and functionaries has been revealed as one of the major impediments which discouraged elected women representatives from taking interest in the process of democratic decentralization. For removing this drawback, government should ensure devolutions of funds, functions and functionaries through statutory provisions.

13. **Establishment of Grievance Redressal Cell :**

Females in general and elected women representatives in particular suffer from various grievances. Domestic violence, abusive language, attempt to rape, corruption by officials or their male-counterparts, neglection in panchayat, treatment as rubber stamp etc. have social and psychological impact on females which further effect their performance in the panchayat. They have no such specific place where they can share their mishappening or complain against the dissatisfaction they are suffering from. Thus such grievance readdressal cell specially for females should be opened and these must be easily approachable to them also.

**14. Interaction with Outside World :**

Several studies emphasized that rural women should have contact with outside world as it makes them more alert and active in the political process. There are two ways of doing this : Firstly interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected women leaders be encouraged. Secondly, these women could be taken out to urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives should be arranged. This will definitely enhance their knowledge and confidence level. These exposure visits and exposure speech will definitely be beneficial for women.

**15. Updating of National Panchayat Portal :**

National Panchayat Portal is a dynamic website for panchayats with a versatile front end in terms of information, content and services needed by people. This portal envisages to provide a single platform for information dissemination and exchange from all Zilla Parishads, Gram and Intermediate Panchayats and allows Panchayats to upload data directly. Therefore if governments invest more on e-PRIIs, then it can facilitate the creation of accurate, update and comprehensive data base in the portal.

**16. Database on the Socio-economic profile of Elected Women Representatives of PRIs :**

In spite of number of panchayat elections, a proper compilation of the data pertaining to the socio-economic profile of the elected women representatives has not yet been done by many states. Maximum data collected is only related to number and percentage of women representatives and their SC & ST bifurcation. Even data on women multi-termers is not present. So if states generate a complete data bank on the socio-economic profile of elected women representatives, then it can help a lot in development and empowerment of women representatives.

**17. Social Audits :**

Social audit process involves auditing of various schemes by social auditor and social audit facilitator and submission of audit report. Social audits help in enhancing the culture of transparency, especially in panchayat and further checks the corruption in panchayat, a problem which hinders female representatives working. Social Audit and Meeting Management (SA-MM) is one of the applications developed as part of Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES) under Epanchayat Mission Made Project (MMP). SA-MM aims to facilitate social audit of works taken under different schemes/ programmes of central and state governments. It also facilitates the management of statutory meetings of local governments. In order to minimize corruption and ensure the benefit reaches the poor, social audit is given a central role in the Mahatma

Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA). Thus this process of social audit should be taken from paper service to practical working.

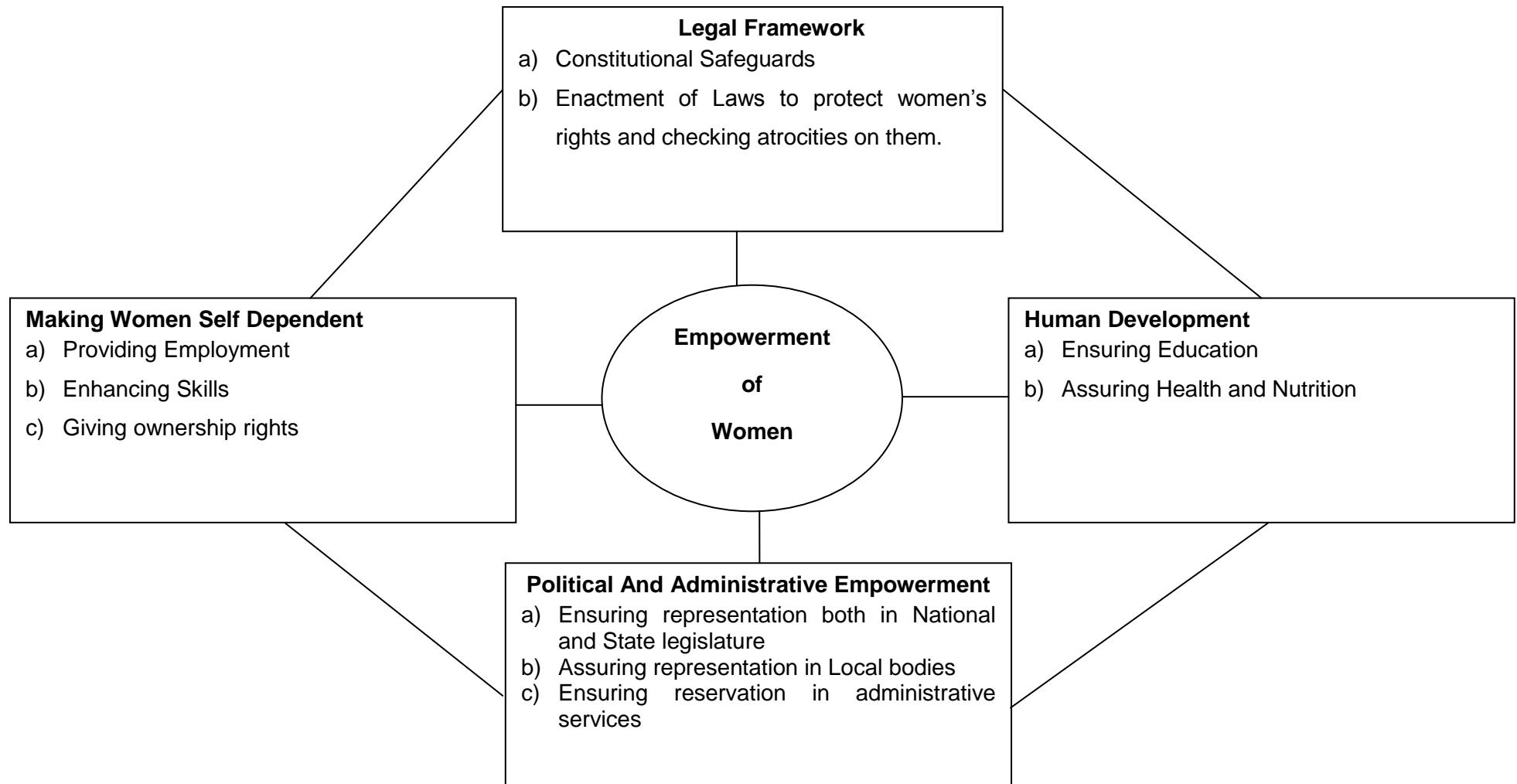
**18. Legal Unbiased Enactment :**

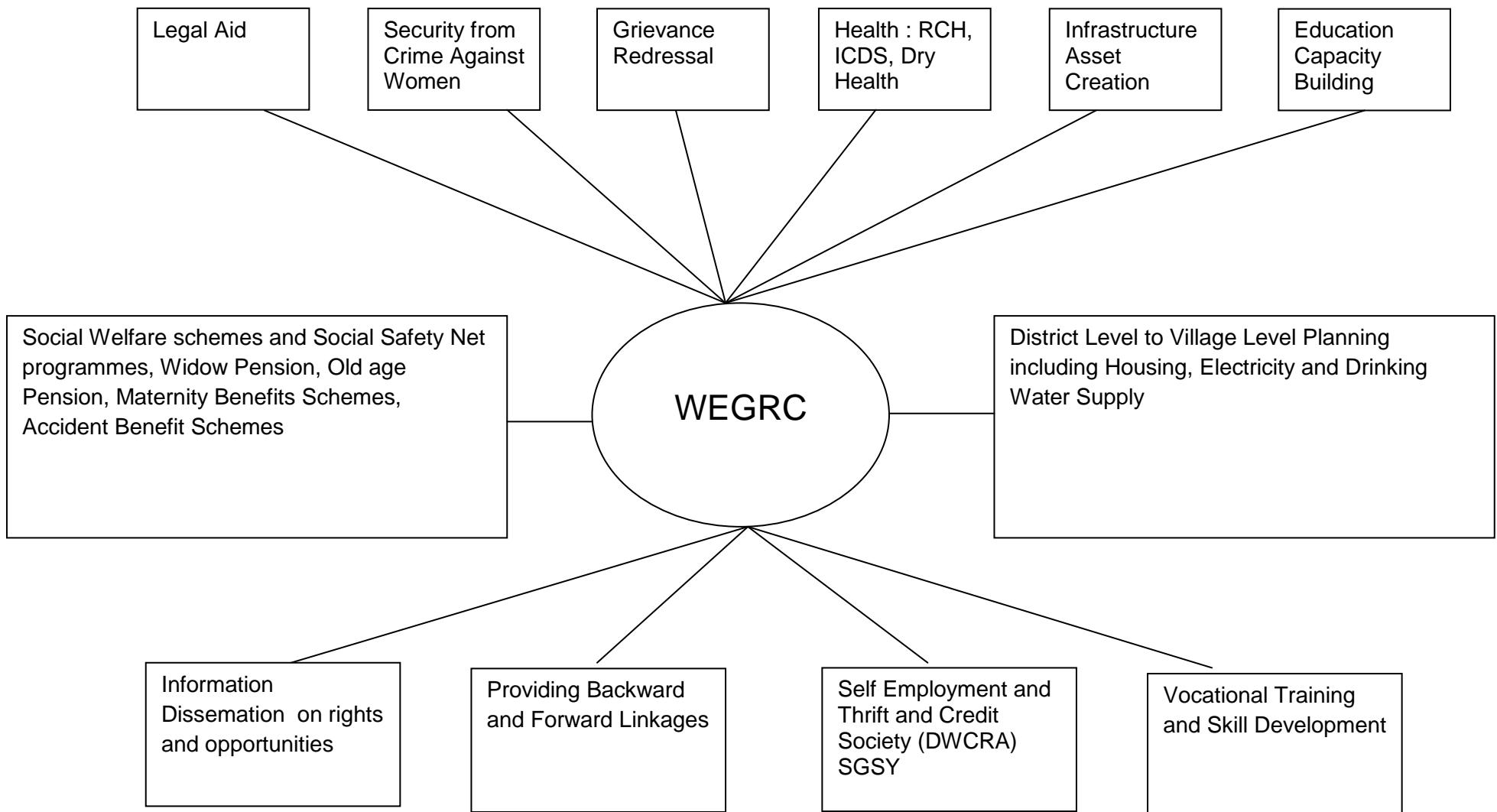
Though government is running various programmes for social economic and political empowerment of women like Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA), Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojna, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MGNREGA) etc. but there real benefit is not reaching to the females due to biasness and discrimination.

19. Incentives and Rewards play a vital role in ensuring participation of women representatives in decision-making. There are few very active and enlightened women leaders who have successfully implemented the development schemes. Such leaders should be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It will definitely encourage the other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will be replicated.

20. Two Models can be recommended for over all empowerment of rural women. The first model has been developed by Dr. Shyam Sunder Singh Chauhan and Gaurav Banyal ("Various Dimensions of Women's Empowerment", and Second Model has been development by Mr. Manoj Pant) Women Empowerment Perspective and Approach. The models may be presented to have future policy interventions.

## **MODEL – 1**





a single window approach towards women empowerment and grievance redressal, it is recommended to set up in every district a centre which will act as Nodal Centre for addressing those issues and contribute in managing and mitigation the socio-economic and gender issues. The proposed nodal centre can be termed as Women Empowerment and Grievance Redressal Centre (WEGRC). The head office or centre can be opened at the district headquarters level with its sub-centres as per requirement or may be a part of the administrative network at the District, Sub-division Block Head Quarters. The existing official machinery with some additional duties and realignments be used so that there could be no financial involvement.

A society may be formed under Registration of Societies Act to give the centre a legal sanction. Active members of various non-government organizations working on such issues may be co-opted in the society. The proposed WEGRC shall be an enabling mechanism to meaningfully address gender related issues and ensure gender equalities by making poor women groups aware of their rights and opportunities and acting as a Resource Centre on Gender issues.

To conclude, representation of women in Panchayati Raj Structure or elsewhere is not a sufficient condition for their effective political participation and empowerment, although it is undoubtedly an essential one.

Despite being members of these democratic bodies or even their head or even politically active, women's political participation and empowerment is constrained by various socio-economic pressures. It would be therefore prudent to follow the above given suggestions. In this regard, it is highly relevant to mention the words of Veena Majumdar, an eminent scholar and secretary to the First Committee on the Status of Women in India, "The state has no option but to take note of the critical mass of human resource. As the empowerment process is already on, it is time for a step forward to acknowledge them as the agents of social change and development."

## **SWOT Analysis of Women Empowerment through Panchayats**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
Capable of realizing their rights	A women opposes the initiatives of another women	Expeditions resolution of problems faced by women desired	The culture of alcoholism in rural areas and resultant undignified behavior with women adversely effect women's mobility and their role performance
Realization of not submitting to exploitation by dominant forces	Lack of education due to lack of opportunities	Need to enhance their knowledge and skills	Socio-Cultural Impediments
Knowledge about problems of their area and specific problems of women	Speak less in meetings (Social – cultural inhibitions)	Need for promoting economic independence	Fear of violence in remote areas
High Self Confidence	Despite reservation, women are not forthcoming	Need to increase opportunities for attainment of functional literacy	Indecent and insulting behavior by male colleagues
Women are givers of strength to each other and emerge strong as a group/collective	Fear of asking questions	Need to come out of the veil system	Inability to mobilize financial resources to fulfill peoples expectations in their locale.

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
Women cares for her family with love and sense of duty, similarly she can be the best caretaker for development of her community and constituency	Fear of facing opposition after loss of post after 5 years	Women sabha should be organized before Gram Sabha, as per prevailing system	Threat of being misled and exploited due to lack of education and awareness
Committed for development of entire work area	Veil System (Purdah System)	Sustained Training for enhancing effective role performance	Directions of women elected representatives not being complied with leading to feeling of disrespect
Good leadership skills	Women are emotional and trust others easily making them vulnerable for being cheated	Special allowance for women elected representatives for support of domestic work and child care responsibilities	Opposition leader's dirty politics
Women leaders conducted meetings peacefully and with patience	High acceptance of male dominance	Vehicle facility for increasing mobility in their area	Cultural Dogmas