

CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has been considered as the most effective instrument to remove their inequality, invisibility and powerlessness. When the Panchayati Raj system was introduced, very few women contested and got elected.

The present study is concerned not only with political participation in general but it is a micro-level study concerned with political participation of women that too at the grassroots level of political functioning. Participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has been an area of much interest in India. Participation in the local government institutions has been viewed essential in promoting women's consciousness and development at the local levels as well as train them for participation in the politics. The inhibitory factors for effective women participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions are many and diverse. Such factors help us to suggest practical ways to overcome some of the limitations in evoking women's participation.

The participation of women in the grassroots politics grew rapidly due to 73rd constitutional amendment, in which it has realized the reservation policy for women in the three tiers of the power structure. The Act gave more and more representation and power to the women in the field of political sphere.

Traditionally, women were considered secondary to men and they were forced to face discriminatory practices in highly male

dominated society. The situation of women was never very respectable in reality from the time of introduction of land and private property. Women were called to remain at home and they reduced them to social reproduction. Specific objectives of the study were to examine the role of women in rural development, at home, in agriculture, the nature and extent of women's role in family, decision making process, knowledge of about different rural development programmes, their participation in these programmes and to suggest measures for integration of women in the development process.

The participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution has increased with the spread of education, and in the process of modernization. Literacy is one of the crucial factors for effective leadership and functioning of women representative. Analysing the situation it is found that the percentage of literacy is highest at matric level and poorest at professional courses. The opinion of the respondents is elicited on the reason that the leadership at Gram Panchayat level is mostly held by illiterate or semi-literates. A change has taken place in the status of women and they are taking active part in the politics.

Politics at the grassroots level gives an idea of women's representatives in different tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. During the study it is found that the position of women has been slightly improved. Members of Panchayats admitted that the party politics has undoubtedly shifted to village level. The lives of the women are affected positively after becoming members of Panchayats.

As far the caste structure is concerned, most of the women came from the upper caste. During the field study it is found that women from Scheduled Castes have been able to get an opportunity and access to feeling of democracy only through reservation. It shows that hegemony of high caste no longer exists but their dominance continues. However, the weaker sections have ceased to remain marginal and have been able to make dent into the rural power structure on account of reservation for them.

Caste is a significant factor in socio-political interaction and women in particular. Women of lower caste in panchayat bodies find it extremely difficult to express their views freely. Such women may lack confidence to express their opinion and on many occasions they may be reluctant to attend meetings for not finding them useful. During the study it is found that the caste plays an important role in decision making process.

Women from various castes, communities and regions, have participated voluntarily and they are aware about the different issues at different levels. During the study it is found those majorities of the respondents are not only aware about the issues around them but are also aware about local, state, national and international level issues.

Panchayati Raj system is a basic concept of rural development. The sheer number of women that Panchayati Raj Institutions has brought into the political system has made a difference. Majority of the women are aware about the new panchayati raj system and the objectives of new Panchayati Raj Act. They are also aware of the programmes and policies under this Panchayati Raj system.

During the study it is found that the women folk are now ready to participate in the local bodies. They are ready to take part in any community activities. The mass media and education has given them hope for betterment only after their participation in public activities. It is a myth that the women folk are not ready to take up new responsibility in the ensuring local body system.

Gender equality is a prerequisite for active participation of women in strengthening the framework of Panchayati Raj Institutions. There is an unholy alliance of caste, class, religion, social values, prestige, etc. which act as the deterrent to equal participation of women. During the study it is found that the women representatives take some more time for their effective participation and it can be increased through self-employment.

During the study it is noticed that majority of the women are aware of the functioning of the panchayats such as the required number of gram sabha meetings, the quorum for these and the persons responsible for preparing the agenda and the person who keeps panchayat record. The women are also aware of the taxes imposed by the panchayats and about the schemes that are implemented by the panchayats.

It is not possible to expect encouraging response from the men folk concerning women's rights and privileges especially in a male dominated society. The men are used to interact with men in panchayats and don't treat women with equally. In this way they discount women presence in panchayat which make inclusion of women members meaningless. We should appreciate the fact that women are capable to understand the local issues and are capable of doing more in the socio-political life of village if properly

motivated. It is observed that very few women enter into electoral politics of grassroots institutions at their own choice, rather they are forced by male heads of the family or their husband to participate in the election of the grassroots institutions. As a result of this majority of the women are not capable of taking independent decision with regard to grassroots politics. During the study it has been observed that male members play a dominant role in the decision making process and majority of the elected representatives of the local bodies have no identity of their own and they act as the mouthpiece of their male counterparts. Even when they contest the election they face many problems from the family and society.

The constitutional provisions ensure the representation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions both as members and as functionaries, but it must be kept in mind that merely becoming members does not ensure their effectiveness. It is observed during the study that women representatives are satisfied with the performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The study also reveals that elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions are satisfied with the role of three tiers system as it plays an important role for rural development. During the study it has been observed that Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Paishad are working in a cordial manner and Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad have a positive control over Gram Panchayats.

Though the 73rd constitutional amendment enlisted participation of women in decision making bodies, their role have been actually performed either by their husband or any other male member of the family. It is observed that after the 73rd amendment elections under Panchayati Raj Institution the participation of

people has increased. In the 73rd amendment there is devolution of powers to Panchayati Raj Institutions. During the study it is found that the amendment has proved a milestone for the leaders of Panchayati Raj Institutions and the participation and involvement of women at the grassroots level has increased rapidly.

Mere provision of reservation for women does not enable them to participate effectively in decision making process at local level. During the study it is found that the reservation of seats both of member and chairpersons of the Panchayati Raj Institutions under the 73rd constitutional amendment is a right step to ensure their participation and decentralization. It is observed during the study that reservation has provided opportunities to large number of women to enter into the politics and also in political decision-making process. It is also observed that the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes and women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has brought participation and involvement of every section of society in the democratic process. The elected members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions are playing significant role in this practice.

During interaction it is observed that women do not find enough time to participate in the political activities at grassroots level. Right from the daybreak till late night they have to perform domestic activities such as, rearing up their children, sweeping and cleaning their homes, send children to school, feed livestock and help their male counterparts in farm activities and do all kinds of miscellaneous activities which are assigned to them in the male dominated world.

Women at the grassroots level face bureaucratic problem also. Most of the women are hesitant to interact with bureaucrats. It is observed during the study that most of the women do not have that kind of exposure which is required for dealing with bureaucracy at local level. This is also a major hurdle in the performance of women as a member, pradhan or chairperson of grassroots institutions. During the study it is also observed besides the bureaucratic problems, they have to face other problems from the government officials. Government officials do not cooperate with them in the formulation of plans and implementation of programmes and policies organised by the government. During the study it has been revealed that the State Government is reluctant to transfer the powers to Panchayati Raj Institutions and its leaders.

State government interferes in the matters of Panchayati Raj Institutions through bureaucracy. It is observed during the study that the State Government and development administrators do not cooperate with women representatives in a proper and a positive manner. Most of the female hesitate to participate in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions due to the non-cooperation of elites and political leaders.

One of the major constraints for women especially those coming from poor families is their economic dependency. They are not economically independent and sufficient funds must be arranged for them by Panchayati Raj Institutions to ensure their participation in the panchayati raj activities. During the study it is observed that the criteria of funds distributions at the grassroots is not a requirement but it is based on political affiliation. It is observed that women are not economically independent most of

the women ask for their husband for bus fare to attend the meetings of gram sabha.

Lack of proper devolution of funds has been revealed as one of the major hurdles in the participation of women. This has discouraged the elected women representative from taking interest in the democratic decentralization. During the study it is observed that the financial condition of Panchayati Raj can improved by the efforts of State Finance Commission and grant-in-aid should be given in proper way. It is also observed that the financial position can help the female to take interest in politics.

Suggestions

Political participation of women requires equality of opportunity in all fields of life. Women are playing important role at home, farms as well as in the political process. Based on the findings of study some measures are outlined for making efficient use of the potentialities and skills of rural women so that their participation can be accelerated.

First and most important is the need to generate awareness among the rural masses about the new system, its advantages and requirements. People in general and women in particular have to be made fully conscious of their rights and responsibilities under the new system. The traditional mindset of the people has to undergo a change to facilitate acceptance of women as a chairperson of panchayat. Government should organize seminars, training camps to bring awareness regarding the utility of local self government so that the participation of women can be increased. The purpose can be achieved by spreading awareness through mass media as well as through audio visual based orientation in

every village. The government should try to develop useful package in local languages. It may also be mentioned that the orientation programmes are also needed for government officials at all levels so as to change their mental attitude; otherwise, they are likely to obstruct the functioning or may bring bad name to Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The second problem is associated with literacy which has affected our society. The lower literacy rate is high among women. How a illiterate or less educated women member function as decision maker in a governmental system based on rules, regulations, proper accounting procedure, circulars etc. The current literacy programmes being operated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development can be modified to take care of this task and crash courses must be started.

The elected representatives of the people-whether male or female would require to be trained to enable them to discharge their function in an effective manner. The need is, of course, more for women because of their lower literacy rate and less exposure to public affairs and dealing with external agencies. A massive programme of training for trainers is, therefore, needed so that adequate number of trainers are available at the block, district and state level to impart training to the members and chairpersons of the Panchayats in a proper manner. For this purpose, state government should direct the grassroots level functionaries like BDO, Circle Officers, Junior Engineers, School and College Teachers etc. to undergo training and, therefore, to train the elected representatives. Interested NGOs or voluntary agencies may also be encouraged to provide training by offering them requisite fees, incentives and facilities.

Those women who belong to poor families and their working hours stretch 15 to 16 hours, should be paid wages for those days for which they go for training and spent time for panchayat work. This provision may be restricted only to women who are from below the poverty line. Unless this is done, the laudable objectives set out by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment would not be achieved.

The government should take the lead in this matter by introducing a component of political awareness in all the ongoing programmes like National Literacy Mission, DWACRA Training Programmes, the Mahila Samikhya Programms, CSWB Awareness Generation Camps, legal literacy camp, sponsored by Department of Women and Children, CAPART OB Programmes etc.

Mass media both print as well as electronics play a vital role in awareness of generations. Women can be motivated and inspired to think, discuss and act politically with the help of documentaries, television and radio talks on women's right. Audio, Visual and Print media can help in formulating positive public opinion and creating a sympathetic atmosphere by dissemination of information on women's issue, which in the long run may result in societies recognition of women's equality with men by the society. It can act as an agent of political socialization.

Training should be based at bringing about hidden qualities, generating self confidence, self pride, development of communication skills and effective convincing power for public interaction, forming opinion and articulating the same rising issue.

Department of Rural Development and the Women and Child Development should allocate funds undertaking political awareness training camp on the lines of awareness generation and

legal literacy camps. Additional allocations should be provided for spreading political literacy and for preparing and developing training manuals and modules.

It is necessary to provide certain support services to women members for Panchayat in order to strengthen their political participation. Election of Panchayati Raj Institutions are being increasingly fought on party lines, political party should create a special fund for women candidates. Local Mahila Mandals, women organizations should raise resources to enable women candidates to contest and win the election.

In the matter of making the Panchayati Raj Institutions financially viable, women should take much more interest and see that the funds are not filtered away. They can at least serve as the watch dogs and keep an eye on the people responsible for spending money and keeping accounts. A women by nature, is an honest person and perfect in balancing the family budget. This quality could usefully be employed in managing the financial house of the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well.

The State Finance Commission needs to formulate special component plans within each sector to set apart resources for activities of direct benefits for women on the lines of sub-plans for Schedule Tribes and special component plans for Schedule Castes with control of re-appropriation. It should be statutorily insisted that for all development schemes in the realm of women development, panchayat should be the decision making bodies at the local level. Panchayat should indentify the priorities, needs and allocate resources and monitor implementation of activities of

women's finance corporation, District Rural Development Agency, ITDA, Women Development Corporation etc.

Another important effort required for real empowerment of rural women is to bring an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and rearing children needs to be replaced by a feeling of equal partnership of women and men, to inculcate this, they must be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both.

The curriculum for the students at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels should be modified to promote gender sensitivity among the students. There should be chapters on Panchayati Raj and women empowerment in all the classes at the school level and compulsory questions be set on these in examinations.

The unfinished agenda for women empowerment be finished by enacting an amendment for providing reservation for women in the national Parliament and the State Legislatures. The reservation at the local level is not enough for women empowerment.

Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayats who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives by their success stories and good practices will get replicated.