

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:
A STUDY OF THE VILLAGE PANCHAYATS OF UTTAR DINAJPUR OF
WEST BENGAL, INDIA (1992-2013)**

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6.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The concept of gender equality has been enshrined in the Indian Constitution through its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policies. The Constitution not only offers equality to women but also authorizes the States to take necessary steps in favour of women for positive discrimination and development.

For economic and social development, political empowerment has been regarded as an important condition. Women must have active participation at different levels of governance. Empowerment is a multidimensional process through which an individual can gain control over his/her life, community and society. Hence, the empowerment through political participation is essential. Empowerment is a result of participation in the decision making process. Due to illiteracy, family burden low income, patriarchal approach and so on, women are being found least or not interested in participating in the decision making process. Different studies on Indian women indicate that they are being deprived of fundamental social, economic and political rights. Indian orthodox and hierarchical society restricts women from the ancient age from taking an active role in political institutions (Chakraborty, 2014).

The policy-makers of the Indian government should realize that women's substantial presence in the formal structure of governance is the prime component of a strong democracy where their active participation and engagement in the political arena ensure a good democratic framework and state system.

The main goals of the laws, developmental policies, plans, and programmes in a democratic state system are to advance the different spheres of life for women. Since the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) the approach to women's issues has been shifting from welfare to development. But now, in Indian politics, the issue of women empowerment has become a central issue

for determining the status of women. Some Constitutional provisions have been inaugurated for women:

Article 14: in political, social and economic spheres men and women will have equal rights and opportunities.

Article 15 (1): abolition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, etc. for all citizens.

Article 15 (3): special provision enabling the state governments to make affirmative discrimination in favor of women.

Article 16: equal opportunities for all citizens relating to the matter of public appointments.

Article 39 (a): the state will direct its policies in favor of citizens for securing equality for men and women and means of livelihood.

Article 39(d): men and women will have equal pay for equal work.

Article 42: states can make provision to secure just and human conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article 51 (a) (e): to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Source: Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Women for the XI Plan

In this regard, the National Commission for Women (1990) has been set up to protect the rights and legal entitlements of women. One of the great steps taken by the Government of India is in the form of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (1993) to reserve seats for women in local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities. This has laid a strong foundation for women's participation in the decision-making process of local-level politics. Since the 1980's the Indian Government has started taking a number of measures and making laws to promote education and political participation for women (Paul, 1998). On the other hand, many International Organizations like the World Bank, World Health Organization and UNO have focused on women empowerment in general and the empowerment of poor women of rural areas

in particular. Towards empowerment of women in India some important steps are:

In 1990, Govt. of India has setup the National Commission for Women by Parliament to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.

In 1993, the 72nd and 74th Constitutional Amendments Act has passed in order to provide reservation for women in the local self government.

In 1993, Govt. of India has rectified CEDAW to secure equal rights to women.

In 2001, National Policy for Women's Empowerment has been taken,

In 2006, the department of Women and Child Development has been upgraded.

Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Women and Child Development, GoI, 2010-11

It is a fact that a large number of works have been taken in different parts of the world and also in India by several research scholars on women empowerment. On the question of women empowerment, a lot of research works have already been done both in national level and local level in India. But at the lack of research work on such issues can be noticed at grassroots level or at micro level. A serious and healthy attention must be given on the study of rural women's political participation at district level. So that as a researcher I have selected Uttar Dinajpur district as my research work. After doing a clean and accurate survey on the EWRs of the Gram Panchayats of Uttar Dinajpur district, I have shown some research findings and given some suggestions in the context of the current situation on the basis of this empirical study.

6.1.1 Research Findings

This study has been attempted to examine the nature of participation of the elected women representatives in the Panchayat process in the district of Uttar Dinajpur. In order to fill the objectives of the study and reach to the conclusion, the theoretical framework including methodology, hypothesis, significance of work all these have been completed in Chapter I. Various works relating to the social, economic and legal status of women have been reviewed in Chapter II.

Uttar Dinajpur District at glance (its history, society, polity and economy) has been shown in Chapter III. The socio-economic status of the respondents is analyzed in Chapter IV. The data that are collected, classified and interpreted for achieving well empirical study have been analyzed in Chapter V. A brief summary on the findings is furnished in this chapter (Chapter VI).

This field survey was conducted on 196 Elected Women Representatives from the gram Panchayats (98) of the Uttar Dinajpur district. In this chapter, the research findings have been shown in two ways. Firstly some significant findings are given according to the blocks of the district and finally, the major research findings of the Uttar Dinajpur district as a whole have been drawn.

6.1.2 Block Wise Research Findings

6.1.2.1 Chopra Block

Chopra, one of the blocks of Uttar Dinajpur district is comprised of eight Gram Panchayats. Most of the EWRs of this block are educated at the primary level and are in the age category of the adult group. This is a Muslim concentrated block and most of the respondents are from OBC (A) category. Most of the respondents do not have knowledge of computer and they earn their living on agriculture. The EWRs are mainly residing in joint families and their monthly income is five to ten thousand. The notable thing is that numerous respondents have come in politics under the influence or by the pressure of political parties. No respondent has been found who has entered into politics willingly. One of the surprising things is that almost all respondents of this block are not aware of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of the India, but they are well informed about women's reservations in politics. One noticeable thing is that about 90% of the total respondents in this block used to attend GP meetings on regular basis and deliver speech there. Most of the EWRs have a very active role to meet people regularly and solve their various problems. In one issue where almost all respondents shared the common answer is that in GP meetings

their opinions have been taken as not so important as men's opinion. In most cases, they want to be elected again in politics. One thing that has attracted attention is that all the respondents think that they can solve different political problems better than men. Many respondents of this block are quite aware of their political position. When they are asked, they did not agree to answer in the absence of their husbands. It means without consulting their husbands most of the respondents refused to answer questions. Some of the respondents have answered though the answers were given by their husband. One thing is very clear that most of the respondents of Chopra Block have answered all the questions very co-operatively and they heartily support women's involvement in politics. Their psychological and material upliftment has also been developed slightly compared to the time when they were not participating in politics.

6.1.2.2 Golpokhar II Block

Another block of the study area is Golpoakhar Block II comprising of 11 GPs. Almost all respondents have been found coming from different age groups. The educational qualification of the EWRs of this block is not so high, but the illiteracy rate is very high. Most of the respondents are from the scheduled castes community and practices Hinduism. The elected representatives of this block are not savvy with the computer and their main occupations are farming. The knowledge of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of the respondents of this block is very low (54.54%), but they are aware of women's reservation in politics. Most of the (36.36%) women representatives have joined politics to serve society. Three out of the four respondents of this block used to attend various meeting in GP and share their own opinions there. The maximum respondents (72.72%) feel that men's opinions in GP receive more acceptance than women's opinions. One notable thing is that most of the female delegates are not dependent on anyone in their political activities and they wish to get re-elected. They are in need of training. They feel that women empowerment can be possible through political participation. They are of the opinion that after being

elected in GP their influence in the family has increased and now they are able to evaluate the politics and their Constitutional rights.

6.1.2.3 Golpokhar I Block

This is another block of Uttar Dinajpur district. This block has 14 Gram Panchayats where most of the EWRs are uneducated. Some of them did not find any scope to get admission in the colleges after passing MP or Higher Secondary examinations. It is a Muslim dominated area. Most of the EWRs come from general or unreserved category (46.42%). They are not aware of the uses of computers (89.28%). Financial condition of the respondents of this block is not so good and the monthly income of their family ranges from twenty to thirty thousand. In most cases, respondents have equal rights to the family property (53.57%). Most of the respondents have joined politics according to the will of their husbands (35.71%) and for doing social works (39.28%). In most cases (78.57%), the EWRs of this block do not know about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, although they are aware of the women reservation in politics (98.85%). The respondents attend GP meetings regularly and participate willingly. They (60.71%) think that men's opinions used to get high-level acceptance rather than women's opinions in GP meetings. Most of the time while doing any work of GP, the women representatives takes initiatives themselves, i.e. they are not dependent on anyone. Politics has always been a good choice for women in this block and so a large portion of respondents (67.85%) wish to get re-elected in politics. They think that they can perform political functions better than men. A common answer has been received that politics has been enabling women to serve their families better than past and developing women's psychology towards social welfare.

6.1.2.4 Hemtabad Block

It is the smallest block of the district comprised of just five GP. This block, like Goalpokhar block-I, also has limited educational qualifications among the respondents within secondary education. Most of the EWRs have been

found to come from general caste (60%) and some belong to scheduled caste i.e. 30%. The maximum number of respondents is Muslim (60%). It is a very notable fact that most of the women members (90%) have good knowledge of computers and obtained diploma degree. All the respondents live in a joint family but half of them do not have property rights. The respondents (80%) have entered politics under the influence of political parties that means they have not come here according to their own will. The respondents (100%) of this block have no any idea of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution as well as the reservation system of the women in politics. Almost all elected women members participate in the GP meetings and put their opinion there. They even think that they can solve the problems of people better than men but they have to depend on the other GP members for political activities. They expressed their wish to get re-elected in politics. They lay stress on the importance of training for the new elected women. After being elected, both material and psychological developments have been ensured among the respondents of this block.

6.1.2.5 Islampur Block

This Block of Uttar Dinajpur district is consist of 13 GPs. This district is educationally backward and higher education among the EWRs is very little. This is Muslims inhabited block where every respondent is married and lives in agriculture based family (50%), though some other professions are also found there. Most of the EWRs (53.84%) live in a nuclear family and have the right to property. None of the EWRs have come into politics from free will but for their husband's sake (53.84%). Almost all women members (88.46%) do not know anything about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act but they are well informed about the women's reservation in politics. Like other blocks, the respondents (53.84%) of this block also believe that men's authority gets more responses than women in GPs. One noticeable thing is that though EWRs think that they are able to serve political task better than men, but they do not involve themselves actively. It has been noticed that most of the respondents (61.53%) of this block are

engaged in NGOs and they demand training for the newly elected women representatives. Though they are facing lots of problems, but have expressed wish to get re-elected in politics. They believe that by political participation true women empowerment is possible because it enhances women's capability and ability to evaluate the governmental system as well as their position in the family.

6.1.2.6 Itahar Block

Itahar Block is comprised of twelve Gram Panchayats. The rate of education among the EWRs of this block is not bad. However, there are many respondents whose education has been confined at the primary level (58.83%). Almost all respondents are married and live in agriculture based joint families but they do not have property right. Significantly, no women representatives have come in politics willingly rather they just followed the command of their husbands (41.66%) or political parties (50%). Like other blocks, EWRs of this block are also completely unaware of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution but have an idea of women's reservation system in politics. Most of the EWRs think that in the GPs meeting, men's opinion is preferred over women's opinion. Nevertheless, they take part in various meetings of the GPs and keep in touch with the village people. Surprisingly, EWRs do not participate in political activities on their own rather they depend on their husbands and other members for the same. They believe that political participation is needed for women empowerment and after being elected here their influence on the family as well as in society have been increased.

6.1.2.7 Kaliaganj Block

This is a small block of this district consisted of 13 GPs. All EWRs are from the age of 28 to 47 years. The educational scenario of this block is quite better than the other blocks of the study area, here none of the respondents is found illiterate. Most of the respondents are Hindus (68.75%) and belong to SC (43.75%) category. Surprisingly, almost all

respondents have no knowledge of computers. The EWRs live in joint family and in maximum cases (56.25%) they do not have any right to property. In most cases, they are encouraged by the political party to join politics where they have entered with very little knowledge about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and Women Reservation Bill. Women representatives of this block participate in gram Panchayat meetings and meet people to solve their problems on a regular basis. Most of the respondents are not dependent on others for doing their political activities and they wish to get re-elected. They think (75%) that they can solve the problem better than male members of the GPs. They have emphasized the fact that through politics true women empowerment may take place. After entering politics their ability to evaluate the system has been developed as well as their status as compared to the before.

6.1.2.8 Karandighi Block

The karandighi Block of Uttar Dinajpur district is consists of 13 GPs. Most of the EWRs of this block are in the age of 28-47. Their education is mostly confined to primary (38.46 %) and secondary (50%) level. Most of the EWRs belong to SC (42.30%) and OBC (A) (30.76%) categories. Hindu and Muslim religion dominate this region. Almost all the EWRs (96.15%) of this block live in joint households whose monthly income is in between 11 to 25 thousand. Most of the EWRs (84.61%) are being deprived of having family property. They have entered into politics due to the requirement of political parties. The EWRs of this block do not have any idea about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the women reservation system of India. They attend Panchayats meetings on a regular basis (69.23%) and take active participation in it. They have expressed that men receive more importance than women. They do not want to be dependent on anyone to perform political functions. Surprisingly, more than half of the total EWRs of this block do not want be re-elected to politics. But they think that they are able to solve social and political problems better than men. Many of the EWRs are associated with some CSOs. However, all

EWRs agree about the need of the training of newly elected women representatives. Because they think that true women empowerment is possible through politics. Significantly, though capabilities and abilities of the EWRs have been increased but they show less interest in politics than before.

6.1.2.9 Raiganj Block

This is another block and the headquarter of Uttar Dinajpur district. This block has 14 Gram Panchayats where most of the EWRs are educated. None of them have graduated. Most of the EWRs of this block are in the age of 28-37. This education is mostly confined to primary (21.42%) and secondary (60.71%). Most of the EWRs belong to SC (46.42%) and General (42.85%) categories. All the EWRs are found either to be of Hindu (64.28%) or to be of Muslim (35.71%) religion. Almost all the EWRs (89.28%) of this block live in joint households whose monthly income is in between 11 to 25 thousand. Most of the EWRs (53.57%) are being deprived of having family property. They have entered into politics due to the requirement of the political parties (60.71%). The EWRs of this block do not have any idea about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the women reservation system of India. They attend Panchayats meetings occasionally (50%) and take active participation in it. They have expressed that men receive more importance in points than women. They do not want to be dependent on anyone to perform political functions. Surprisingly, more than half of the total EWRs of this block want not to be re-elected to politics. But they think that they are able to solve social and political problems better than men. Many of the EWRs are associated with some CSOs. However, all EWRs agree about the need for training the newly elected women representatives. Because they think that true women empowerment is possible through politics. Significantly, though capabilities and abilities of the EWRs have been increased but they show less interest in politics than before.

6.1.3 Major Research Findings

Apart from this above discussion, some major research findings of the Uttar Dinajpur district as a whole are given below:

6.1.3.1 Socio-economic and demographic profile of the EWRs

- It may be said that EWRs are found from all categories of age groups. As far the field survey is concerned, maximum EWRs (78.05%) of this district are between the ages of 28 to 47.
- In terms of social group, the EWRs have been distributed by the caste system reflects their distribution in rural areas. Most of the EWRs of the study area belong to General and SC communities. On the other hand, the number of EWRs belonging to the OBC (B) category is very few (SC-34%, ST-5.10% and General 36.22%).
- Surprisingly none of the EWRs have found unmarried.
- Education among the respondents is not very good. The maximum number of EWRs are less educated and confined at the primary level (39.79%). There are many who are absolutely illiterate (14.28%). Due to lack of education, they are mostly unaware of political issues including governmental activities and legislations. This picture has been almost the same for those women who are not in politics.
- Very significantly it has been found in the study area that there is only one respondent who has acquired Masters Degree (0.51%).
- A large number of EWRs live in poor families. As a result, they are far behind on health issues. This district has not sufficient health infrastructures. The condition and infrastructures of village health centers are very bad and there is no treatment facility too. In some cases, due to these conditions EWRs cannot fully concentrate on political activities.
- One thing is clear from the field study that the number of EWRs belonging to Hindu (49.48%) and Muslim (50%) communities are

almost equal. Surprisingly, only one woman has been found in the Christian faith.

- In the study, it has been found that more than half of the EWRs come from farming families (54.08%). On the other hand, there are very few families whose owners are public servants (6.63%). Again, their husband's education is fairly good and most of their education has been confined at the primary level and very few have higher education.
- Most of the EWRs (91.32%) whose family income is in between 11000 to 25000/ month.
- On the question of family property, more than half of the EWRs in this district are deprived of their rights (54.59%). The Karandighi Block is the most backward in this respect.
- The district is not free from religious influence. Social norms and religious rituals have a profound effect on the women of the household. In these religious practices, women have to perform political duties. As a result, sometimes their political incentives decline.
- The EWRs (57%) are also engaged with several social services including CSOs, NGOs, Self-Help-Groups, Samiti, etc.

6.1.3.2 Awareness of the EWRs

- Most of the EWRs (84.18%) of this district have no idea about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution.
- 69.83% of the EWRs are well informed about the system of women's reservations in politics and have expressed their demand to increase this reservation. 84.18% of the respondents have argued that women's reservations in politics are very significant.
- Most of the respondents have no idea about the functioning of Panchayats.

6.1.3.3 Activities of the EWRs

- Most of the EWRs (60.20%) of this district regularly visit and participate in various Panchayats meetings and 33.67% of them occasionally participate in Panchayats meetings.
- 57.65% of the EWRs speak in Panchayat meetings on regular basis.
- EWRs are well aware about their responsibility for the villagers. 57.65% of them visit village people to solve their problems on regular basis.
- More than half of the EWRs (52.04%) do not personally contribute anything as the representatives of the village. They just follow the command of male members of the GP.
- Managerial capacity among educated EWRs of this district is quite high. EWRs organize Gram Sabha and various meetings at different times. They complete these meetings efficiently. Women efficiently perform the management system of their own families and public service. However, such skills are more noticeable among educated women.
- They have mostly wished to be free from male domination of their own families.

6.1.3.4 Basic wishes of the EWRs

- Many EWRs are not properly informed about their duties after entering in the political life. That is why they (96.93%) realize the need of training for the newly elected women representatives.
- Despite many obstacles in political life, many of the EWRs in this district have expressed their desire to be re-elected (67.85%). Because they feel that they are far capable than men of performing duties.
- Many EWRs have made an objection that the GP Offices of this district are situated far away from their home so that they are not being able to serve their political responsibility along with the routine work. That is the reason government needs to form every GP office at the center of the region and if needed their number will have to be increased.

6.1.3.5 Impact of participation on EWRs

- Regarding the question of social welfare and interaction with others, the capacity of EWRs (72%) has been increased after entering into politics.
- Many of the EWRs feel that after coming to politics they have learnt a lot about the political system of the country and have learnt to evaluate it. They are now able to express their views freely.
- The women (73.97%) of this district feel that politics has an important role in respect to women empowerment. They argue that through politics true women empowerment is possible.
- After being elected, the affection and love for politics among EWRs has been increased much more than before.
- After entering into politics, the EWRs (80%) of this district have increased their importance in the family as well as in society more than before. Now they are able to participate in the family activities and political decision-making process as well.

6.1.3.6 Nature of political participation of the EWRs

- The cause which is mainly responsible for women's entry into politics is the pressure and influence of the local political parties (45.40%). It is to be noted that only two of the EWRs are found who come into politics willingly (1.02%).
- The active participation of women in politics is a key tool for the success of democracy. Men's opinions and decisions are imposed on women. Uttar Dinajpur district is a shining example of it where about 90% of the EWRs feel that the opinions of male members receive more priority than women.
- It is important to note that in performing various political programs, most of the EWRs argue that they are independent. Although in some cases women members are influenced by their own family members.
- The EWRs of this district are deprived of their privileges and opportunities. They are not given the chance even though they can

afford it. Despite many wishes, they cannot enjoy political opportunities and serve other women in the village. They have been performing their responsibilities in obstacles.

- The EWRs of this district have been provided with instrumental powers and authority. The problem is that although EWRs are aware of the various programs and projects of the Panchayat, during the implementation of these plans and projects they are being deprived of them. In these cases, women are governed and pressured by their husbands and political parties. Though EWRs have been given political power and authority but they cannot serve them willingly.
- One of the surprises that have been noted on the question of political skills is that their political skill is seen only when they work alone. But in front of male members and their husbands, they remain silent.
- It has been seen from the survey in the study area that women prior to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, this role at the Panchayat level in the district of Uttar Dinajpur was not very significant from the point of view that there were much less representation of the women at the Panchayat level. Since there number was much less, their voice did not find any substantial place in the decision making process of the local government body.
- EWRs have a very positive view of politics. They think that social negligence and deprivation will be eliminated through politics.
- In most of the cases women of this district enter into politics either due to the death of the husband or placement of the wife by the husband due to other social factors.
- Though women's political participation issue is marginal in the true sense of the term, it can be said that women's participation rate is being increased leading women empowerment.
- In spite of several constitutional provisions, I have seen that male members have been dominating whole process. In spite of these obstacles women of this district are coming out to participate in politics

and playing vital role. So we can hope a bright future for women of this district. It is further seen that the political parties are definitely paying a more positive attitude towards women development. They are projecting more and more women than ever before. The political parties that operate in the scenario are in a lenient mood to project more women representatives. Apart from that, several NGOs are also operative in this regard.

6.1.3 Study Recommendation

The following recommendations are made for enhancing women's capabilities in decision making process through politics. This recommendation will affect the quality of women's participation, their performance as well as their own development.

- i. The education rate among the EWRs of this district is not very acceptable. They are not able to make appropriate decisions due to the lack of higher education. Because of that, the government has to arrange modern education for them. They should be provided with open distance learning education so that they will be able to serve their own family and get higher education.
- ii. Most of the respondents of this district are religious and therefore each of the social activities is being influenced by religious belief and practice. So, it is necessary to take action on how the village women can work independently and stay outside of these religious orthodoxies. They will have to be counseled in scientific manner.
- iii. There is no unmarried representative in this district. It means there is a lack of mentality among unmarried women to come in politics. However, youth should take a leading role in this matter. Therefore, the maiden should join politics and use their point of view in order to make

the government more efficient. The political party, social organization, and government should take necessary action in this regard. If possible, a law should be enacted to bring reservation of seats only for the maiden in politics.

- iv. Since all the women representatives of this district are married, their decisions may be influenced by their husbands and relatives. Government should make understand to EWRs' husbands that women are competent to take any single decision.
- v. There is a need for a systematic study of political science from the primary level for a greater understanding of the requirements of political participation and political rights.
- vi. Women in this district have very little idea about technical education, such as the use of the computer, calculator, and internet. In this case, knowledge in these areas are very important because after getting elected in politics, women have to perform many important tasks, such as gathering information, implementation of digital work, audit e.t.c. So, the government will have to take initiatives by various schemes for the same.
- vii. The government requires female officers in different higher administrative posts in the district because most of the women representatives feel uncomfortable and embarrassed in front of male officers such as BDO, SDO, and DM.
- viii. Even after being elected, women of this district cannot speak freely in GP meetings. This situation may be arisen due to fear and shame. Therefore, the government needs to create a language lab and counseling

hall in every GP where women will be trained to talk freely with the people and understood how to make communication with others.

- ix. Many EWRs have made an objection that the GP Offices of this district are situated far away from their home so that they are not being able to serve their political responsibility along with the routine work. That's why the government needs to form every GP office at the center of the region and if needed the number will have to be increased.
- x. Women of this district have an idea on the provision of reservation for them in the Indian Constitution. But their knowledge of the constitution is very little. Even they do not know anything about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Actually, rural women are not so educated. They depend on other male representatives of the GPs in this regard. So, the government has to make a simple publication of the Indian Constitution in the form of a book where all facilities, rights, and safeguards of women will be highlighted. These books should be provided free of cost to each woman in this district.
- xi. Women cannot enjoy the political game due to lots of family pressure. They have to engage themselves in their families. If all the members of the concerned families take responsibility for their respective work, the path of women's politics will be accessible and their workload will be reduced considerably.
- xii. Many women of this district do not wish to join politics due to the lack of social status and self-confidence. Their self-confidence can be retrieved by counseling. In addition to the government, various social organizations will have to take several programs to ensure women's social status.

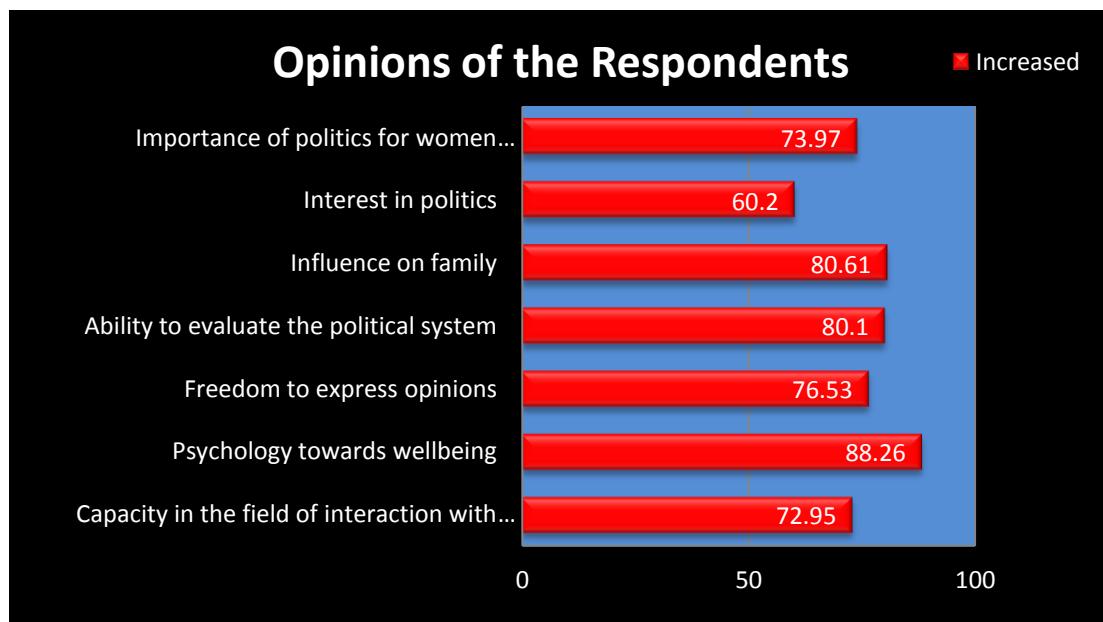
- xiii. Most of the EWRs of this district are afraid of participating in politics. Many have expressed dissatisfaction in coming to politics. Most of the respondents think that they are dependent and reliant on men and without men they cannot make any decision. They are habituated with this patriarchal system. So, in some cases, women themselves have to change their approach and the government should take necessary steps in this regard.
- xiv. There are many such EWRs who live below the poverty line. Poverty became a major obstacle in front of political participation. The economic crisis should not become a barrier to political participation. So the government must provide a special economic grant for EWRs belonging to a poor family.
- xv. So far as the local democracy is concerned, the emergence of women in the Panchayat system was mainly due to family compulsion. In most cases, the wife emerged in politics either due to the death of the husband or placement of the wife by the husband due to other social factors.
- xvi. So far as male domination is concerned, it is seen that in spite of several constitutional provisions, male intervention and male domination is very much present in the total process.
- xvii. So far as the future of women empowerment in the district is concerned, it can be said with a fair amount of certainty that in spite of several hurdles, the women are coming out and they play positive role and involve in various activities more and more than before. As a result, it can be said that they have a bright future with regard to empowerment.

Table-6.1
Basic Findings

Opinion of Respondents	Areas/ Subjects	Increased
EWRs	Capacity in the field of interaction with others	72.95
EWRs	Psychology towards wellbeing	88.26
EWRs	Freedom to express opinions	76.53
EWRs	Ability to evaluate the political system	80.10
EWRs	Influence on family	80.61
EWRs	Interest in politics	60.20
EWRs	Importance of politics for women empowerment	73.97

Source: Field Work

Chart-6.1
Basic Findings



Source: Field Work

6.1.5 Conclusion

Uttar Dinajpur District is one of the most marginal districts of west Bengal. The district has different setting in terms of its history, geography and culture. The socio-economic and political conditions of this district affect the public life. This district is not too old. It has been created in 1st April, 1992. The responsibility of overall development of any area lies on the government as

well as its residents. As government takes steps and make legislations for the development of the citizens, so it is very essentials that the people should be aware about the governmental systems and political activities. Political participation of the people is an important element for self empowerment. In this respect, the issue of women empowerment becomes the most important matter in the present day society. Women's active participation in politics is important indeed. It is significant to participate in the decision-making process for the women in order to be aware of the governmental programmes and policies and also be familiar with political rights. The primary aim of this research work is to highlight the nature of the participation of women at the local level politics of Uttar Dinajpur district in general and discuss the nature of political participation of the elected women representatives of the Village Panchayats of Uttar Dinajpur district in particular.

The issues that have got most importance in this research work are: to highlight the socio-economic condition of women in the district of Uttar Dinajpur; to know about how far and to what extent, the women participate in different spheres of political activities in the district of Uttar Dinajpur; to explore the awareness, interest, and involvement of the women in different elections in the district of Uttar Dinajpur; to find out different obstacles in front of women's political participation in grassroots level politics in the district of Uttar Dinajpur; to evaluate the impacts and changes of women's political participation after the 73rd Amendment Act in the district of Uttar Dinajpur.

After analyzing different government reports including census report, district fact book, human development reports, minority district projects report and specially the data that have been collected through field survey on the elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats of Uttar Dinajpur district, one thing is very clear that the level of political participation of women in this district has been increased more than before and through political participation women empowerment has been made possible [table (6.1) and chart (6.1) proves that]. Women's engagement have been increased in different

perspective including women's capacity of interaction with other, women's involvement in politics, women's influence in family, women's political culture, women's political consciousness and women's abilities to evaluate governmental system and process. However, women of this district are being empowered through political participation, but the pace of this process is slow and hence not sufficient. Women are still being discriminated in various field of this district. At the end of this research work, it must be said that it is not true that women of Uttar Dinajpur District have not been empowered through political participation.

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