

Political Representation of Women in Panchayati Raj of Odisha: A Study in Balangir District

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Abstract

Modern political system develops on the edifice of the citizenry representation and participation. Representation usually refers to the representative democracy where interests of the people are articulated by an elite group. It requires the representation of a few to transmit the choices and preferences of the people to the legislative body. India being a vast nation is expected to strengthen the grassroots level besides the apex body. The grassroots that constitute the structure of the political system in India is the Panchayati Raj. It is the most viable political body accomplishing the primary objective of the democracy through which only the administration reach out to the people. This paper aims at examining the role, nature and extent of participation of women representatives in PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) of Balangir district in Odisha. This study has followed the empirical method collecting primary sources endeavouring to reveal the real representation of women in PRIs. The primary sources have been collected through personal interviews, attending Panchayat meetings from time to time. The secondary sources include the relevant literature relating PRIs Act and from various journals, reports, documents and other published literature. Following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1997, 2002, 2007 and 2012 elections to PRIs bodies were held in Odisha. This study includes the role and nature of participation of women representatives elected in 2007 election. Out of 1492 women representatives of PRIs 500 are selected for interview based on random sampling method. Empirical evidences of this study reveal that there is poor participation of women despite considerable number of women appear in PRIs. There are various dimensions for non-participation of women like illiteracy, poverty, backwardness, patriarchy. It is apparent that large scale representation of women in PRIs would not necessarily lead to true democracy. Rather it would be ridiculous on the part of women since they have to encounter multifarious difficulties during their tenure. Real representation of women in PRIs can never be possible unless they are adequately qualified, trained and capable enough to tackle any type problems. It is imperative for the society bringing forth attitudinal changes of the people a developed nation can be built.

Key Words: Political Representation, governance, IPU, Patriarchy, representative democracy, CSWI, Orissa Gram Panchayat Acts, KBK region, political participation, SHG

I. INTRODUCTION

It has become a major agenda of each and every society together with government to ensure and foster women in politics. The growing challenges that women encounter in everyday life compelling them to fight for their rights and liberties. Virtually that might have led women to articulate their problems in the public forum. Despite widespread movement across the world at present only 14.35 per cent are women leaders in different countries. The maximum numbers of women representatives are in Nordic countries having 37.6 per cent and the minimum 3.5 per cent in the Arab world. In India it is confined to 11 per cent. This shows the disproportionate representation of women in the governance. However a remarkable representation was seen in Sweden where there was equal number of male and female ministers. The world first woman representative leader was seen as the education minister of Denmark in 1924. Long after that in 1960 SirimavoBandarnaikebecame the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka¹.The world average of women in legislative bodies continues to be merely 12-13 per cent, although in a few countries the representation is 30 per cent for women in decision making body. According to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) the percentage of women MP has increased four-fold. The statistics indicates that in 2000 the world average in parliaments is 13.8 per cent². It seemed that women in politics became the major agenda adopted by most of the countries after the Beijing International women Conference, 1995 that mandating the member states to provide space for women in political representation.

Specifically regarding women's role in politics has become a major agenda in each and every community. Increased participation of women in politics is now occurring. The sex ratio of voters in India has improved from 715 female voters for every 1000 male voters in 1960 and 883 female voters seen in 2000 elections. Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general election was 65.63%, compared to 67.09 % turnout for men. In 16 out of 29 states of India, more women voted than men. A total of 260.6 million women exercised their right to vote in April-May 2014 elections for India's parliament. ³ According to World Economic Forum's annual

global gender gap index studies, which considers such a broader scale India has ranked in top 20 countries worldwide for many years with 9th best in 2013- a score reflecting more women's participation in India's political process than Denmark, Germany, France and United Kingdom.

Women constitute nearly 50 per cent of the global population. According to the report of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) around 70 per cent of small enterprises are run by women. About 35 per cent of world's household women are the sole bread earners. Nevertheless they have been sidelined due to exploitation, oppression and relegation in the society. Backlashes of women in the society are visible due to chauvinistic patriarchy and orthodoxy. Since there was no scope to have an access to the social, political and economic structure of the society, women worldwide resented against the political authority for their rightful claim. History witnessed various movements occurred in different parts of the world representing women's claim from time to time. Movements worldwide intensified the nation to have a deep concern for the women's stand for getting different rights. International Conferences were held to take the issues of women seriously. Although it is only in the Beijing International Women Conference, 1995 the member states passed resolutions indicating for mandatory space for women in politics. By that time a small number of countries had their provision for women reservation. However much earlier than the Conference in 1974 Government of India, showing a deep concern over the women problems revealed a gloomy picture through the 'Committee on the Status of Women in India' (CSWI)

In 1992 after the presidential thumb, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act came in to force since 24th April 1993 mandating 33% of seats reserved for women in Panchayati Raj. Since then women in conspicuous numbers have been elected to the Panchayati Raj body. The area of study- Odisha is one of the backward states of India established reservations prior to the amendment of the Act having 28,089 women representatives elected in 1992. With the advent of women's reservations political participation of women went from miniscule 4-5 % to 25-40 % that gave millions of women the opportunity to serve as leaders in local government. Later in 1997 the systematic development in Panchayati Raj was found following the 73rd Constitutional Act. With the introduction of this act women in large numbers came to the fore representing in different Panchayats. Political representation of women became ubiquitous all over the country. Lately, some states including Odisha introduced 50 per cent of reservation following the 108th Constitutional Amendment getting parliamentary nod in 2009. The election to rural local bodies held in Odisha in 2012 mandating 50 per cent reservations for women. Despite the mandatory

reservation for representation it has not been satisfactory to achieve the true meaning of democracy. It is imperative to find out the viability of such reservation that fulfilled the long aspired goal of democracy.

II. CONCEPT OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

In contemporary times most of the nations have made it convenient to adopt democratic structure of government especially representative form. The entire world has witnessed incessant strife and struggle over the years for bringing forth representative democracy. The modern political system prefers to assume the representative form of democracy composing of the choices and preferences of the entire populace of the country well represented by a section of a minority group. This group is an elected body to articulate the interest of their people to whom they represent. Virtually they are accountable to the people for all of their political activities. Thus political representation usually refers to representative democracy synonymous to indirect democracy. This form of political system is strengthened on the edifice of allocation of power to all sections of the communities. The statement of David Easton "Authoritative allocation of values" is rightly justified in structuring the democratic government integrally from apex to the bottom in which top is the central unit of administration and bottom is the local self-government. In the words of Hanna Pitkin "Political representation is the making of citizens' voices, opinions and representatives present in the public policy making processes. Political actors speak, advocate, symbolize and act on behalf of others in the political arena"⁴. Nadia Urbinati has stated "Democratic theories have paid increased attention to problems of political representation over the past two decades. Interest is driven by (1) A political landscape within which electoral representation now compete with a new and informal kinds of representation, (2) Interest in fairness of electoral representation, particularly for minorities of women (3) A renewed focus on political judgment within democratic theory (4) A new appreciation that participation and representation are complementary forms of citizenship"⁵ Representation as well as participation is the necessary attributes of democracy. Rousseau's analysis on participatory system makes two points clear: first participation in the making of decisions and second is the theory of representative government, a way of protecting private interests and ensuring good government. As a result of participating in decision making individual is educated to distinguish between his own impulses and desires, he learns to be public as well as private citizens.⁶ Mill regarded Representative Government would not be a rational form of government until it would be instrumental in motivating men to a certain level of political sophistication and public

spiritedness visible in advanced countries.⁷ Further Mill and G. D. H. Cole both have laid stress on participation at the local level and in local associations that the individual could learn democracy.

The vital concept of democracy, i.e., the right, liberty and equality are supposed to be acquired by the people of all sections in the society. It envisages on the equal participation of the entire citizenry by virtue of rights and liberties. Of late much effort has been undertaken making available of all the benefits and opportunities to all, especially the weak and backward. Since women are considered weak and backward they have been given with this opportunity to par with men in all spheres; social, economic and political.

III. PAST LITERATURE

Researches on women in PRIs have been undertaken by a number of scholars. Snehalata Panda's⁸ study on Village Panchayat in Odisha reveals that elderly women feel it convenient to enter in to PRIs because of their relief from the domestic assignment. Another study conducted by M. Jena⁹ in Odisha indicates that substantial numbers of women have been nominated for elections to PRIs without seeking their consent. This study also observed that 27 per cent women are ignorant about their responsibilities. Evelin Hust¹⁰ in her study undertaken in two Panchayat Samitis of Balipatana and Gania located in the undivided Puri district of Odisha (presently Balipatana is in Khurda district and Gania is in Nayagah district) reveals that the presence of women became more visible in the public sphere, their participation in politics was considered legitimate to a certain degree, and their service as role models in some respects did have an impact on the larger group of women. S. Batliwala¹¹ in her study in South Asia explores that the process of empowerment begins with the women's consciousness about their rights, capacities, self-image and awareness of how gender and other sociological and political forces are acting on them. Rashmi Arun's study¹² in Madhya Pradesh highlights that despite more than half of the population of women in India, their participation in decision making body has been found negligible. It is often seen in most of the cases that either women are new entrants to politics or they are compelled by their husbands to contest the election. Subsequently they became identified as SarpanchPati or adhyakshapati started functioning in many panchayats. Illiteracy and lack of awareness have become impediment in the way of active participation of women in panchayats. Mahipal¹³ revealed a dismal picture of caste discrimination. Since Indian society is always dominated by the higher caste people, the rural politics reflect the whim and foul play of that class. Sudha Pai¹⁴ in her field study in Meerut District found that Pradhanis in Panchayats were illiterate and only able to put their signatures on officials papers.

The women representatives contest for election due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because of their own interest. Dr. Bharti¹⁵ explains that before 73rd Amendment came into force, Government of Orissa had adopted some of the important provisions such as reservation of seats for women, SCs, STs in its existing Panchayati Raj Acts. P. Pattnaik¹⁶ finds out the participation of elected representatives belonging to weaker sections in the functioning of four gram panchayats in Orissa's Dhenkanal district, in order to observe the extent to which numerical representation has been successful in the actual exercise of power by these sections. S. Kaul and S. Sahani¹⁷ study explores the minimal interaction of women with their male counterpart in the Gram Panchayat; they do not have knowledge on and amenities privileges meant for them. The empirical study of Artatrana Gocchayat¹⁸ explores the fact that presently apart from inequalities in the health, education and employment sectors inequality in the political arena is a new challenge for women. The above research outcome is the elucidation of the real picture of women representation in PRIs body. However, in this regard, this study refers to highlight on the awareness, interest and involvement of women in Panchayat administration and panchayat election.

IV. OBJECTIVES

This paper aims at highlighting certain objectives for the analysis of the study. The objectives are as follows-

1. It examines the Panchayati Raj Laws amended from time to time with special reference to Odisha.
2. It reveals the political awareness of women representatives of women PRIs members.
3. It examines the nature of participation of women representatives in different sphere of activities of PRIs ranging from voting to decision making.
4. It reveals the constraints encountered by the women representatives of PRIs during the performances of their duties.

V. METHODOLOGY

In order to find out true representation of women in Panchayati Raj in this empirical study qualitative method has been adopted. The primary sources were collected through personal interview to members of PRIs. The secondary sources were collected from the relevant literature relating PRIs Act and from various journals, reports, documents and other published literature.

Elections to PRIs bodies have been held four times consistently till date, following 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, in 1997, 2002, 2007

and 2012. This paper highlights the role and nature of PRIs women representatives of PRIs elected in 2007 election. Out of 1492 women representatives elected in 2007 to PRIs body, 500 members have been selected for the study organizing personal interview based on random sampling method.

VI. PANCHAYATI RAJ LAWS AND WOMEN

The Indian constitution has made special provision for women enshrining in the Art 15 of the chapter on Fundamental Rights; Part III. Further following the Gandhian principles the chapter on Directive Principles of state; Part IV the organization of village panchayat has been incorporated in Art.40. Consequently the first influential document was prepared by the Balwantrai Mehta Committee studying the Community Projects and the National extension Service, 1957. It was constituted to evaluate the work of Community Development Programme launched by the government in 1952 and National Extension Service established in 1953. Moreover it had to investigate the reorganization of the district administration on the basis of the recommendations of the second five year plan i.e., village administration should be gradually linked with popular organisations at higher level and the entire general administration and the development of the district should be taken over by the democratic bodies. Under the Community development Programme the administration at the district and the lower levels had been reorganized. Block emerged as the central unit of planning and development. Thus the Committee recommended for the setting up a three-tier structure of elected self-governing institutions; the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It was also precisely mentioned by the committee for the women representations having co-option of two women members to the Panchayati Raj Institution. Subsequently Ashok Mehta Committee was formed to look into the work of Panchayati Raj system in various states. With regards to women the Committee laid special emphasis on managerial roles of women strengthening their role in decision making. Apart from that it recommended for that two seats be given to the two women secured highest number of votes and in case no women got elected two women should be co-opted.

In 1974 a pioneering and very influential report was prepared by the Commission on the Status of Women in India. (CSWI) Chapter 7 of this report deals with the political status of women in which it was proposed for the reservation of women in the legislative bodies. The key recommendation of the report was the establishment of statutory women's panchayats at the village level having autonomy and resources of their own for the management and administration of welfare and development programmes for women and children. However the Committee remained overlooked by the Government

for several years. The National Plan of Action the major outcome of the CSWI could be able to mention hardly on the subject on women participation in politics. The former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi following the National perspective Plan formulated 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 1989. In this document, the provision of reservation for women at all level was proposed. But the bill felt to be enacted in the parliament. However after three years the bill was reintroduced in a slightly modified form as the 73rd Amendment bill was enacted under the government of Narasimha Rao in December 1992. The states were directed to introduce or amend their existing Panchayati Raj acts accordingly till 24 April 1994.¹⁹

A. panchayati raj act with special reference to odisha:

After independence of India Odisha claimed to be the first state to introduce village Panchayat through Orissa Gram Panchayat Act 1948, later amended in 1964 and passed in 1965. Following Balwantrai Mehta Committee report a full-fledged but short lived three tier system emerged through Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959, implemented on 26 January 1961. Subsequently the Community Development Blocks were converted into 314 Panchayats and Zilla Parishads were set up in all of the then 13 districts. Blocks became the pivot of the administrative level for rural development. Panchayat samiti exercises its functions for the development of the blocks. The Zilla Parishad Act was amended in 1967 and surprisingly in 1968 it lost its relevance substituted by the district Advisory Board which was profoundly dominated by the District Collector. The set-up of 1959 the position of women was negligible as in elsewhere in Indian Republic. In 1991 the Janata Dal Government led by Biju Pattnaik came to power. Soon after the formation of the government the process to establish full-fledged three-tier Panchayati Raj System began. Therefore In 1991 all the three Acts; the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act 1991, the Panchayat Samiti Act 1991 and the Zilla Parishad Act 1991 were passed. These acts became major breakthrough in making provisions for reservation of marginalized groups including women. The Orissa Act 9 of 1991 amended the Gram Panchayat Act, 1964 laid the provision for reservation of no less than one-third for women. In 1992 when the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was passed since then Odisha has had a reservation of no less than 33 per cent. Further it also mentions that in case the Sarpanch happens to be a man, the naib-sarpanch has to be a woman. Following the 73rd Government of India Act 1992, the Government of Odisha conducted elections to three-tier Panchayati Raj in 1997 for thirty districts, 854 Zilla Parishad constituencies, for 5260 Panchayat Samiti constituencies in 314 blocks, and in 5261 Gram Panchayats having 81077 wards. It is

recorded by the State Election Commission that the seats for the various offices shows that 35.27 per cent of the ward members (28595), 35.39 per cent of the Sarpanchs (1862) 35.55 per cent of the Samiti Members (1870), 36.31 per cent of Samiti chairpersons (114), 34.43 per cent of the Zilla Parishad members (294), and exactly 33.33 per cent of the Zilla Parishad presidents have been reserved for women.²⁰

VII. WOMEN IN POLITICAL PROCESS

Historical evidences indicate poor representation and participation of women in politics. The political role of women includes voting, campaigning, holding political offices and contesting as candidates. The election records show the constant increase in number of women as voters has been increased since 1952 to 2014. There are multifarious factors like education, religion, caste, class, traditions and effort of political parties and political awareness affect the voting pattern of women.

A. women's movement and political representation

Women in India in pre-independent period could have achieved more success in the field of political representation compared to their British and American counterpart. Women's movement in India during British period had to pass through two phases: first from 1917 to 1928 the period of strife for women enfranchisement and second phase from 1928 to 1937 was the struggle for the liberalization of enfranchisement and increasing female representation in legislatures. In 1937 elections to Provincial Legislatures 56 women entered the legislature of which 41 won from reserved seats, 10 got elected from unreserved and five were nominated to provincial legislative councils. During pre-independent period women had acquired remarkable achievement in the sphere of representation.²¹ Indian Independence movement witnessed some eminent number of women like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant and Durga Bai. In Odisha some prominent women like Malati Choudhury, Rama Devi, Sarala Devi and Annapurna Maharana took part in India's freedom struggle. In post independent period only countable number of women occupied significant positions.²² The post Independent India witnessed the gradual decrease of status and dignity in social economic and political sphere. Keeping in view, the deplorable condition of women 'The Committee on Status of Women in India' (CSWI) was constituted that revealed the gloomy picture of women in its report in 1974. In Odisha after independence Basanta Manjari Devi the queen of Ranpur was a minister in the state government. In true sense she was not a leader but had occupied ornamental position in the ministry. Saraswati Pradhan representing Bhatli assembly constituency was a deputy minister from 1961 to 1970. Smt Nandini Satpathy seen as a minister of state at the centre and sent by then Prime Minister Mrs.

Indira Gandhi to lead the state setting her as chief minister. From 1952 to 1980 women representation to legislature in Odisha was abysmally low. The average percentage of representation from 1952 to 1990 is 3.52 per cent and from 1952 to 1998 the average is 5.91 per cent. It seemed the predominance of largest number of Kshatriya women in the Legislature.²³ It is apparent that they were getting royal patronage as well as support of their people. Hence it seems in Odisha women access to politics is largely dominated by the higher castes, influential political families in the legislature. The representation was confined only with elite mass of higher class. At present there are two women MPs in Lok Sabha from Odisha, they are Rita Tarai and Sakuntala Laguri and 11 (7.48%) women MLAs have been elected to Odisha Legislative Assembly in 2014. There took place a sea change in the field of local politics in the year 1990, when Janata Dal Government led by Biju Pattnaik came to the power. Panchayati Raj The fulcrum of the representative system got amended by the Government. Subsequently substantial number of women can have an access to power corridor at local level in rural politics. It does indicate the true democratic representation of the people in the governmental process.

VIII. THE AREA OF STUDY

The area of study is the Balangir district of Odisha. Odisha is located in the east of the Indian subcontinent and forms a bridge between north and south India. The state has been divided into two parts: one is the coastal belt and other the hinterland. The area of study the district of Balangir is located in the hinterland of Odisha and one of the backward districts of KBK region. The district is nestled with Gandhamardan hills. The lofty irregular range of Gandhamardan forms the natural boundary to the north east. The district is traversed by hill streams.

The district is mostly inhabited by the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, constituting 20.63 and 16.92 per cent of the total population respectively. As per the 2011 census report the population of the Balangir district is 1648574 of which male constitute 831349 and female population is 817225. the sex ratio is 983 female per 1000 male in the district. Regarding the density of the population the district ranks 14th in Odisha²⁴. The socio-economic feature of the district indicates a poor and backward living condition of the people. Due to poor industrialization the economy of Balangir is basically agrarian while 75 % of its yielded land is dependable on rainfall. Thus agriculture in the district is affected due to erratic rainfall that leads to poor economy. Politically the district has occupied strategic importance in Odisha. The politics of the district was primarily dominated by the former chief minister Rajendra Narain Singhdeo leader of Swatantra party.

The citadel of opposition leadership became crushed with the death of Singh Deo. So far as women representation is concerned the only woman Sangeeta Singhdeo had represented three times from Balangir Parliamentary constituency. The district was the bastion of non-congress party. The people of the district show their loyalty to the king. However the people in rural areas are not so politically conscious. The rural politics is mainly dominated by male. The participation of women in Panchayati Raj is abysmally low. So far as rural administration is constituted the district has 14 blocks, 285 Gram Panchayats and 1794 villages. It is only after 73rd Amendment Act considerable number of women could be able to enter into power circle. At Gram Panchayat level in 1997, 1254 women out of 3489, in 2002 of 3812 total members 1381 women and in 2007 of 3812 total members 1380 women got elected. At this juncture representation of such a huge number of women to local bodies like Panchayati Raj would be of no value until suitable candidates are elected. Without having knowledge on the Constitutional laws, provision on reservation, articulation in decision making, deliberating the people's interests as a representative in the Panchayat is nothing but tokenism. Hence this is an audacious effort to explore the factors despite huge representation there is poor participation of women focusing some suggestions to resolve the problems.

IX. EMPIRICAL STUDY

The empirical study has been undertaken in the district of Balangir. In order to reveal the fact out of 1492 women PRIs members of three tier elected in 2007, 500 (33.51%) have been selected for the study. Personal interview to women members is conducted through random sampling method. A range of qualitative method was used for this study. In order to reveal the political representation of women this study reveals the socio-economic and political profile of women. Moreover the level of political awareness also is explored.

A. Socio-economic profile

This profile of women members reveal the category of the caste, age structure, education, occupation and land holding. So far as caste is concerned the highest representation i.e., 60 per cent of women members from OBCs (Other backward communities) and the lowest representation is the women from general category. Age is one of the primary features that determine the political role of women. It is assumed that normally women of older age join politics because of their relief from domestic assignment. However with the advent of mandatory reservation due to 73rd amendment act considerable number of young women came to the fore. This study explores the representation of women in PRIs from the age group of 35 to 45. The female education in the district is 53.50%. Education is the most vital

factor that determines the political awareness of women representatives. Education enhances the level of intelligence, political consciousness and the process of political socialization is also triggered. This study reveals that 50 per cent of its have received education of higher secondary level and only 8 and 2 per cent members are graduate and post graduate respectively.

B. political awareness

Political awareness of an individual can be known from one's attitude, behaviour exhibited in a political system. The level of awareness of an individual can be perceived through political culture which is concerned as a set of orientations of individuals towards the political system. Every society is built upon the shared ideologies and outlook that bind its citizens with the system vis-à-vis to one another. The culture refers to the accumulated ideas, values and beliefs of individuals. Political attitude of individuals can be perceived with the behavior they exhibit. "Political behavior can best be understood in the context of certain attitudes that people hold. In a very real sense, these attitudes are the building blocks of political activity."²⁶ Political behavior and political consciousness of individuals are concerned with the orientations of individuals in a society. Hence political awareness is an essential feature that enhances the level of representation as well as participation in the political sphere. The level of knowledge on various social, political issues indicate the level of awareness of political matters. This study reveals the degree of political awareness after collecting the information through random interview to women members of PRIs. Regarding the knowledge on voting age of a citizen, only 35 per cent could reply correctly. Nearly 70 per cent members do know the five years tenure of panchayats. Only 45 per cent members could be able to give positive reply about the minimum age as prerequisite to contest Panchayat election. Only 10 per cent members have knowledge on the provision of Fundamental Rights and the various Acts of Government. Nearly 32 per cent could be able to reply that they have knowledge on 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act mandating reservation of seats for women in PRIs.

C. political participation

Participation is fundamental to social life. From socio-psychological standpoint Warr and Wall defined 'participation' as concepts like 'involvement' and 'influence'.²⁷ Participation is a primary feature of democratic system. A democracy can be fruitful with the citizens' participation in the selection and running of the government. Moreover participation in the decision making is also one of the vital features of democracy. This study reveals the level of participation of women members of PRIs in political affairs. Political participation includes the various

kinds of activities like voting, campaigning, contesting in the election, holding political posts, attending party meeting and panchayat meeting, Palli Sabha, articulation of the interests and of citizens' articulations on various women issues

1. Voting

Voting is the primary mode of participation in politics. It is revealed that 60 per cent of the respondents cast vote regularly in all elections, 25 per cent cast occasionally and 15 per cent do not cast their votes. The world has witnessed various movements for women enfranchisement. New Zealand happened to be the first country in 1893 in providing women enfranchisement. In 2011 Saudi Arabia declared the provision of voting right for women in the forthcoming election that would be held in 2015. Participation in the enfranchisement process assumes the formation of a representative government. The citizens may at any time withdraw their consent from the government in case of abusing power.

2. campaigning

It is the next higher level of participation by a citizen when he joins in the campaigning programme organized by a party. It is evident that women are primarily engaged in domestic activities, have little interest in politics. They are less exposure to public. They preferred to confine inside their home. This study indicates 30 per cent respondents join in the campaigning activities.

3. contesting election

It is challenging for women to contest the election. It is apparent that a miniscule number of women do contest in the election under the party banner. It is also worrisome for women to contest as an independent candidate. The political parties hardly prefer women as candidate to contest in the Parliamentary and Assembly seats. It is evident that due to mandatory reservation the political parties are compelled to accept women as party candidate.²⁸ It is revealed in this study only 20 per cent respondents want to contest the elections; remaining 80 per cent of the women members reluctantly contest elections to PRIs body. As a member of political party women occupy different posts like party president, secretary and spokesperson. It is often seen women are hardly assigned with the posts by the party. Only two to three per cent women occupy these positions.

4. holding political post

As a party member woman seldom attend party meeting. It seems that they rarely remain present in the party meeting. Nearly 5-6 per cent women attend party meeting. And if it is Panchayat meeting about 90 per cent women attend. The Palli Sabha is attended by almost 100 per cent women members. Earlier the meeting was usually attended by their male relations, may be husband, father-in-law or son. But in due

course the women members' presence has been increased. However the presence of women has been acclaimed as mere tokenism.

5. attending party meeting, panchayat meeting

It seems most of the women members hardly pay a visit to Panchayats. They are preoccupied with the household responsibilities. The women members occasionally come to the panchayats. Near about 5 per cent members are active in performing panchayat duties. As representative to panchayats a few active members articulate the interests of the people.

6. Role in decision making

Women members often prefer to remain quiet in Panchayat meeting. About 3 per cent women give constructive suggestions. A few that is one per cent protest against the arbitrary decision of the panchayat officials. Of late women members including non-members have become more vigorous to get the liquor bar to closed and compel the administration to take stern action against the bar owner.

D.analysis

From this study empirical evidences reveal the fact that there is awfully low rate of awareness on political issues by the women members of PRIs. Nevertheless there seemed the appearance of large number of women members in PRIs due to mandatory reservation. After conducting random interviews to the women members the outcome has been drawn. It is observed during the period of interview most of the members are not free to express themselves, or reluctant to reply openly. This seems primarily because of their low exposure to public, they are not clear to express or to speak freely. Nonetheless some of the women members reply promptly without hesitation. It is evident from the fact that a few women members rarely get involved them in the electoral process and in the affairs of panchayats. They do not have clear idea on liberties, rights and their own position in society. Most of them do not know the name of political parties, instead of that they know only the party symbol. It is evident that women members in the area of study is backward, hardly interact, have narrow attitude, confined to the four walls of their home, do not have independent thought, traditionally subjugated by their male members, do not have interest in politics, do not think about social welfare and development of their society, do not want to enter into politics willingly due to criminalization of politics. These problems are due to illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, traditional pattern of society, lack of financial independence and narrow attitude of family members little cooperation extended to women members and inhospitable attitude of Gram Panchayats. The male members of GPs very often ignore the women members; the panchayat officials bypassing women members take most of the decisions even on financial matters.

X. CONCLUSION

The reservation of seats in Panchayats has only made the quantitative increase of seats, but it requires a lot of effort to be undertaken by the civil society, government, Panchayats, families, N.G.Os, organizing conferences and workshops, imparting training to women members at different level. Women should be educated to understand the rights and duties. Financial independence to Panchayats should be given. Women should be economically independent that could enhance their political efficacy. Political socialization of women can be developed since the student days, imparting political training. Seminars, workshops, symposiums should be organized very often by the schools, colleges and universities. There should be genuine effort taken by the union as well as state government to devolve powers to PRIs for empowerment. Women in the Panchayats should be given free hand to deal with the panchayat affairs. They should be given financial independence for developmental work. Women should not be ignored by their male counterparts. At this juncture it is essential that all the members of the panchayats should get united to represent the grievances of the people forgetting all differences. So that real representation of women in Panchayat can best be exercised.

In spite of a lot of obstacles the level of political representation has not only increased quantitatively but also qualitatively. With the advent of 73rd Amendment Act the representation of women increased from miniscule 4-5 per cent to 33-40 per cent. It is apparent that initially women entered reluctantly to panchayats but in due course they have shown maturity in politics. In order to enhance their potential they are being imparted with training at different level and for capacity building workshop also are being organized. With the formation of Self Help Groups (SHG) women have become financially independent. Presently due to social and cultural development mothers are sending their girl child to schools that helped in more enrolment of girl children in the schools. All these indicate the positive sign of development of a society that will lead to true representation. However this has not been endeavored noticeably. Government of India has provided wider space for women extending its provision for reservation of 50 per cent in local self-government. However the Constituent Amendment bill on the reservation of women in legislature is yet to be passed in the parliament. It requires a large scale preparation bringing women to politics. Somehow women in rural areas have become aware although illiteracy, poverty inhibits them participating in politics actively. Genuine devolution of power to Panchayats can pave the way for the running of true Panchayati Raj. Subsequently administration can reach out to

people. We have to go a long way to achieve success in the sphere of women representation effectively.

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