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**ROLE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A  
STUDY OF BUDGAM DISTRICT, JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to study the role of women representatives in panchayati raj institutions in budgam district, Jammu and Kashmir. The sample of the study consists of 151 respondents, which were selected by multistage random sampling method. The major objectives of the study are:- 1. To analyse the nature and extent of political linkage of women leaders in Panchayati Raj system in the study area. 2. To study and analyse the Panchayati Raj System and participation of women in the wake of constitutional amendment (seventy-three) act; 3. To ascertain the perceptions of people on the role of women representative in Panchayati Raj Institutions and also on rural development. The most significant aspect of women's participation in the decision-making process at the grassroots level is that it would throw up a trained younger leadership for the political mainstream, which has hitherto been restricted to men and a few elite women. The experience of the working of the PRIs in various states during the last one decade shows that very few states have transferred all the powers given in the 11th schedule to the PRIs. Even the powers that have been transferred, in reality, continue to be exercised by the functionaries under the supervision of the state government. The recommendations of the State Finance Commissions have also not been fully implemented in most of the states. The PRIs have also been reluctant to raise the resources of their own by using the powers of taxation given to them. Over and above, the PRIs can neither really be empowered through the amendments in the Constitution nor by the statues enacted by the state legislatures and notification issued by the state governments. PRIs can be genuinely empowered only after the rural masses and the elected leaders in the PRIs themselves put strong pressure on the central and state governments for implementing the aforesaid subjects. For this, they will have to sink petty political differences and unite, organize and struggle for a common cause.

**Key Words:** Women's Empowerment, Panchayati Raj System, Awareness of Self-employment schemes, Concept of Empowerment, Constitutional Amendment of India Panchayati Raj Activities about Women Empowerment.

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## **Introduction**

Political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government. Under international standards, men and women have an equal right to participate fully in all aspects of the political process. In practice, however, it is often harder for women to exercise this right. In post conflict countries there are frequently extra barriers to women's participation, and special care is required to ensure their rights are respected in this regard. Political participation extends beyond parties, however. Women can also become involved in certain aspects of the electoral process through independent action-particularly at the local level—and by joining civil society organizations. Some women in post-conflict countries have gained political experience by participating in non-elected transitional assemblies. Women's networks, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, and the media can all provide avenues for women's political participation. (United Nations, 2010)

In many countries the rights of women are enshrined in law, and there are no formal legal barriers to women's political participation in election processes. In practice, however, there are often formidable obstacles to women's active participation in politics. The hurdles to be overcome can be particularly daunting for women considering running for office, and may be overwhelming for women in post-conflict countries.

Politics has traditionally been a male domain that many women have found unwelcoming or even hostile. Societies in which traditional or patriarchal values remain strong may frown on women entering politics. In addition to dealing with unfavourable cultural predilections, women are often more likely than men to face practical barriers to entering politics, including a paucity of financial resources, lower levels of education, less access to information, greater family responsibilities, and a deprivation of rights that has left them with fewer opportunities to acquire political experience. With the exception of the close relatives of male politicians, women generally lack the political networks necessary for electoral success.

The Inter-Parliamentary Symposium on the Participation of Women in the Political and Parliamentary Decision-making Process held in Geneva (1989), stated that: The political space belongs to all citizens; politics is everyone's business and affects the lives of each of us. There is no doubt that the more women are associated, in numbers corresponding to their percentage of the population, in the political decision-making process, in parties, in elected bodies in Governments

and in international bodies, the more they can be associated with this process as protagonists and the more they can change the modalities and outcomes of politics. Only then will be the concept of democracy find concrete and tangible expression. Indeed, the democracy and the participation of women go hand in hand and promote each other mutually.

This has been the underlying refrain of all the subsequent international conferences on gender issues and categorically stated in all Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. To ensure women's equal access and full participation in power structures and in decision-making; governments have to set the targets and the measures to be taken for substantially increasing the number of women representation through positive action. To protect and promote the equal rights to women and to engage them in political activities and to provide freedom of association, including membership in political parties and trade unions, etc., political parties need to reform their structures and procedures by removing all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women in politics.

### **Status of women in India**

The constitution of the Republic of India ensures equality of women and men in every sphere of life and activity. The fundamental rights of the Indian constitution has clearly delineated stating, "The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, caste, sex, colour, place of birth or any of them". Women in India have been given equality of opportunity in all matters relating to education, employment and legal status and they can aspire to grace the highest office of the state. However, this is truly not indicative of the existing position of women in general in the country, yet. Though, legally and constitutionally, all women have equal access to and right to venture in every walk of life, a vast majority of them are still illiterate and uneducated (Subhash Singh Yadav and Ram Kumar Gurjar 1997).

### **Representation of Women in Legislatures**

Political representation was initially based on the premise that it deals primarily with individuals, regardless of sex; and equal opportunities should be granted for power and influence in society. It was believed that though very few women were actually joining politics, given time the overall change in terms of education and employment opportunities would necessarily percolate into the political sphere too and their representation would increase. However, the representation of women in the Lok Sabha has not crossed 10 per cent. In the First Lok Sabha there were only 22 women constituting 4.4 per cent of the House which has increased two fold to 45 in the 14th Lok Sabha. Similarly in the case of Rajya Sabha the percentage of women members

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has never crossed 12 percent. These facts inevitably lead us to conclude that there is need for positive action in favour of women. Given the low representation of women in politics, there has been a consistent demand for more meaningful methods to increase their representation in decision-making bodies (Ghosh, Jayati, 1999). In pursuance of this notion of empowerment of women, the 73rd Amendment Act and the 74th Amendment Act reserved seats for women at the grassroot level bodies, namely the panchayats and municipalities with the hope that these measures will set the trend to provide women their legitimate place in public life (Lalnehzovi, 2007). After these amendments, Article 243 D and 243T of the Constitution provide that not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by the direct election in the local bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities) would be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the local bodies (Nandal, V. 2013). This indeed makes a beginning for the effective participation of women in the decision making process at the grassroot level. It is a fact that in the elections to these local bodies one million women have been elected every five years. This portrays a very encouraging trend for women's empowerment. As far as the participation of women in the electoral politics is concerned, the statistics shows that very few women are actually participating in the elections. For example, in the Sixth General Elections out of the total contestants of 2,439, only 70 candidates were women and in the 14th Elections, out of the total numbers of contestants of 59,435 only 355 were women (Thakur, A.K 2008). Though the number of women participating in the elections may be increasing gradually they continue to constitute a very small percentage of the total number of contestants. Another surprising fact is that out of the total number of women who actually contest the elections, the percentage of women who finally make it to the Lok Sabha is very less. In fact, over the years the percentage of women who have found their way to the legislature has reduced. In the Sixth General Election 27 percent of the women contestants won the elections and by the fourteenth General Election less than 13 percent have actually made it to the House (Thakur, 2008).

### **Constitutional rights of women in India**

The country got freedom in 1947 and the framers of the constitution including the main architect Dr. B.R. Ambedkar realized the unequal social position of women and assured equal rights for women. The greatest honour was given to women after independence ensuring the equality principle in the constitution. Prior to independence women were most neglected and subjected section of the society. The dreams and aspirations of the national leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru were embodied in the Preamble to the Constitution of India viz., to promote social, political

and economic and ethical values and to provide social justice, economic and political liberty of individuals and general welfare. The Fundamental Rights enshrined in Articles 14, 15 and 16 guarantee the principle of equality before law, equality of sexes and equal opportunity in all walks of life including public employment. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any one of them (United Nations, 2004). Article 39(a), states that the state shall direct its policy towards securing equality to men and women the right to an adequate means of livelihood, and 39(d) enjoins the state to direct its policy towards securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women (World Health Organization, 1990) Article 51A imposes certain fundamental duties on every citizen of India. Article 51A(c) provides that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. Thus, a woman can aspire to the highest office of the state and is free to choose any form of education and training in order to pursue a career of her choice. Articles 325 and 326 introduce adult franchise without distinction of sex. Women have also right to vote, right to contest in elections. Government of India has provided certain reservations exclusively for women in political field.

### **Review of Literature**

**A.K Sinha (2004)** has given in the book, “Panchayati Raj and Empowerment of Women” a detailed account of the empowerment of women in villages in Haryana State, based on his field work. He gives detailed information of Panchayati Raj institutions and the history of gram Panchayat. He writes, education is not the sole factor to make women Sarpanch assertive, as even little educated Sarpanchs were assertive due to their knowledge of village problems and needs. Those who were not exposed to outside world found it difficult to interact with Government officials. He writes that after 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution women and specially scheduled cast women have started taking part in village level politics in greater numbers and this is a positive trend as women get a chance to participate in decision-making and it serves as a training ground for democracy and political education.

**K. Subha (1994)** has made an attempt to explore the working of the Bangalore Municipal Corporation since its inception in 1994 and to evaluate the role of women councillors in policy-making and administration, and, the extent to which it has met the requirements of women. This study has also attempted to highlight the potentialities and the attributes of women who were at the helm of affairs in this urban body. She has also made some practical suggestions for the development of women at the grassroots and their effective participation in political mobilisation.

**K.C.Vidya (2007)** has intended to touch upon various aspects of women's performance in the Panchayati Raj institutions and its impact on the overall development of women especially in the rural areas. The study also examined pertinent questions like role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the cause of women's development and effective participation of women in the decision-making process, their influence in the behaviour and attitude of rural women after their entry into these institutions.

**Mukherjee and Bhattacharya (2003)** have analyzed the status of women in India and the alternative modes of their empowerment. The issue of empowerment is viewed from different dimensions by well known feminist writers. It deals equally with the theoretical issues relating to empowerment as well as issues involved in practice. "Women and Politics" is edited by Kiran Saksena. In this work she gives a historical background of women's movement and stress the need for empowering women. She writes the core of politics is the exercise of power; and as politics belong to the public sphere where instruction of women is forbidden. This is not just or democratic hence feminist demand women's participation in politics.

**Snehalata Panda (1997)** in her study "Political Empowerment of Women A case study of Orissa" attempts to explore the rural socio-political situation and the performance of women representatives in PRIs in Orissa with the mandatory of one third reservations for women provided by the new Panchyati Raj act 1994. The author concludes that women entered into politics due to mandatory provision of one third reservation; most of the women were non political and entered politics due to persuasion by their family member or pressure from the village community or pressure from a political party: or some entered politics due to personal interest. The study indicates that there is a positive change in the socio-political dynamics of the rural society.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyse the nature and extent of political linkage of women leaders in Panchayati Raj System in the study area.
2. To study and analyse the Panchayati Raj system and participation of women in the wake of Constitutional Amendment (Seventy-Three) Act;
3. To ascertain the perceptions of people on the role of women representative in Panchayati Raj Institutions and also on rural development.

## Methodology

The unique feature of four tier area sampling design has been executed to get a random sample of 151 respondents from the Kashmir valley. The sampling of the study is said to be *Multi-Stage Random sampling method*. The first stage of sampling involves the selection of district from the Kashmir. Out of 10 districts of Kashmir, Budgam district has the second highest number of voters of 335604 according to the 2011 census, so in the first stage, the Budgam district was selected for the present study. The second stage of sampling involves the selection of two blocks from the district. The Budgam district has 8 blocks namely Budgam, Nagam, Chadoora, Beerwah, Khansahib, Khag, Narbal, B.K Pora. Out of these 8 blocks, two blocks namely Beerwah and Khansahib were selected on the basis of high concentration of population. The third stage of sampling involves the selection of four villages from the two selected blocks. The two villages namely Saihama and Gampora were selected randomly from Beerwah block and two villages namely Kule Hama and Gund Panah were selected randomly from Khansahib block. The fourth stage of sampling involves the selection of respondents from the four selected villages. The 5 percent of the total population of the 4 selected villages was selected and thus a total sample of 151 respondents has been selected from the Budgam district for the present study.

## Results and Discussion

**Table-1**  
**Age-Wise Classification of the Respondents**

S.No	Age Group	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	18-27	30	19.8
2.	28-37	64	42.4
3.	38-47	35	23.2
4.	Above-47	22	14.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Age determines the active participation of the community in promoting their economic and education position. Table-1 shows that out of the 137 respondents, the majority of the respondents 42.3 percent were between 28-37 age-group, 23.4 percent respondents were between 38-47 age-group, 19.7 percent respondents were among the 18-27 age-group and 14.6 percent respondents were Above-47 age-group.

**Table-2**  
**Education-Wise Classification of the Respondents**

S.No	Education	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	13	8.6
2.	Primary Education	17	11.3
3.	Middle Education	22	14.6
4.	Secondary Education	51	33.8
5.	Higher Sec. Education	30	19.8
6.	Collegiate Education	18	11.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Education is a vital input for growth and development. Education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. It plays a primary role in the health status of the population. The total literacy rate of the district is 68 percent which is less than the overall literacy rate of Jammu and Kashmir. Table-2 shows the education-wise classification of the sample respondents. The respondent's literacy levels are classified into four major groups to estimate their levels viz illiterate, primary, secondary, graduation and above. Out of the 137 respondents, the majority of the respondents 34.3 percent were illiterates, 19.7 percent have completed their higher Secondary education followed by 14.6 percent who have completed their secondary education, 12.6 percent have completed their college education, 10.9 percent have completed their primary education and 8.9 were illiterates in the study area.

**Table-3**  
**Distribution of Respondents by Household Income**

S.No.	Income (in Rs.)	Frequencies	Percentages
1.	Below-25,000	55	36.4
2.	25,001-50,000	43	28.5
3.	50,001-75,000	33	21.9
4.	Above-75,000	20	13.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Household income is one of the proxy indicators in assessing the levels of development of the households. Table-3 portrays the sources of household's income of the respondents. The household's annual income comes from six sources in the study area. The majority of the respondents 36.4 percent of the respondents were under the category of Below-Rs.25,000, 28.5 percent of the respondents were under the category of Rs.25,001-50,000, 21.9 percent of the respondents were under the category of Rs.50,001 to 75,000 and 13.2 percent of the respondents were under the category of above-Rs.75,000.

**Table-4**  
**Reasons for Conducting the Election**

S.No	Exercise Your Vote	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	To elect the political representatives	78	51.7
2.	To vote for a good administrator	45	29.8
3.	To complete principle of democracy	16	10.6
4.	Don't know	12	7.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Table-4 shows the Reasons for Conducting Election. Respondents have given multiple responses for the reasons for conducting elections. Out of the 151 respondents, the majority of the respondents 51.7 percent respondents admitted that elections are being conducted to elect the political representatives of their choice, 29.8 percent said that the purpose behind conducting elections is to vote for a good administrator. However, 10.6 percent of the respondents revealed that it is only to complete principle of democracy. But, 7.8 percent respondents could not say anything due to lack of awareness. Thus, the respondents have expressed their different versions about the reasons for conducting elections. According to the above data, most of the respondents are politically aware of their electoral process but majority of them vote for electing good administrator rather than just exercising their right to vote. There is general awareness among people about the electoral process but its importance cannot be seen in terms of electing good administrator.

**Table-5**  
**Gender of the Leader**

S.No	Gender of the Leader	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Male	15	9.9
2.	Female	136	90.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Coming to direct question to the respondents about their leader, they were asked to say who is their leader? The reason behind asking the question is to know whether the respondents are aware about their elected representative. Whether their elected representative is male or female? Table-5 shows that out of the 151 respondents, the majority of the respondents 90.1 percent respondents admitted that their elected representative was female. According to them, elected

leader means Sarpanch or Mandal President. Few may be having their opinion about MPTC, ZPTC, MLA or MP. On the other hand 10 percent of the respondents revealed that their political leader was male. They might be having their opinion either on MP, MLA or any other elected member.

**Table-6**  
**33 Percent of Reservation to Women**

S.No	33 Percent of Reservation to Women	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Necessary	90	59.6
2.	Not necessary	21	13.9
3.	Don't know	40	26.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

The respondents were asked to comment on the necessity or otherwise of 33 percent reservation of seats in local bodies to women. Table-6 presents the comments of respondents with regards to the reservation of seats for women, out of 151 respondents 59.6 percent felt that it is necessary because 50 percent of the total population in the country is women. However, 14 percent of the respondents felt that there is no such necessity. Women can fight elections in general quota as men do According to 26.5 percent of the respondents said that they do not have any idea about the reservation of seats exclusively for women.

**Table-7**  
**Role of the Women Leaders**  
*(Total Number of Respondents 151\*)*

S.No	Role of women leaders	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Women should concentrate on development works	90	59.8
2.	Women should tackle the situation	76	50.4
3.	Women should not fear	45	29.9
4.	Women should help women	61	40.2
5.	Don't know	46	30

**Source:** Computed from primary data

\*Number and percentage do not tally due to multiple responses

Table-7 shows the role that women leaders are expected to play in the district, as expressed by the respondents. The respondents have given multifarious responses. Basically the role of any elected representative is to carry out development works, provide basic facilities, security, and ability to address the problems. In case of women leader, women's definitely expect more from women leader in a hope that women will definitely solve the women related issues of

safety, security and other issues in concerned area. Out of 151 respondents, 59.8 percent expect that women leaders should concentrate on developmental work which is a primary responsibility of any representative irrespective of gender. However, 50.4 percent of the respondents opined that women should be able to tackle any type of critical situation that arise in carrying out their primary duties and should go ahead. Especially, 29.9 percent of the respondents commented that women leaders should give top priority to the redressal of women problems because most of women voters might have elected them with this intention only. While taking decision women leaders should not fear. On the other hand 40.2 percent of the respondents said that the women should help to women. On the whole the respondents have expressed different views over the role to be played by the women leaders. 30 percent of the respondents said that they don't know about the role of women leaders.

**Table-8**  
**Redressal of Problems**

S.No	Redressal of Problems	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Yes	131	86.8
2.	No	20	13.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Redressal of problems subsequently, the respondents were asked to say whether the women representative has solved their problems. Table-8 presents their response of the respondents given when they were asked this question. Out of 151 respondents with regard to the redressal of problems, 86.8 percent admitted that their problems were solved with the involvement or recommendation of their leader. And 13.2 percent of the respondents said that their problems were not solved by their leaders.

**Table-9**  
**Reasons for Not Solving the Grievances**

*(Total Number of Respondents 151\*)*

S.No	Reasons for Not Solving the Problems	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	She could not influence the officials	85	56.3
2.	She is not experienced	77	51
3.	Innocent	29	19.2
4.	Lack of sense in tackling the problem	38	25.2

**Source:** Computed from primary data

\*Number and percentage do not tally due to multiple responses

Table-9 shows the reasons for not solving the grievances of the respondents in the study area. According to the perceptions of the respondents, the reasons for not solving their grievances are multifarious. The data is tabulated for 151 respondents, 56.3 percent of the respondents opined that women leaders could not influence the officials to redress the grievances. If this statement is taken into consideration, there is a serious doubt on the capability of women leaders' communication ability and her ability to put forth the problems in an effective manner. Another 51 percent of the respondents noted that due to their inexperience in administrative problems the grievances were not solved. Likewise, 25.2 percent of the respondents commented that the leaders do not have the sense of tackling the problems and hence they are suffering. Another 95 respondents 19.2 percent of the respondents simply commented that the women leaders are innocent.

**Table-10**  
**Organization of Public Meetings**

S. No	Organize public meetings	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Yes	66	43.7
2.	No	36	23.8
	Don't Know	49	32.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Afterwards, with an intention to draw the perceptions on the individual capacity of women leaders, certain questions were put to the respondents. Respondents were asked to reveal whether they organize public meetings in their areas. Table-10 gives the details pertaining to the organization of public meetings. It is necessary for any public leader to organize small public meetings here and there to show gatherings and to canvass their performance. Out of 151 respondents 43.7 percent of the respondents said that the leaders of their area organize small meetings, gatherings to address the people regarding their activities. On the other hand 23.8 percent of the respondents categorically said that no such public meetings are organized by any leaders, except during the time of elections. And 32 percent, of the respondents said that they don't know about such public meetings. This data reveals inability of the leader to garner attention and create awareness about her in the society and mainstream politics.

**Table-11**  
**Works Undertaken in Constituency**  
*(Total Number of Respondents 151\*)*

S. No	Respondents	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Road Formation	28	18.5
2.	Culverts	22	14.6
3.	Water Supply	52	34.4
4.	Schools/ Hostels	58	38.4
5.	Old Age Pensions	27	17.8
6.	Loans	11	7.3
7.	Crop Loans	31	20.5
8.	No Works	34	22.5

**Source:** Computed from primary data

\*Number and percentage do not tally due to multiple responses

Respondents said that different types of works have been undertaken in their constituency. While assessing the women leaders, they might be having in their minds about the performance of Sarpanches, Mandal Presidents, Members of MPTC, ZPTC, MLA and MP also. Water supply has been given top priority in the developmental works. Equal importance was given to the construction and maintenance of schools and hostels. Table-5.28 indicates that different types of works have been executed in the areas by women representatives. Out of 151 respondents, 150 of them, 38.4 respondents said that the schools/ hostel works were done by the leaders followed by 34.4 percent of the respondents said that the water supply works were done in the study area. It is also informed that crop loans were sanctioned to 20.5 percent of the respondents and that old age pension were sanctioned to 17.8 percent of the respondents in the study area. It was also informed that 18.5 percent said that road formation was done in the constituency. 14.6 percent of the respondents said that culverts were put in the roads wherever they were needed and 22.5 percent of the respondents viewed that nothing has been done in their areas.

**Table-12**  
**Satisfaction on the Services of Elected Representatives**

S.No	Redressal of Problems	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Yes	45	29.8
2.	No	106	70.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Computed from primary data

Table-12 shows the satisfaction on the services of elected representatives. It is observed that majority of people are unhappy with the services rendered by their elected women representatives, out of 151 respondents, 70.2 percent expressed their opinion that the female elected representatives are not taking decisions on their own and they are influenced either by

their relatives or male friends. Female representatives are unable to take decisions. They are not in a position to take own decisions on several grounds. Due to this fact the common public is unhappy. However, 29.8 percent, mostly women expressed their happiness over the services rendered by the elected (women) representatives. It is because, whenever they approach their leader with grievances, their representatives listen to them and make their efforts to solve their problems. It is because of this reasons, few respondents expressed their happiness over the services of their representatives.

**Table-13**  
**Suggestions for Better Performance of Women Representatives**  
*(Total Number of Respondents 151\*)*

S.No.	Responses	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Women representation should work without fear	54	35.8
2.	Everyone should respect the 73 <sup>rd</sup> CAA	15	9.9
3.	All should respect the govt. policy	47	31.1
4.	Awareness about the reservation	30	20
5.	Women representatives should take decisions on their own	27	17.9
6.	They should have the capacity to convince the officials	29	19.2
7.	They should have the capacity to get funds for developmental works	37	24.5

**Source:** Computed from primary data

\*Number and percentage do not tally due to multiple responses

According to the analysis of table-13 the respondents have suggested several ideas for the better role of women representatives. Out of 151 respondents 35.8 percent of the respondents have suggested that all women representatives' right from the level of ward member to the level of Parliament member should discharge their duties boldly and without fear. Similarly, 31.1 respondents have suggested that all citizens of the country should respect the Government policy of providing reservations to women. Then only the elected representatives will function with devoted commitment. Respondents further suggested that the women representatives should have the capacity to get the funds from the government for the execution of developmental works in their respective jurisdictions. Out of 151 respondents 9.9 of the respondents have suggested that everyone should respect the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act which provides reservation of political seats to weaker sections and women. On the other hand 20 percent of the respondents have suggested that the Government should take all necessary steps to give wide publicity about the reservations provided to women and create awareness among the general public. Moreover, 19.2 percent respondents have suggested that the women representatives should develop the capacity to convince the officials to take up developmental works in their areas. Simultaneously,

respondents have suggested taking the decisions on their own and avoiding to be influenced by their husbands and relatives. Depending upon their individual ability and understanding of the subject, the respondents have given various suggestions which are, according to them, necessary for the better role of women representatives

## **FINDINGS**

- The majority of the respondents 42.3 percent were under the age group of 28-37 years and 14.6 percent of them were under the age group of above-47 years.
- It was found that majority of the respondents 72.3 percent were married and 27.7 percent of the respondents are unmarried.
- It was found that majority of the respondents 72 percent belong to nuclear families and 28 percent belong to joint families.
- The majority of the respondents 34.3 percent were illiterates, 10.9 percent of the respondents have completed their primary education and 12.6 percent were graduates and above in the study area.
- The majority of the respondents 36.4 percent have income below Rs.25,000 and 13.2 percent have above Rs.75,000.
- The majority of the respondents 66.9 respondents have exercised their vote in Assembly elections and election for rural local bodies, few of them have exercised their votes thrice also and 33.1 percent of the respondents have not exercised their right to vote at any time.
- The majority of the respondents 51.7 percent respondents admitted that elections are being conducted to elect the political representatives of their choice, 29.8 percent said that the purpose behind conducting elections is to vote for a good administrator.
- The majority of the respondents 90.1 percent respondents admitted that their elected representative was female. According to them, elected leader means Sarpanch or Mandal President. Few may be having their opinion about MPTC, ZPTC, MLA or MP. On the other hand 10 percent of the respondents revealed that their political leader was male.
- The majority of the respondents, 28.5 percent said that their women leaders are dynamic, functioning well and attend to the grievances of public whenever they approach. 22.5 percent of the respondents said that their women leaders are working with fear. They are

afraid of male leaders and upper caste people. Due to their general ignorance, the officials exploit them.

- The majority of the respondents 59.6 percent felt that it is necessary because 50 percent of the total population in the country is women. However, 14 percent of the respondents felt that there is no such necessity.
- The majority of the respondents 57.6 percent welcomed the reservation of seats to women and appreciated the decision. But 26.5 percent of the respondents felt that reservation of seats for women is not necessary.
- It was found that the majority of the respondents 59.8 percent expect that women leaders should concentrate on developmental work which is a primary responsibility of any representative irrespective of gender. However, 50.4 percent of the respondents opined that women should be able to tackle any type of critical situation that arise in carrying out their primary duties and should go ahead.
- It was found that majority of the respondents 43.7 percent of the respondents said that the leaders of their area organize small meetings, gatherings to address the people regarding their activities. On the other hand 23.8 percent of the respondents categorically said that no such public meetings are organized by any leaders, except during the time of elections.
- It was found that majority of the respondents 38.4 said that the schools/ hostel works were done by the leaders followed by 34.4 percent of the respondents said that the water supply works were done in the study area. It is also informed that crop loans were sanctioned to 20.5 percent of the respondents and that old age pension were sanctioned to 17.8 percent of the respondents in the study area. It was also informed that 18.5 percent said that road formation was done in the constituency.

## **Conclusion**

The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act provided a new constitutional platform which ensures the representation of one-third women in the PRIs. This legislation accelerated the process of the participation of women in the policy making bodies. In many areas of social and political development women now a days are accorded more and more importance. It might be regarded as a traditional, benevolent point of view to state that women promote value codes and encourage in their own way a humane society, no matter whether this perspective can be taken at face value. It also has to be emphasized that women equally with men implement democracy as a way of life and generate economic resources. Hardly any country in the world has yet succeeded in fully implementing the equality of women and men. In India, women are the first and most to suffer

from poverty and illiteracy from oppression and violence, from disasters and the infringement of human rights. Over and above, the same Indian women have proved on many occasions that they can be more accountable, equally skilled and less corrupt than men. Confronted with all possible social and political problems, they have demonstrated their social competence and their own income generating capacity.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act marks a watershed in the field of advancement of Indian women as they ensure one-third of total seats in all elected bodies of PRIs. This provides an opportunity to about one million rural women to enter as leaders and decision-makers at the grass-root level and enter public life through the existing 0.25 million bodies-rural and urban. Of these 75,000 will be chairpersons at the village, block and district levels. The participation of often illiterate rural women in the process of grassroots democracy has attracted both positive and negative views. The allegations are that these institutions are being misused by the predominantly male political structure which keeps women away from meetings, take their signature at their residence well before the meetings and operate through dummy candidates. To make the participation of women in the PRIs really meaningful, it would be desirable that the percentage of reservation has to be raised to the proportion of women population. Further, conferment of judicial and police powers would go a long way in elevating the status and authority of the PRIs. Lack of education in the rural areas, social and family barriers and preoccupation with house hold duties prevent women from actively participating in the political process. However, it appears that defector women's participation in grassroots democracy will make its mark on the democratic structure of the nation sooner rather than later.

The most significant aspect of women's participation in the decision-making process at the grassroots level is that it would throw up a trained younger leadership for the political mainstream, which has hitherto been restricted to men and a few elite women. The experience of the working of the PRIs in various states during the last one decade shows that very few states have transferred all the powers given in the 11th schedule to the PRIs. Even the powers that have been transferred, in reality, continue to be exercised by the functionaries under the supervision of the state government. The recommendations of the State Finance Commissions have also not been fully implemented in most of the states. The PRIs have also been reluctant to raise the resources of their own by using the powers of taxation given to them. Over and above, the PRIs can neither really be empowered through the amendments in the Constitution nor by the statues enacted by the state legislatures and notification issued by the state governments. PRIs can be genuinely empowered only after the rural masses and the elected leaders in the PRIs themselves put strong pressure on the central and state governments for implementing the aforesaid subjects. For this,

they will have to sink petty political differences and unite, organize and struggle for a common cause.

To conclude, it is expected that the present Bharti Janta Party Government initiatives some concrete steps towards enabling panchayat leaders in becoming proficient riders and performing their role effectively by getting adequate skill, knowledge and attitudes for local governance, planning and development on priority basis. It is hoped that carving out a separate ministry of Panchayati Raj from the Rural Development and the recently held conferences of the Chief Ministers and State Ministers on RD and PR on the theme of poverty alleviation and rural prosperity through PR held in New Delhi may be a strategic and innovative step towards this direction.

### **Suggestions**

1. An important requirement for bringing about empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and bearing children needs to be replaced by a feeling of equal partnership of women and men. To inculcate this, they should be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both.
2. There should be increased emphasis on ensuring the participation of women in the meetings of Panchayats at all the levels. This is needed to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and self-confidence. It will help them to perform better in the Panchayats to ensure their participation in the meetings. Attendance of all women must be made compulsory from Gram Panchayat to Zilla Parishad.
3. Women Leaders should be in a position to organize public meetings and address the gatherings to convey the messages to the public and canvass the government policies and programmes.
4. It is the duty of concerned officials to cooperate with the elected representatives irrespective of their party affiliation, gender, caste. It is observed that such cooperation is lacking in the case of women leaders. Hence the officials should be instructed to extend cooperation to women leaders.
5. While listening to the problems of public, women leader should give top priority to the problems pertaining to women. It is against the background of neglect of women, the reservations for women have come-up to help women folk.
6. Since women leaders are new to politics, there is an acute need to train them in the subject. As soon as they are elected, they must be trained in a reputed training centre about the

characteristics and nature of politics, methods of bureaucracy, addressing the gatherings etc.

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