

Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Area of Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract: *It is widely accepted that self governing institutions as the local level are essential for national growth and for effective people participation and that they are an integral and indispensable part of the democratic process. Grass roots of Democracy which is based on small units of government, enables people to feel a sense of responsibility and to inculcate the values of democracy. At the same time it also offers a unique opportunity to participate in public affairs, including development work. In a vast, diverse and complex, subcontinent, decentralization is also a political and administrative imperative. Self governing rural local bodies are described in the Indian context as institutions of democratic decentralization or Panchyati Raj. This was considered a political and administrative innovation of far-reaching importance when it was first introduced in 1959. It was depicted as a mechanism of popular participation. The Panchyati Raj bodies were expected to awaken political consciousness on the country side and to engender a democratic process in rural India. Women empowerment is the most used and discussed term today. The empowerment of women is becoming an increasingly popular term in human rights and developmental discourses. Women play significant role in all walks of life. Empowerment of women is a necessary basic condition for socioeconomic development of any society. Although women constitute one half of the population, they continue to be subjugated, unequal in socioeconomic and political status. Women have been struggling for self respect and autonomy. Since mid 1980,s owing to questioning by women themselves about their oppressed status and plight through varied women's movements, the issue of 'women empowerment' came in to focus.*

Women's participation may be used both for support by an agency and as a control device by the low markers. Participation may be direct, formal or informal; it may be political, social or administrative in nature. Women's participation in Panchayat Raj institution may take many forms. It refers to all those activities which show the women's involvement in the process and administration, that is participation in policy formation and programme planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes meant for development target groups in developing societies the traditional definition of people's participation often becomes irrelevant due to lack of time, initiative and resource of the citizen who fails to show the necessary enthusiasm or cooperation towards governmental programmes meant for their benefit the state not only plays the key role in attempts at social economic transformation and modernization but also in promoting, what is called institutional participation. Government aid the government sought to create an institutional infrastructure to promote popular participation. Panchayati Raj and community development programmes were introduced mainly so solicit women participation in the development programme was a method of soliciting community participation to assist the government authorities in improving the social economic and cultural life of the women in the rural areas.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN RURAL INDIA

I. Introduction

Empowerment of woman has been a subject of discussion in the contemporary world. So what does this empowerment mean? Empowerment occurs when someone who did not have power earlier is given power and this power make the person who is empowered experience a sense of ownership and control over sources. Empowered individuals must be made to realise that jobs belong to them. Given a say, the empowered must feel responsible. When they feel responsible, they show more initiative in their work, get more work done and enjoy the work more. Empowerment is facilitated by a combination of factors, including values, leadership action, job structure and the rewards system.

Women's empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men, to participate as a partner with human dignity in the development process of the society through the political institutions aims at enhancing their ability in the decision making process. It implies their participation beginning from voting to holding office and there by sharing power to effectively influence policy formation.

The concept of women empowerment has predominantly become a focus on political participation. The latter in turn in the context of the debate on the 81th constitutional amendment bill regarding reservation for women in Parliament, has become a restricted discourse on the role of women in formal representative institutions of decision-making, whether it is Panchayati Raj Institution or Parliament. In the process, empowerment of women emerges as an extremely limited concept. The fact that empowerment should imply a power to participate in the decision-making in all spheres of society, with no separation of the public and private and in all social, political, economic and cultural processes in society is completely obfuscated. The potentials of women remain largely unrecognized and their contributions are often overlooked. Several factors are responsible for women's low participation. The most important ones are literacy, traditionalism, prejudices, economic dependency and the unfavorable political structure, with its high rate of predominantly male incumbency and slow turnover. The dire need today is to remove the disparity between women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power. 2001 was the year of empowerment of women and was celebrated all over the world. We are now into the new century. The challenge before us now is not to just talk about the gender equality and awareness, but to initiate the process of transforming societies to turn away from gender discrimination. Empowerment includes overall development in terms of education, employment, legislative powers, decision-making power and health and awareness.

Empowerment of Women In India

The concept of empowerment flows from the power. It is vesting where it does not exist inadequately. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be comically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making. In India the ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD-1985) and the national Commission for women (NCW) have been worked to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. the 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women that for reservation of seats (33%) and findland 34.9% in India "the new panchayati raj" is the part of the effort to empower women at least at the village level.

The government of India has ratified various international convention and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women these are CEDAW (1993), the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward looking strategies (1985), The Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for Action (1995) and other such instruments. During the year, a landmark document has been adopted. "the National Policy For the empowerment of women". For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), food and Nutrition Board (FNB), information and Mass Education (IMF) etc.

The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At present all over India, there total 2056,882 laces gram panchayat members, out of this women members is 8,38,244 (40.48%), while total Anchalik panchayat members is 1,09,324, out of this women members is 47455 (40.41%) and total Zila parishad members is 11708 out of this women members is 4923 (42.05%). At the central and state levels too women are progressively making a difference. Today we have seen women chief ministers, women president, different political parties leader, well establish businessmen etc. the most notable amongst these are Mrs. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, Shila Dixit, Mayawati, Sushama sawraj, Samriti Irani, Basundhara Raje, Sonia Gandhi, Brinda karat, Nazma Heptulla, Indera Nuuye, Mamata Benarji, Jai Lalita, Medha patakar, Indian Iron women, Ex- prime minister smt. Indira Ghandi etc. women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education, health and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a rang of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-nOn of progress for a country, hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinks and reforms.

Evolution And Growth Of Panchayati Raj System In India

The Rig Veda, one of India's oldest sacred books and historical source mentions about the existence of village communities across the sub-continent that were self-governing and serving as the main interface between the predominantly agrarian village economies and their higher authorities. Such councils or assemblies called "sabhas" slowly assumed the form of the "Panchayat" (an assembly of five respected elders). These panchayats in north and south India became the pivot of administration, the focus of social solidarity and the principal forum for the dispensation of justice and resolution of local disputes. During the medieval and Mughal periods these characteristics of the village panchayats remained unchanged.

Panchayats in British India

In 1870, Lord Mayo, Governor General-in-Council secured the passage of a resolution for the decentralization of power aimed at bringing about greater administrative efficiency in meeting the demands of the people but primarily designed to augment imperial finances. At about the same time, a significant first step towards reviving the traditional village panchayat system in Bengal was taken through the Bengal Chowkidari Act, 1870, which empowered District Magistrates to set up Panchayats of nominated members in the villages. The *Ripon Resolution* of 1882 provided for rural local boards with two-thirds of membership to be composed of elected, non-official representatives and presided over by a non-official Chairperson. Actual progress in implementation was slow but the role of rural local administration was elevated and the term “self-government” gained currency.

In 1907, the government constituted a six-member Royal Commission on Decentralisation with Shri Ramesh Chandra Dutt as the only Indian member. The Report of the Royal Commission on Decentralisation, released in 1909, elaborated the principles enunciated in the Ripon Resolution and recognised the importance of Panchayats in the Governance of India. The Montagu -Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 brought local self-government under the domain of Indian Ministers in the provinces. To make local self-government both fully representative and responsible, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms suggested that there should be, as far as possible, complete popular control in local bodies and the largest possible independence for them from outside control. The Government of India Act, 1935 and the inauguration of provincial autonomy under it marked another crucial stage in the evolution of Panchayats. With popularly elected governments in the Provinces, almost all provincial administrations enacted legislation for further democratization of local self- government institutions, including the village Panchayats.

Panchayats in Post-Independence India

Article 40 of the Constitution of India included village Panchayats in Part IV of the Constitution which contain the non-mandatory Directive Principles of State Policy. It reads as follows:

“The state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.”

The legislative competence to enact laws to establish local bodies was given to States under Item 5 of List II of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Following Community Development projects in 1952, a historic breakthrough in establishing Panchayati Raj was effected in 1957 through the Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development Projects and National Extension Service, headed by Shri Balwantrai Mehta, which recommended that “Public participation in community works should be organized through statutory representative bodies.” The Team was of the view that without an agency at the village level that could represent the entire community, assume responsibility and provide the necessary leadership for implementing development programmes, real progress in rural development could not come about at all. Subsequently, the National Development Council endorsed the basic principles of democratic decentralization enunciated in the Balwantrai Mehta report and laid on States the duty of working out the structures suitable to each State. It was during this period that the term “Panchayati Raj” gained currency as a process of governance. In 1959 Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated Panchayati Raj on 2 October, 1959, at Nagaur in Rajasthan. By the mid-60s, Panchayats had been established in several States all over India in accordance with local state legislations. However, these were differentially empowered by these legislations. Women were not given any special representation through reservation in Panchayat bodies. Elections to these bodies were not held regularly and state governments often superseded them prematurely and placed them under administrators.

Later, the Asoka Mehta Committee Report of 1978 recommended that Panchayati Raj be included in the Constitution. In keeping with the spirit of the Asoka Mehta Committee recommendations, some States including West Bengal, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh revisited their respective Panchayati Raj systems and undertook several new initiatives to endow local bodies with more powers.

In May 1989, the Union Government introduced the Constitution (64th Amendment) Bill, which proposed constitutionally-sanctioned Panchayati Raj. Although both the 64th and 65th amendments (the latter dealing with Nagarpalikas) Bills received the required two-thirds majority with at least half the members present and voting in the Lok Sabha on 13 October 1989, the Bills failed by a handful of votes in the Rajya Sabha.

In 1991 the Union government introduced the 72nd (Panchayats) and 73rd (Nagarpalikas) Constitution Amendment Bills, based substantially on the earlier Bills moved in the Eighth Lok Sabha but also incorporating some changes. Both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha passed both Bills on the 22 and 23 Dec. 1992 respectively. By then, their sequence changed to the 73rd and 74th amendments respectively. Following their ratification by more than half the State Assemblies as required under the Constitution, the President of India

gave his assent and the Acts came into force as the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992 on 24th April 1993 and the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992 on 1 June 1993, adding two new Parts to the Constitution, namely, Part IX titled "The Panchayats" and Part IXA titled "The Municipalities"

Following the enactment of these amendments, all States except Jharkhand have conducted at least one election to the Panchayats at all levels. About 28 lakh Panchayat representatives have been elected to 2,39,544 PRIs (all three levels included). Of these 10.39 lakh representatives are women.

Panchayati Raj Institutions In Himachal

Panchayati Raj system in Himachal Pradesh was established under the provision of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1952 only 280 Gram Panchayats existed prior to the enactment of this Act. However, after the enactment of this Act 466 Gram Panchayat was established in the year 1954 and the number of Gram Panchayats were increased to 638 during the year 1962. On November 1, 1966, the hilly area of Punjab was merged in this state and consequently the number of Gram Panchayats increased to 1695. In the merged area, a three tier Panchayati Raj System was in existence under the provisions of Punjab Panchayat Sammiti and Zila Parishad Act, whereas two-tier system was prevalent in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

With a view to bring uniformity in the Panchayati Raj system in the old and the newly merged areas, the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj act, 1968 was enacted on November 15, 1970 and the two tier Panchayati Raj system was establishment throughout the state. Beside this the Nayaya Panchayats were also in the existence in the state for discharging judicially functions, but during the year 1977 Nayaya Panchayats were abolished and the judicial functions were transferred to the Gram Panchayats. After the enactment of the said Act in the year 1970 the existing Gram Sabha/Gram Panchayats were established. During the year 2005-2006 Gram Sabha circles, thereby raising the number to 3243 Panchayats.

Rational Of the Study

Women empowerment has been an ongoing debate in India and elsewhere. Indian women occupying a subordinate position to men need to be empowered to overcome social and economic discrimination. There were several attempts to improve the position of women after India got independence. The 73rd amendment Act is a major step towards political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions. This has resulted in the entry of large number of women into decision making bodies in the rural areas, who were otherwise home makers. The human development report relates empowerment to participation. It says that since development is for the people, they must participate fully in the decisions and processes that affect their lives (UNDP, 1995). To Oxfam empowerment means being able to challenge the existing oppression and inequality in society (Oxfam, 1995). Rowland's sees empowerment as a bottom-up process that cannot be formulated from top-down. To Rowland, empowerment does not only mean to have access to decision making but also able and entitled to occupy the decision-making space (Rowland, 1995). Batliwala defining it from a feminist perspective state women empowerment should result in (a) an understanding that both men and women are equal beings regardless of their gender. Using their full potentials can help construct a more humane society for all. And (b) men should give up the false value systems and ideologies of oppression in dealing with women (Batliwala, 1994).

The report of the committee on status of women in India, 1974, reported that since 1911, the condition of Indian women has worsened. Gender disparities were evident in employment, health, education and political participation. The new wave of decentralization in 1990's through 73rd and 74th constitution Amendments gave 33.33% representation for women in local governments. This was seen as a road to political empowerment and gender equity. This gave opportunity for a large number of women to enter into local governments and to be a part of decision making body. Democratic decentralization is a form of governance that expands subordinated group not only because of the proximity of local governments to the lives of ordinary women but because the lack of democracy in gender relation excludes them from participation in governance and the consideration of their interest in the business of governmental decision-making. The committee on the status of women, 1974, recommended reservation for women in local governments. Few committee members objected to this as it will reinforce separate identity for women. Lotika Sarkar and Vina Mazumdar in favour of the recommendation said that, equality of opportunities cannot be achieved in the face of the tremendous disabilities and obstacles which the social system imposes on all those sections whom traditional India treated as second class citizens. The application of the theoretical principle of equality in such situations merely means privileges for those who have them already and not for those who need them. Equality of opportunity cannot be achieved as there are obstacles in the social system. Decentralization with affirmative action was accepted as a means towards gender equity and political empowerment. The common problem in India is that not all states have devolved financial and administrative powers to the local government bodies. In many instances, planning. These factors limit the extent of participation. Except for Kerala, no other state had allotted the percentage of budget for women

development, making it difficult to press for decisions that would forward women's agenda. State has to provide more opportunity for gender equity measures. Gender advocates argue that the extent that decentralization creates management of resources it may benefit. Good number of women competing with men in local politics, forwarding gender related agendas is looked as a way towards gender equity.

In India and Himachal Pradesh a number of studies have been conducted on the issue of woman empowerment. There are wide differences in socio-economic and geographical conditions among regions resulting in variations for a meaningful analysis a single region has been taken to analyse the empowerment of woman through Panchayati Raj Institutions.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Though all efforts have been made to make the study meaningful and precise, yet on account of the shortage of time, an in-depth study analyzing different other relevant aspects of woman empowerment could not be taken up. A Primary survey, especially that where one man team is involved. Generally limits one to obtain simple responses on a schedule rather testing individuals with respect to their attitude, Value, intelligence etc. Finally, from the policy point of view it is quite difficult to generalize these findings as the sample came from only one Development Block of the District.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The focus of the study is to analyze the empowerment of the woman through representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Seraj Development Block of Mandi District in Himachal Pradesh. However to be precise following are the main objectives of the study.

1. To study the socio- economic background of the respondents.
2. To analyse the situation of women representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Seraj Development Block of Mandi district in Himachal Pradesh.
3. Does the woman representative are dictated by their counterparts in political matters.
4. To know the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

In this section a brief resume of the study has been presented in order to obtain a broad outline of the present study. For analytical and clarity the study is divided into four well defined parts. The first part begins with the concept of woman empowerment and evolution and development of Panchayati Raj Institutions. In Addition to introduction rational of the study, objectives and limitations of the study have also been discussed in this chapter. In second part various studies have been reviewed in order to provide a perspective to the present study. Data base, methodology and sampling procedure has also been discussed in this chapter. Third part presents a detailed discussion and analysis of the empirical study. The fourth part summarized the major findings of the study and the broad policy implications drawn from the analysis has also been presented there.

II. Review of Literature And Methodology

A large number of studies have been conducted on the issue of women empowerment in Indian and abroad by the government and individuals. A few studies have been reviewed in this chapter with a view to have an idea about the empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

RAO (1996) found that women are changing the governance in India. They are being elected to local councils in an unprecedented numbers as a result of amendments to the constitution that mandate the reservation of seats for women in local governments. In India, we call this new system the Panchayat Raj Institution System. The women whom Panchayat Raj Institutions has brought in politics are now governing, be it in one village, or a large area such as 100 villages or a district. This process of restructuring the national political and administrative system started as recently as January 1994, and thus it is too early to assess the impact of women's entry in formal structure of the government. The Sheer number of women that Panchayati Raj Institutions has brought into the political system has made a difference. The percentages of women at various levels of political activity have shifted dramatically as a result of the constitutional change, from 4-5 percent before to 25-30 percent after. But the difference is also qualitative, because these women are bringing their experience in the governance of civil society. In this way they are making the state sensitive to the issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice.

Palanithuri (1997) in a case study 'New Panchayati Rj System at Work: An Evaluation of Tamil Nadu' reported that they were not informed or invited to the meetings in male headed Gram Panchayat. Women members have always projected the issues relating to women empowerment. It is women that the husbands of the members used to accompany them (women) when they come to attend the meetings.

According to **Pai (1998)** to his field noted in Meetut District Pradhans in New Panchayats revealed that many of the Pradhans were illiterate and only able to put their signature on official papers. Regarding their roles, the study revealed that they were almost insignificant in the functioning of Gram and Block Panchayats bodies. As they belonged to better off families in the villages, they do not work outside their homes. They agreed to stand for elections due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because they were keen to do so. The reservations provided by the Government had forced of them to contest elections, provisions of reservation has not them to participate in decision- making in local bodies.

Nambiar (2001) in her study of making the Gram Sabha noted the difference utilities in organizing the Gram Sabha. Majority of women reported that they were not informed or invited to the meetings. While some other members were filling hesitant in participating in the presence of a large number of elder members. However, they have to forego their day's wages or household duties just to future.

Mandal (2003) assessed social and political background of women members in one district of West Bengal, evaluated various facts of their participation and roll performance in Panchayati Raj Institutions ,ascertains the nature ,their social acceptability and informs both the positive and negative aspects of reservation policy for women .The study brought fourth exclusive and absorbing features ;women members are not dummy or;their participation both at formal panchayat processes and informal level is no exalting .

Singh (2004) found that in Hariyana relatively younger women have begun repacing older ones .Reservation of women has led to formal empowerment of women in panchayat and the emergence of new women's leadership these women have been able to participate considerably in deciding day to day activities.

Sharma (2004) also observed that after the year 2000, with panchayat elect in Himachal Pradesh ,there has been an increased participation of women in grass roots governance. The state government is also committed to reservation in the leadership structure of the community to give women their long overdue share of power so that they can exert pressure and exercise authority in the decision making prices.

Methta and Sinha (2007) found that political workers use their strategies by influencing women members .It is in the case of schedule tribe and schedule cast women do file their candidature for panchayat elections out of their own choice,whereas some other factors are responsible for it like pressure of their husbands ,son ,other male members of the family ,village or pressure of political parties .The violence of caste war in some regions dominates the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions elections social restrictions, traditional concepts on women,women get setback in participation .Household responsibility also restricts the mobility of women. Apart from these ,various women in various states of India have used their participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions to engage in development work in their respective councils in the new Panchayati Raj Institution system in India.They are changing governance in India. It is found that 33% women respondents wre elected in 2001in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Jammu Province.

Singh (2008) in a study conducted on rural women in shimla, (Himachal Pradesh) revealed that full development may not be achieved unless women and the resources represent are fully migrated into the development and women empowerment as a tool to sustain the development as an ongoing process. The author also highlighted the problems of the concept of Pati Panchayat or proxy rules by husband.

Koul and sahani (2009) observed that women want to work for the society, and raise their points and views in the Panchayat meetings. But they fail to do so as koul and sahani found that sometimes some factors like their inability in motivation their colleagues, frustration of not being heard may discourage their participation. They also sometimes unable to take decision in the meeting because of shyness, unaware about the agenda and the belied of only male can take right decision.

Phukan (2010) found that there is an active participation of women member of Jorhat Zila Parishad. Majority of women attend the meeting conducted by Zila Parishad. Those who cannot attend meeting are only for domestic work. Women always raise their voice in discussion, talk on issues like water supply, medical faculty, educational and training, agriculture, different women issues etc. but they were unable to take any decision due to numerical strength.

Haziraka (2011) studied the issue of women empowerment in India and found that during post –vedic and epic age the women were treated as slave. But after early twenty century (Natiional Movement) their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. After independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demanded equal social position of women with men. Yet they have not absolutely free of some discrimination and harassment of the society. Only a few women have been able to establish their potentialities.

Pandey(2013) in a study concluded that the inclusion of well qualified women in village panchayats at the initial state of the interlocution of panchayati raj institution in rural areas would be an important instrumental measure in planning for improving social status and empowering women. This group of well qualified women can play dominant role in decision making process and make suitable recommendation for improving the status of women in the meeting. It creates opportunities for women to exercise more control over design and provisions of services and the management of resources it may benefit.

Nandal (2013) conducted a study on the sample of 50 women respondents from village Anwali District Sonipat, Haryana, India. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted for selection the sample from different wards of the village. Interview schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents. Analysis revealed that the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women was not satisfactory. Participation level of women in Gram Panchayats only limited, only to remain as voter. Some of the women respondents even do not know the functioning of Gram panchayat. In Gram Panchayat election their husband and family decided that to whom they have to give vote, women do not have their own choice.

Agnihotri and Singh (2014) made an attempt to analyse the situation of women representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Himachal Pradesh. They found that with the increasing violence against women in the society it is necessary to find out the problems of our society regarding women and give valuable suggestions to deal with the problem and to give a step to move forward in the direction of women empowerment. Women play several roles like mother, wife, sister and daughter in the society.

Jayalakshmi(1997) in her empirical study conducted in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh on all women panchayats, found that the women representatives were able to identify the village needs and assist each other in accomplishing them. To a great extent these women have made efforts to gain the confidence of all sections of the village. They abide by the rules and follow procedures pertaining to the functioning of the panchayat.

In another case of Sushma Mahjan Pradhan of Dohab Panchayat, Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh, even if her husband offered advice and guided her occasionally, she grew out of the traditional role of being confined, to taking decisions within her husband and made the quantum leap to address the development needs of her community. Another case is of Bhikhi Devi, Sarpanch of Bait Block of Barmer District, and Rajasthan. The quality of work carried out under her leadership set her panchayat apart and was recognized by the Zila Praishad officials. She was awarded by the National Commission of women on March 8, International Women's Day.

However many studies like that of Agnimitra (1996), Ghosh (1997), Prashad (1999), Bohra (1997) and Rajeshwari (1996) etc.. Have concluded that usually these women are merely proxy candidates and the male members actually exercise the real power. Many studies have been undertaken on the impact of reservation for women in PRIs. According to a few studies they have been doing a fine job; however, most of these studies have concluded that usually these women are merely proxy candidates with the male members actually wielding the real power.

Data Base and Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data which is the base of the study has been collected by interview schedule. The data is collected by the investigator from the field. An interview schedule was framed to collect the primary data. Secondary data were collected from different official publication and various government records. Simple statistical tools that is average, percentage and ranking have been used while tabulation and analysis of data.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

In Mandi District there are Ten Development Blocks. From these ten development Blocks Seraj(Janjehali) development block is purposively selected as it is the most rural, far flung and Backward Area development block of Mandi District and the literacy rate of this block is also below average of the District (Census,2011). This Development Block falls in the high hill zone of the district and therefore the topography, climatic conditions, access to recourses as well as the cropping pattern, income and consumption pattern in this block is quite different to rest of the district. For the selection of Gram Panchayats in this development block is 50% of those Gram Panchayats have been selected those are headed by a female president (Panchayat Election, 2015) by using stratified random sampling, strata being the level of education.

Out of total 45 Gram Panchayats 23 are headed by females, hence 12 Gram Panchayats have been taken for empirical investigation. In order to select the ward members from different wards of Gram Panchayat stratified random sampling method has been used again. Out of total 300 women ward members 30(10%) have been taken. Moreover 2% of the rural women of those Gram panchayats where, there is female Panchayat President were interviewed regarding their awareness on function of panchayat and women empowerment. Along with Gram Panchayat President, ward members and rural women all the female elected Block Development Committee members and Zila Prarishad members has also been interviewed directly by the investigator.

Hence the total sample size is 95 comprising 12 Gram Panchayat President, 30 ward members 50 rural women and 3 Block Development Committee member and Zila Parishad member.

III. Analysis And Interpretation

Historical Background

The history of Himachal Pradesh goes back to the period of earliest existence of human civilization in this part of the world. There adequate evidence of human civilization in this part of the world. There adequate evidence to prove this fact those historical remains is found in the area traversed by the Bangana Valley of Kangra, Markanda Valley of Sirmour, Sirsa Satluj Valley of Nalagarh Bilaspur etc. on the basis of typological comparisons with similar tools found in the Indian Peninsular region these seems to be at least 4000 years old. This is a common believed that natural vegetation animal life, raw material in the form of river pebbles and readily available fiver water attracted men to settle around river valleys since metal was not known then. Men utilized stones for making his livelihood.

The earlier inhabitants of Himachal Pradesh as mentioned earlier were recognized in the Vedas as Dasas, Dasyus, Nishads etc. In prehistoric times, outside the Indus Valley, the Indo- Gangetic plains was inhabited by Prot- Australoid or say Munda speaking Kolarian people of Indus Valley spread through the Gangetic Plains, they pushed forward the Kolarian people. They later moved to the forests and Valleys where they could live peacefully and preserve their way of life. Thus they move northward to Himachal Valley and were known as Kasyus. In the post Vedic literature they were mentioned as Kinners, Nagas and Yakshas. The Kols have been considered the earliest and original migrants to Himachal Hills. It is a common believed among modern historians that the Kolls, Hali, Doms, Chanal of the Chumangs and Damangs of Kinnaur and Lahaul & Spiti are the remnants of this race according to the literature to rig Vedic period.

The second race to enter in Himachal Hills was Mongolian people called Bhotass and Kirats in Indian literature at present they are found in the highest regions of Himachal Pradesh. The third race to enter in Himachal Hills was Aryans probably 1500 B.C, come to be known as Khashas, who mere considered to be Kshatriyas. The original home of the Aryans was in central Asia. When they left their homes they moved to the middle belt of the Himalays and established colonies in the hill and valleys of Kashmir, Himachal, Gharwal and Nepal.

In the later ages some Vedic saints and sages with sages with their sisciples came to the low Hill Valleys as peaceful settlers and established their hermitages in several places. Among them the established lake in Sirmour is associated with Rishi Jamdagini, The Vashishta lake Kully Valley with Parshuram etc. The Mahabharta refers to four Janpadas in the Himalaya- Audumbra, Trigarta, Kuluta nad kulind founded by khasas. Of these Trigarta and kuluta are identifind with present dya kangra and kully. Trigarta finds mention in the mahabharta, the Vedas and the work of Panini. Rivers of Himachal Chenab, rave, Beas and Satluj are mentioned in the vedic literature as Askini, Parushni, Vipasha and Shatudri respectively.

On 15 April 1948 the state of Himachal Pradesh come into existence as chief commissioner's Province by putting together twenty six Shimla Hill states and four Punjab Hill states with its headquarters in the historical building of British foreign office at Shimla which was later destroyed in a devastating fire on 5th may 1957.

Administrative division that were on 15th April 1948

S. No	District	Tehsils
1	Chamba	(i) Chmba (ii) Churah (iii) Bhatiyat (iv) Brampur(sub tehsil (v) Pangi(sub tehsil)
2	Mandi	(i) Mandi Sadder (ii) Chachiyot (iii) Saraka Ghat (iv) joginder Nagar (iv) Sunder Nagar (vi) Karsog
3	Sirmour	(i) Nahan (ii) Ponta (iii) Renuka (iv) Pachhad
4	Mahasu	(i) Arki (ii) Solan (iii)Kasumati (iv) Theog (v) Kumar Sain (vi) Ranpur (vii) Roharu (viii) Chine (ix)Jubbel (xi)Suni

Source: Himachal Pradesh Jagmohan Balokhara

On July 1954, The part "c" state of Bilaspur was marged with Himachal Pradesh as The 5th distict namely : Bilaspur.

On 1st November, 1956 Himachal become Union Territory under an administrator designated Lieutenant Governor and first occupant od this post was, Raja Bajrang Bhadur Singh.

On the intergration of Punjab Hill areas with Himachal Pradesh in 1966 district Lahul & Spiti, Shimla, Kangra and Kullu district were formed in the new administrative divisions.

On the Notification of dated 29 August,1972 No.3-32/71-GAC some district were reorganized as follows:- Mahasu and Shimla District were reorganized District name Shimla and other District as : District Solan, District Kangra, distict Hamirpur and District Una.

Economic Profile of State

The state development report of Himachal Pradesh justifiable claims that Himachal Pradesh scores high on indices a of human development (Human Development Report, 20009) The educational achievements of the state are impressive: its health indicators are generally better than those for the country as a whole and have been successful in substantially reduced the poverty to a lower it has been able to promote gender equity to a substantial extent as well consistently high public contributing to Its success on human development font.

During the last four decades or so, the economy of Himachal Pradesh on the basis of economic growth in comparison to national average passed through different phases. The economy of state grew at almost 3 per cent per annum during sixth plan. It was 2.3 percentage point lower than that of the national average, Further the sate grew at 8.8, 6.3 and 6.4 percent during seventh, eighth and ninth five year plan respectively, and During the 1990,s Himachal's economic growth roughly matched with that of the national average. But during tenth five year plan the state's economy recorded a lower growth rate than that of national average. During eleventh five year plan the state economy grew at 8.1 per cent as compared to national average of 7.9 percent. Thus the state economy during tenth the previous three five year plans.

Himachal Pradesh has emerged as a leading economy in the country and is also a leader in hill area development, agriculture and horticulture revolution. Himachal Pradesh is and ideal destination for investment in power and tourism. Responsive administration and conductive macro economic conditions have included a competitive environment in the economy and has led to a roost economic performance in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

In Himachal Pradesh, agriculture, horticulture and around husbandry are main occupations of the people .While upper Himachal famous for apple, apricot and walnut the lower4 part of the state an its niche in citrus fruits. As land holdings and small and hill farming is incapable of mass production people are shifting to cash crops. Seed Potato, off season green peas and vegetables, floriculture, exotic vegetables and fruits are emerging as new money earners. Tourism is another income generating activity.

Historical background of Mandi District

The present district of Mandi was formed with merged of the princely states Mandi State and Suket (Sundernagar) on the 15th April 1948 , when the state of Himachal Pradesh was established. Ajar Sain assonated Mandi, it led to beginning of modern period of Mandi history.

Himachal background of Development Block Seraj of Mandi District :

On the 15 April 1948 when the Himachal Pradesh become o existence. The Seraj Development bock was the part of Chachiyot tehsil of Mandi District. The main headquarter of development block Seraj is situated at Janjehali 85 km far from Mandi town. The total Gram panchayats of Seraj are 45. There are ton of places to visible for tourist like Janjehli, Bhulah, Gadagusain, Shikari Devi Shet Dhar, where one can't deny visiting there. There are many religious places in Seraj area like Shikari Mata temple, Sheti Nag temple, Dev Kandha (Bada Deo Mataloda) temple, Chunjwala Dev Temple, Tungasi Garh Temple and Jalapa Mata Temple Gadagusain etc. All said temples are situated in the highest hills in Mandi district. The all peoples of Seraj used the local language named Seraji Bhasha. Culture of Seraj is different from another part of Mandi District. Seraj is also known as Apple Valley of Mandi District.

Socio-Economic Profile of Mandi District

Table 3.1 Presents the administrative profile of Mandi District. There are 10 developments Block in Mandi District, 16 Tehsils and sub Tehsils, 469 gram panchayats and one statuary town. Total village in Mandi District is 3308 among the total village 2833 inhabited village and 505 Uninhabited Villages. Total geographical aria of Mandi District is 3950 sq.km.

TABLE – 3.1: Administrative profile of Mandi District

Sr. No	Item	Number in Mandi District
1	Development Block	10
2	Tehsil/Sub Tehsil	16
3	Gram Panchayat	469
4	Statuary Town	1
5	Inhabited Villages	2833
6	Uninhabited villages	505
7	Total Villages	2308
8	Area	3950 Sq.Km

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, State Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh, Directorate to Economics and Statistics, Shimla.

Table 3.2 Presents demographic profile of Mandi District. The table shows us that the total population of Mandi District is 999777(male 498065 and female 501712). Total population rural is 937140 and urban is 62637.

TABLE – 3.2 Demographic Profile of the Mandi District

Sex	Mandi District			Himachal Pradesh		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Male	32015	466050	498065	311525	31210345	3481873
Female	30622	471090	501712	317024	3065705	3382729
Persons	62637	937140	999777	688552	6176050	6864602

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, State Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh, Directorate to Economics and Statistics, Shimla.

Table 3.3 Presents the sex Ratio of Himachal Pradesh and Mandi District. Table shows us the total sex ratio in Himachal Pradesh is 972 (Urban 986 and rural 853), Mandi District total 1007 (urban 1011 and rural 956).

TABLE -3.3 Sex Ratio in Himachal Pradesh

	Mandi District	Himachal Pradesh
Urban	1011	986
Rural	956	853
Total	1007	972

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, State Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh, Directorate to Economics and Statistics, Shimla.

Table 3.4 Presents sex ratio of Himachal Pradesh and Mandi District.

The table shows that total sex ratio (0-6 age group) in Mandi District are 916 (Rural 879 and Urban 918) And Himachal Pradesh total sex ratio is 909 (Rural 881 and Urban 912)

TABLE-3.4: Sex Ratio (0-6 age group) in Himachal

	Mandi District	Himachal Pradesh
Urban	918	912
Rural	879	881
Total	916	909

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, State Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh, Directorate to Economics and Statistics, Shimla.

Table 3.5 Presents schedule cast population of Himachal Pradesh and Mandi district. Total schedule cast population rural 1606535, urban 122717 and male 876300, female 852952. Total schedule cast population of Mandi District is 293694 among the total schedule cast population Rural 280580, Urban 13159 and male 147205, female 146489.

TABLE-3.5: Scheduled Caste Population in Himachal Pradesh

	Mandi District			Himachal Pradesh		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Rural	140605	139975	280580	812072	794463	1606535
Urban	6645	6514	13159	64228	58489	122717
Total	147205	146489	293694	876300	852952	1729252

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, State Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh, Directorate to Economics and Statistics, Shimla.

Table 3.6 Presents literacy rate in Himachal Pradesh and Mandi District. The total literacy rate of Himachal Pradesh 83.80 among the total rural literacy rate is 81.85 urban literacy rate is 91.10 and male 89.53, female 75.93.

TABLE- 3.6: Literacy Rate in Himachal Pradesh

	Mandi District			Himachal Pradesh		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Rural	89.20	72.64	80.84	89.05	74.62	81.85
Urban	94.06	88.98	91.56	93.42	88.37	91.10
Total	89.56	73.66	81.53	89.53	75.93	83.80

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, State Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh, Directorate to Economics and Statistics, Shimla.

Table 3.7 Presents women participation in Panchayati Raj institution in Development block Seraj of Mandi District general Panchayati raj election 2015. Total Panchayat president in Seraj Block is 45 among the 45 male presidents is 22 and female president is 23 percentages of women participation is 51.11. Total ward member in Seraj block is 545 male member is 270 and female member is 275 the percentage of women participation 55.05. Total block development committee member in Seraj is 21 among the 21 member male 10 and female 11 the percentage of women participation is 55.52. Total Zila Parishad member in Seraj Block is 3 on e member is women and other two members is men the percentage of women participation is 33.

TABLE – 3.7: Women Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Seraj

Designation	Male	Female	Total	Percentage Of Women
President	22	23	45	51.11
Vice-President	45	00	45	0
Ward Member	275	270	545	55.05
Block Development Committee Member	10	11	21	56.52
Zila Parishad Member	2	1	3	33

Source: B.D.O. Office, Seraj Development Block, Janjehali, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh.

Empirical Analysis

Table 3.8 Presents the age wise classification of the respondents. A perusal of the table reveals that out of total sample 45 of female respondent (47.37 percent) belonged to 18.30 years of age group. 36.84 percent belonged to middle age group (31.50). Only 15.79 percent respondents were from the age group of above fifty This classification shows that majority of the respondents belongs to young age which is good sign for democracy and same trend has been observed in the demographic profile of Himachal Pradesh and India. Hence it may be said that the selected sample represents the actual picture of population classification in Himachal Pradesh.

TABLE – 3.8: Age Wise Classification of Respondents

Age Group(Years)	Number	Percentage (%)
Young Age (18.30)	45	47.37
Middle Age (31-50)	35	36.84
Aged (Above 50)	15	15.79
Total	95	100

Source: Calculated from Primary Data.

Table 3.9 Depicts the marital status of the selected respondents 84.21 percent respondents were married, 10.35 percent unmarried and 5.26 percent women were widow. The result shows that marital status does not affect the women participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

TABLE – 3.9: Distribution of Household Population on the Basis of Marital Status

Marital Status	Number	Percentage (%)
Married	80	84.21
Unmarried	10	10.53
Widow	5	5.26
Total	95	100

Source: Calculated from Primary Data.

Table 3.10 shows that out of the total sample of 95 women majority of women 62.01 percent were from upper caste or general caste followed by scheduled caste 25.26 percent and other backward classes 12.63 percent. So caste system does not affect the participation rate of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

TABEL – 3.10: Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Caste

Caste	Number	Percentage (%)
General (Upper Caste)	59	62.01
Scheduled Caste	24	25.26
Scheduled Tribe	00	00
Other Backward Caste	12	12.63
Total	95	100

Source: Calculated from Primary Data.

Table 3.11 depicts the majority of the respondents 57.89 percent were senior secondary passed. 17.89 percent were studied up to metric level followed by graduate level 15.79 percent and 8.43 percent respondents were post graduate and above . Not even a single respondent was illiterate. Classification of respondents on the basis of their educational qualification shows that educational level of Seraj Development Block is quite impressive which is pre- requisite for empowering women and an essential tool to bring awareness among women regarding working, functions and powers of Panchyati Raj Institutions.

TABLE-3.11: Education Qualification of the Respondents

Educational Qualification	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	00	00
Primary	00	00
Matric	17	17.89
Senior Secondary	55	57.89
Graduate	15	15.79
Post Graduate and above	8	8.43
Total	95	100

Source : Calculated from primary Data.

Empowerment is facilitated by a combination of factor, including values, leadership action, job structure and the reward system .Education is the only mean by which all these values are inculcated. For ensuring active participation in any activity one must have complete Knowledge. Unless and until one is aware of her rights and duties they cannot practice the same. Thus for ensuring participation of woman in the grass root level democracy which is at Panchyati Raj Institutions of course regarding their role in the panchayats. Family status of the respondents has been shown in **Table 3.12** It is clearly evident from the table that 80 percent of the respondents are living in nuclear family and only 20 per cent are living families.

TABLE-3.12: Family Status of the Respondents

Type of family	Number o Respondent	Percentage (%)
Nuclear Family	76	80
Joint Family	19	20
Total	95	100

Source: Calculated from Primary Data

Table 3.13 shows that majority of woman respondents family were engaged in agriculture for livelihood followed by 20.05 per cent respondents family in governments job and after that 12.63 per cent and 10.53 per cent respondents family were engaged in private job and other occupations respectively . The table clearly shows that agriculture sector is still dominant sector of the economy of Sera Development Block In addition to Agriculture, Horticulture, Floriculture and live stock are also included in agriculture sector.

TABLE-3.13: Source of Income of the Respondents Family

Occupation	Number of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	50	52.63
Government job	20	21.05
Private job	12	12.63
Business	10	10.53
Other	3	3.16
Total	95	100

Source: Calculated from Primary Data.

Empowerment of woman through political participation helps in getting idea about woman’s socio economic status as well as the involvement in electoral process in local bodies, because the participation of woman in political ground is utmost necessity in present day. Factors like sexual division of labour, exclusion of woman from certain positions and level of labour, poor representation in decision making etc. Keep away

woman participation and politics Some other causes for low participation includes poor education level less support from guardians, shyness ,family and society

Participation of rural woman in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Seraj Development Block of Mandi District in Himachal Pradesh is as found similar to that of the status of woman in other parts of India, due to the sake of reservation it was found that the woman just go for participation either dictated by their male counterpart who is her husband, brother or father etc. The male counterpart does all the functioning of the gram Panchayat in the name of female elected member. The elected female members of the gram Panchayat seldom take active part in Gram Sabha and if they participate in the meeting they have no day. Then details of the main finding from the study area are discussed in Table 14, and 15.

In Seraj Development Block in the three tier system of Panchayati Raj Institution we have in total 545 Ward members, 45 Gram Panchayat President and Vice President each, 23 Block Development Committee members and 2 Zila Parishad Members. That is in total we have 647 of representatives in the three tier system of Panchayati Raj Institutions (Table 3.7). Among these elected members a good number of females' representatives' area also there .The active participation of female elected members in gram panchayats is considered taking the awareness percentage and involvement percentage of the females in different activity under the three tier system of Panchayat Raj Institutions .For insuring participation of women in the grass root democracy of course requires first of all the awareness of aware respondents of the rural elected representative regarding three tier system of panchayats as found is shown in **Table 3.14**.

TABLE-3.14: Awareness Level of the Respondents' about the Panchayat Raj (Panchayat Election, 2015)

Sr. No	Awareness	Elected Respondents saying YES	Rural Women Respondents saying YES
1	Knowledge of Panchayat Raj Act 73 rd amendments	30	5
2	Source of Income of Panchayat	50	30
3	Power and works of Panchayat	70	20
4	Seats reserved for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, State Assembly and Parliament	70	25

Source: Calculate from Primary Data.

The Table shows that respondents have very less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institutions .They have very little knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Act73 amendment. It is found that 50 to70 percent of rural elected female members area aware regarding the structure, source of income and functions of Panchayats .70 percent of the elected members have the knowledge of women right and seats reserved for women in Panchayati Raj Institution, state assembly and parliament . While in case of rural women respondents the level of knowledge and awareness regarding function, powers of Panchayat and regarding women empowerment is very low as shown in Table column no 4 This implies that both the women who are the general rural women and who are elected as Panchayat members keeps very less information regarding the structure and function of Panchayati Raj institutions and even regarding their rights and empowerment.

However, amongst the elected members of Panchayati Raj institution, the elected members of Block Development committees and Gram Panchayat President are found to be more aware than that of ward members. So we found less awareness of the respondents about various issues of Panchayati Raj Institutions and constitutional bodies. This poor level of awareness is due to the existing illiteracy among the rural women, secondly, they are also politically illiterate and thus are not politically conscious, thirdly, they are dependent on their male counterpart and thus, finds no need of gathering knowledge of have no queries too. In such a stand where complete awareness is far behind cent percent, to ensure complete involvement of the female participation is a far behind dream.

Table 3.15 shows that majority of respondents (rural women) participated in the election as voter. 35 percent respondents participated to support any political party. Only 10 per cent respondents participated as a campaigner in the Panchayat election. When the questions were asked from the respondents about their own choice, interestingly most of their response shows that they casted.

Their vote which was decided by their husband rather they only know the symbol of the political party which was told by their husband.

TABLE-3.15: Mode of Electoral Participation of Women in Panchayat Election Rural Women
(Panchayat election, 2015)

Participation	Percentage of Respondents Saying Yes
As a voter	90%
Supporter of political party	35%
As a campaigner	10%
As a candidate	4%

Source: Calculated from primary Data.

It is found that the most of the rural women participated in Panchayati raj Institutions since the seat is reserved for women. The Participation as ward member, gram Panchayat president is hundred per cent for women reservation. While taking with the elected female members it was found that earlier in these seats their male counterpart either husband, father, brother or uncle was elected and now since it is reserved so they are participating now. It has two interpretations firstly, since the seat is being reserved for women now, at least they could name out of their domestic bindings and participate which secondly widens the path for women empowerment. Though complete participation without the seat is reserved is still to be achieved. The women now who has been elected can enjoy the joy of treating equality in respect of participating in Panchayat raj Institutions and thus participating in grass root level democracy as well find her status. However it is also found that the participation in.

The Panchyati raj institution is mostly influenced by their male counterpart. Thus it is found that due to the sake of 50 per cent reservation we are having rural women mostly participating in the panchayats or in the grass root level democracy. It is no doubt a good sign at least on the one hand they are getting an equal treatment in respect of filling nomination for the seats in grass root level democracy. On the other hand this participation is ensuring women empowerment as we have found that a good number of women are self motivated to participation in the Panchayat elections and a good number of them use to speak a take decisions in the meeting of Gram Sabha. Tough it is also found that this participation is coming from the top of the Panchayat president and Zila Parishad members are more educated than that of the ward members Higher is the education level higher come the participation rate. Again another thing to be mentioned here is that the gram Panchayat presidents who are motivated to participate by their duties as they are participating in the meeting as well also taking decisions. This is no doubt a positive sign of women empowerment and participation of women in grass root level democracy.

IV. Conclusion And Policy Implications

Considering the involvement and domination of women in different activities, historical experiences regarding their participation in various regional movements associated to different level and pattern of awareness about the regional development and maintaining traditional value system and having relatively better educational attainment it is expected that the introduction of Panchayati raj institutions and reservation policy for women in the Panchyati could be an important instrumental measure of achieving improvement in the socio economic status and strengthening the empowerment women in Seraj development block, However the motive of policy introduction an empowerment would mainly depend upon its implementing process, socio-economic and political background and characteristics of elected women representatives in the gram panchayats factors such as the attitude and intention of elected women towards the initiation of various development programmers and capacity in making efforts in linking different segments of village population with the introduction programmers also matter very much in improving the status of women representatives in the social environment of the gram panchayats. As a consequence this process would lead to increase and strength empowerment of woman.

Main findings of the study

The present study entitled empowerment of women through reservation in Panchayati raj institutions in Seraj development block of Himachal Pradesh is a study conducted to know the Awareness and constitutional knowledge of women in Panchayati rah institutions. The study has been conducted on 95 respondents from Seraj development block of Mandi district in Himachal Pradesh on the Panchayati raj election 2015. Out of total 65 respondents , 45 were elected members of three tier Panchayati raj institutions and the remaining were rural women of the female heads gram Panchayat respondents were selected on the basis of stratified random sampling strata being the level of education the main findings of the study are as under;

1. When we analyzed all the data collected from the respondents we found that majority of respondents participate in the electoral process as a voter.
2. From this study we found that respondents have very less awareness about the Panchyati raj act 73rd amendment. They know that every village have a Panchayat which works for the development of village but they do not know the various power, works etc. of the Panchayats.

3. They have a little knowledge about the reservation of seats for women in gram Panchayats. During this survey we found that most of our respondents cast their vote to that candidate whom their husband chose. Even they do not have that right to cast their vote for their own choice.

Today we have different acts and schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education and also reproductive healthcare women are found to be economically very poor all over the A few Women are engaged in services and other activities.

Policy Implications

The Present study has many policy implications. It has been observed that women are found to be less literate than man. According to 2011 census, the rate of literacy among men in Himachal Pradesh is found to be 89.53 per cent whereas it is only 75.93 per cent among women. Thus increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has been considered that the inclusion of well qualified women in Gram Panchayati Raj Institutions in rural areas would be an important instrumental measure in planning for improving social status and empowering women. This group of women, if provided representation at Gram Panchayat level can strongly rise in the issue related to the empowerment of women, can play dominant role in decision making process and make suitable recommendation for improving the status of women in the meeting. It creates opportunities for women to exercise more control over design and provisions of services and the management of resources it may benefit. Good number of competing with men in local politics forwarding gender related agendas is looked as a way towards gender equity. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger.

Another problem is harassment of women at their work place. For this reason, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few woman are engaged in services and other activities So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men.

In conclusions it can be said that though complete active participation of women is yet to be achieved in grass root level democracy but stills it cannot be ignored that the rural women of this are becoming know more active in their duties they are also contributing to the development in the Panchayats.

However it is to be noted that in order to bring all the women force in the mainstream of development they should be more conscious of their rights as well as the benefits that they can enjoy which are meant for them .They must be more politically conscious to ensure their complete participation in democracy. Thus, these huge human forces which are women have to be made more aware and of course education can play here a significant role. By organizing camps, programmers in television, radio the government as well the NGOs can come forward to make the rural women enlighten about their rights, about framework of panchayats and other institutions so that there comes cent percent active participation of rural women in democracy. This will no doubt make the dream of our country to have an inclusive growth all runoff .When the rural women will be good enough to understand their need in participation in democracy and confidence enough to take their own decision hope reservation may not be required to bring the women participation in democracy.

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