

**PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN
PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A STUDY
OF JORHAT ZILLA PARISHAD**

BY

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I, Shivani Phukan, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.

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PREFACE

Since independence, in India various initiatives have been undertaken for bringing improvements to the socio-economic condition and status of women. The Constitution of India provides a framework of participatory democracy and has guaranteed various socio-economic and political measures to ensure equality. Yet it has been realized that women remain marginalized, disadvantaged and underrepresented in the political spheres. This realization has made the policy planners to think in terms of providing space to women in local self governance. Empowerment through representation to that regard constitutes an essential input in the development of status of women in society. The policy of providing 33% of reservation of seats to women, in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by the 73rd Amendment Act (1993), in that context can be regarded as an important governmental intervention.

Though the 73rd Amendment Act has been hailed as an important landmark in the constitutional development in creating wider base for participatory democracy and more space for political participation of women, various studies and research works have pointed out that it did not bring positive results to the desired direction.

The object of the present study is to analyze whether increased numerical strength in political spheres has brought any substantial change in

the position and status of women. This work covers Jorhat Zilla Parishad which is one of the three tier PRIs of Jorhat district located in the north-eastern part of Assam. The study has attempted to analyze the participation of women as elected members in Jorhat Zilla Parishad (JZP), and their role at the various levels of activities of JZP. Participation in this study is seen in terms of their involvement in the process of decision making, implementation and evaluation. This is an empirical study primarily based on the responses of the elected members of Jorhat Zilla Parishad both male and female, obtained through interviews.

This work would not have been possible without the help and assistance of several individuals and institutions.

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CHAPTER I

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PROCESS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term 'participation' is a widely used concept and interpreted differently by different scholars. It has been used in terms of involvement, interaction, influence, self-help, empowerment and self reliance. 'Participation' is viewed either as a goal to achieve a milestone or set targets or it is seen as a means to achieve the goal. It is a performance oriented concept, and has to be understood in the context in which it is being used.

Available literature on participation indicates that with the growth of development studies the concept of participation has received scholarly attention. In India, the concept of 'popular participation' was promoted both by Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the 1950s and 1960s. The need of people's involvement in development and community projects was highlighted by them as a pre-requisite for the success of micro level development programmes. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, multilateral agencies such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) also began to put emphasis on popular participation in development projects and programmes and thus the concept "of the people by the people and for the people" took a concrete shape. In recent years, a large numbers of studies have been initiated by different scholars on participation. This body of literature on 'participation' helps us to understand the concept of participation.

The term participation has generally been conceived as the involvement of the people in the affairs which affect them. It is accepted both as a value as well as a means to improve performance. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has defined participation from a broader perspective that, “*participation is a collective sustained activity for the purpose of achieving some common objectives, especially a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development*”.¹ United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines participation as active involvement in decision making at every stage starting with the identification of problems to the study of feasibility, planning, implementation and evaluation.² United States Agency for International Development (USAID) defines participation as the active engagement of people in sharing ideas, committing time and resources, making decisions and taking action to bring about a desired development objective.³ Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) has considered participation as a voluntary contribution by people in any of the public programmes but the people are not expected to take part in either shaping the programme or criticizing its

¹ UNESCO, Meeting of Experts on the International Problems of Participation in the Strategies of Integrated Rural Development, UNESCO, Division for the Study of Development, Peru, 4-8 September, 1978.

² Report: Development Co-operation, “The Role of Development Co-operation in Participatory Development”, DECD Publication, Paris, 1973, pp. 45-46.

³ Canadian International Development Authority (CIDA), “Mainstreaming Participatory Development: Experiences and Lessons of the Inter Agency Group on Participation”, *Draft Working Paper*, CIDA, 1997.

contents.⁴ According to United Nations Human Development Report, participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. People may in some cases have complete and direct control over these processes in other cases the control may be partial or indirect.⁵

Warr and Wall have conceptualized participation as involvement in the decision making process so as to influence the decisions.⁶ Pamela Singla holds the view that participation is an interaction among individual to achieve specific goals and outcomes.⁷ Vroom has considered participation as influence that an individual feels he has in decision-making process.⁸

According to Pearse and Stiefel, participation should be defined as an organized effort to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in a given social situation, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.⁹ According to Soysal, the term participation is used to cover all forms of actions by which people take part in the operation of administration.¹⁰ To Uphoff and Cohen, participation includes

⁴ Economic Commission for Latin America, "Popular Participation in Development", *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1973.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report, New York, 1993, p. 1.

⁶ Elizabeth Chell, *Participation and Organization: A Social Psychological Approach*, Macmillan, London, 1985, p. 1.

⁷ Pamela Singla, *Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj: Nature and Effectiveness*, Rawats Publication, Jaipur, 2007, p. 63.

⁸ Elizabeth Chell, *op.cit.*

⁹ Andrew Pearse and Mathias Stiefel, *Inquiry into Participation: A Research Approach*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 1979, p. 1.

¹⁰ Mumtaz Soysal, "Public Relations in Administration: The Influence of Public on the Operation of Public Administration, Excluding Electoral Right", Central Report to XIII...

people's involvement in decision-making process, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes, and thus involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.¹¹ In the words of Oakley and Marsden, participation is an active process in which the person takes initiative and in doing so asserts oneself.¹² Verba has defined participation as an active engagement of citizens with public institutions, an activity which falls into three well-defined modes, voting, election-campaigning and contacting or pressure either individually or through group activity, including non-violent protests.¹³

To Sartori, participation means self-motion. It involves a factor of determination on the part of the participants.¹⁴ Poonam Vats feels that participation can only be described when the person who participates is fully conscious of the responsibilities he assumes in doing so. Participation is not something that can be created artificially. *It is a feeling on the part of the people, not just the mechanical act of being called in to take part in discussions.*¹⁵

International Congress of Administrative Sciences, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Paris, 1966, p. 57.

¹¹ N.T. Uphoff and Cohen, "Feasibility and Application of Rural Development Participation: A State of the Art Paper", Cornell University Press, USA, 1979.

¹² P. Oakley and D. Marsden, *Approaches to Participation in Rural Development*, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 1985, p. 19.

¹³ S. Verba, N.H. Nie, and J.O. Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven Nation Comparison*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978.

¹⁴ Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. LXIV, No. 4, December, 1970, pp. 50-52.

¹⁵ Poonam Vats, *Political Participation and Attitudinal Transformation of Rural Women*, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p. 2.

The above definitions illustrate the fact that participation implies many things to many people. It is as argued by Rahman, is difficult to attain a concrete definition of the term 'participation'. It can be explored but cannot be contained in any formal definition.¹⁶

Further we often notice that many prefixes such as active participation, passive participation, developed participation, real participation, effective participation are used and added to the concept of participation. This implies that the term 'participation' does not convey much unless it is understood with respect to given objective, values and context.

In the context of Panchayati Raj Institutions, participation implies involvement of people in the process of decision-making, implementation and evaluation and the present work look at the topic of research from this perspective.

Various authors have put forth different frameworks for analyzing the concept of participation. According to Cohen, the study of participation involves three dimensions namely: what kind of participation is under consideration, who is participating and how is participation occurring?¹⁷

Tandon has focused attention to the conditions of participation. According to him, political and structural arrangements, local organizations and traditions, and operational mechanisms which enable people to participate are

¹⁶ Quoted in P. Oakley, *Projects with People - The Practice of Participation in Rural Development*, ILO, Geneva, 1991.

¹⁷ J.M. Cohen, "Participation at the Local level: A Working Bibliography", Centre for International Studies, Rural development Committee, Cornell University, USA, 1978.

essential pre-condition for effective participation.¹⁸ Poonam Vats has discussed three other conditions for effective participation. These include proper information, well organized communication network; and willingness to participate.¹⁹ Participation, thus we see has got many inter-related elements.

Role and Rationale of popular participation

The term ‘participation’ has assumed such importance in present era because it is seen as closely related to the goal of development and social change. From the development perspective, Clayton has considered participation as both means and an end. According to him, as a means, participation is a process in which people and communities co-operate and collaborate in a development project and as an end, participation is seen as the empowerment of individuals and communities in terms of acquiring skills, knowledge and experience.²⁰ Oakley has argued that participation can enhance the efficiency of development by reducing time and saving resources. Participation allows people to influence the definition of programme objectives, and increases people’s commitment and project effectiveness.²¹ Besides, participation leads to democratization, good governance, equality, equity and human rights. Participation increases self-reliance of participants by giving

¹⁸ Rajesh Tandon, *Where are the People/Community Participatory Research in India*, PRIA, New Delhi, 1989.

¹⁹ Poonam Vats, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

²⁰ Andrew Clayton, Peter Oakley and Brian Pratt, *Empowering People, A Guide to Participation*, United Nations Development Programme, New York, 1998.

²¹ P. Oakley, “People’s Participation in Development: Reviewing the Balance Sheet”, *Working paper*, 1994.

them opportunities to move from passive dependence to active interdependence. It intends to empower people to take more control over their lives.²²

Development is basically a normative term and carries varieties of meanings. It is human centered process and implies a positive change in the desirable direction.²³ David Corten defined development as “a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of their life consistent with their own aspirations”.²⁴ It was normally perceived that women play an equal role in development process throughout the world, but the fruits of development are distributed unequally among males and females.

Participation is a necessary ingredient of every political system. The term participation implies redistribution of power in a powerless society. The central issue of popular participation has to do with power exercised by some people against other people and by some classes against other classes.²⁵ A society in which a substantial part of the population is denied any participation whatsoever, a sense of deprivation always comes into picture. So, to ensure

²² Rudqvist Anders and Prudence Woodford Berger, *Evaluation and Participation- Some Lessons*, SIDA Studies in Evaluation, SIDA, Stockholm, 1996.

²³ Molley Joseph, *Women's Participation and Development Strategies*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 78.

²⁴ David Corten, “Getting to the 21st Century-Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda”, Oxford and IBH, New Delhi, 1992, p. 67.

²⁵ Andrew Pearse and Mathias Stiefel, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

participation we find both government and nongovernmental organizations have taken legal and institutional steps all over the world.

Participation in political process has been subject of abiding interest in political science since the days of Plato. Aristotle defined citizen as one who takes part in the administration of justice and holds office. The declaration of French Revolution of 1789 also says that all citizens have right to take part personally or by their representatives in the formulation of law. Marx argued that universal participation is a means and an end of the manifestation of human freedom.

The behavioural revolution which rejuvenated the academic discipline of political science in fifties and sixties of 19th century, concentrated on the study of political behaviour, voting behaviour and electoral process. In the context of voting behaviour, the term 'political participation' has acquired new and more dynamic connotation. In recent times, a good number of scholars have been initiated studies on the concept of political participation.

Politics is generally understood as an exercise of power. Political participation means involvement of people in the process of exercising power. According to Sushila Patni, participation in political process can be considered as the involvement of people in any form of organized activity that affects or seeks to affect the power relationship.²⁶ According to Kaushik, participation in political sphere involves framing of policies and decisions and effective control over implementation of the same. Participation in a political process preserves

²⁶ Sushila Patni, *Women Political Elite: Search for Identity*, Printwell, Jaipur, 1994, p. 87.

equality and justice, reverse existing situation and brings out necessary social changes so as to promote a better social order.²⁷ Herbert McClosky in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, refers political participation to those voluntary activities by which member of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy.²⁸ Norman D. Palmer defines political participation as the involvement of citizens in such political activities which directly or indirectly influence the behaviour and actions of decision-makers.²⁹ Anthony M. Orum defines political participation as the variety of ways in which people try to influence the political process.³⁰ Nie and Verba included in political participation, those legal activities by citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and the actions they take.³¹ Milbrath and Goel define political participation as those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics.³²

In a democratic society, participation gives the ordinary citizen a means of voicing his opinion and a sense of belongingness to the system. “It gives the ordinary citizen a chance to show his willingness to carry out

²⁷ Sushila Kaushik, “Women and Political Participation”, in Ranjana Kumari (ed.), *Women in Politics: Forms and Process*, Har-Anand Publications, Chirag, 1993, p. 35.

²⁸ Herbert McClosky, “ Political Participation,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 12, Macmillan, New York, 1968, p. 253.

²⁹ Norman D. Palmer, *Elections and Political Development: The South Asian Experience*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976, p. 57.

³⁰ Anthony M. Orum, *Introduction to Political Sociology*, Prentice- Hall, INC, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1978, pp. 281-282.

³¹ Norman H. Nie and Sidney Verba, “ Political Participation,” in F. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (ed.), *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol.4, Wesley Publishing Company, Massachusetts, 1975, p. 1.

³² Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political Participation: How and Why do People Get Involved in Politics?*, Rand McNally Publishing Company, Chicago, 1977, p. 2.

constructive public work and to demonstrate his good citizenship by other means than periodically exercising his right to vote”.³³ A democratic society in principle is a participant society in which power is shared and authoritative decisions are made by the representatives of the citizens. The ordinary citizen can take part in the process of governing the country, irrespective of the sex, caste, class, religion or any other consideration. According to Palmer, citizen’s active participation in political affairs in a democracy is crucial and necessary because it assures the legitimacy of the system and also strengthens the democratic values.³⁴ According to McClosky, participation is necessary and of prime concern because it is the right of citizens through which ‘consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled.’³⁵ The *Concise Encyclopedia of Democracy* has mentioned that although political participation does not by itself make a democracy, the opportunity for the average citizen to participate in the political process is essential for any democracy and participation is often included in the definition of democracy.³⁶ Gerian Parry and George Moyser have also argued that a regime in which common people do not participate in rule cannot be qualified as democratic.³⁷ James Bryce observes, “An essential ingredient of a democracy is that a considerable proportion should have the experience of active participation in

³³ Mumtaz Soysal, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

³⁴ Norman D. Palmer.*op.cit.*

³⁵ Herbert McClosky, *op.cit.*, p. 253.

³⁶ “Political Participation” in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Democracy*, Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington D.C., 2000, p. 293.

³⁷ Geriant Parry and George Mayser, “More Participation More democracy?”, in Ricardo Blaug and John Schwarzmantal (ed.), *Democracy : A Reader*, Edinburg University Press Ltd., Edinburg, 1988, pp. 42-43.

the work of small self governing groups, whether in connection with local government, trade unions, co-operatives or other forms of activity".³⁸ Thus, participation is of vital importance to democratic polity. This enables the government to set goals of the society in such a way as to maximize the allocation of benefits of the people as a whole. Therefore, political participation can be considered as a pre-requisite and minimal requirement for a successful democratic political system. It is not only for as ethical and moral reasons but for it has a functional and utilitarian reason as well.³⁹

Means and methods of political participation

In a democratic society there are various means and methods through which people can participate in political process. Verba and Nie have mentioned four means of political participation which include voting, campaigning activity, co-operative activity and citizen initiated contacts.⁴⁰ Milbrath and Goel add protest and communication to these modes mentioned by Verba and Nie, which relate individuals to polity.⁴¹ Schonfeld has mentioned ten types of activities which are often cited in the literature of political participation. These include (a) holding public or party office, (b) belonging to a party or other political organization. (c) working in an election, (d) attending political meetings or rallies, (e) making financial contribution to a party or a

³⁸ James Bryce, *Modern Democracies*, Macmillan Company, New York, 1921, p.132.

³⁹ UNRISD, *Development and Dialogue*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*, Harper and Row, New York, 1972, pp. 44-47.

⁴¹ Lester W. Milbrath, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-24.

candidate, (f) contacting a public official, (g) publicly expressing a political opinion to convince others, (h) partaking in political discussions, (i) voting and (j) expressing oneself to political stimuli.⁴²

Voting is considered as the simplest political activity which does not require much information and motivation as do most other political activities. Since vote determines who holds elective office, it exerts a pressure upon the leaders and is called as the blunt instrument of control over the government. Campaign activities require much initiative and have more collective effect upon decision making process than voting. Membership in political party or voluntary organization is the co-operative mode of political participation. This mode of participation requires much initiative on the part of citizens. Contesting election is considered as the highest and most serious form of political participation than the other modes of political participation. Protest activities, such as marches, rallies, strikes and other such direct actions- which are called as unconventional method of political participation, generally considered as unhealthy for democracy.⁴³ But slowly and gradually this type of participation is gaining ground in many developing countries of the world.

Factors of political participation

Political participation is a complex phenomenon and depends upon many factors. Such factors are identified by CIRDAP studies which can

⁴² William R. Schonfeld, "The Meaning of Democratic Participation", *World Politics*, Vol. XXVIII, No.1, 1974, pp. 136-137.

⁴³ Bhawana Jhatra, *Women and Politics in India*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 15-16.

be categorized as psychological factors, socio-economic factors and political factors.⁴⁴ Psychological factors refer to the degree to which citizens are interested in and concerned about politics and public affairs. These include individual's knowledge, values, attitudes and personality. As far as socio-economic factors are concerned, it has generally been noticed that education, occupation, income, age, race, religion, sex, family background, residence etc. assume importance. Participation tends to be higher among better educated, members of the high occupational and income groups, middle aged, the dominant ethnic and religious groups, people with political family background, settled residents, urban dwellers and members of voluntary organization.⁴⁵ According to S.M. Lipset, "*the co-relation between level of education and extent of participation is particularly noteworthy. The educated citizen is more likely to engage in political process than the uneducated citizen*".⁴⁶ Hazel D. Lima has also put emphasis on social backgrounds. According to her, participation is directly influenced by the individual's own educational level and the educational status of the family. In addition to this, according to her, in India, caste, landholdings and the political influence of a family also create the opportunity to participate.⁴⁷ However, the co-relation between participation and socio-economic factors may vary from culture to culture with different political contexts and their effect on political participation may not be stable. As far as

⁴⁴ Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP): *People's Participation in Rural Development*, Dhaka, 1984.

⁴⁵ Bhawana Jatra, *op.cit.*, pp. 50-53.

⁴⁶ S. M. Lipset, *Political Man*, VFS Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1959, p. 82.

⁴⁷ Hazel D. Lima, *Women in Local Government: A Study of Maharashtra*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1983.

political environment is concerned, policies of government, access for an individual to relevant information, group pressure and institutional arrangement have become important determinants in understanding the character of political participation.⁴⁸ If the political map of a country is too large, if the machineries for political participation do not properly function, if the government institutions are enmeshed in highly rigid and complicated rules, people are likely to develop somewhat a feeling of remoteness that seriously affects the rate of their participation. Further, it has been observed that if the prevailing ideology of a state does not encourage openness and maintains the direction and decision-making concerning state affairs in strictly controlled hands, the prevailing political environment will not be conducive to participation. Furthermore, a centralized political system that lays less emphasis upon local mechanisms for administration and decision-making can greatly reduce the potential for authentic participation. Centralized governments encourage centralized administrative structures which, by their very nature, are major obstacles to people's participation.⁴⁹ It can be seen, therefore, that the nature of political environment within a particular State will have a strong influence on the potential for meaningful participation.⁵⁰ Besides, many other factors such as backwardness, unwillingness, absence of commitment, political inheritance, unavailability of resources, rigidity in programmes restrict people's

⁴⁸ S. M. Lipset, *op.cit.*

⁴⁹ D. Curtis, "Popular Participation in Decision-Making and the Basic Needs Approach to Development", *Working paper*, ILO, Geneva, 1982.

⁵⁰ B. Tsiane and F. Youngman (eds.), *The Theory and Practice of People's Participation*, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Gaborone, 1985.

participation in political processes. The lack of leadership and organizational skills, consequent inexperience in running projects or organizations leaves people incapable of responding to the demands of participation.⁵¹ In brief, political participation varies in relation to various factors which have been summarized by Milbrath in the following words. *Political participation depends on an individual's political stimuli, individual's personal characteristics and individual's social characteristics in which the individual finds himself.*⁵²

Women's participation in political process

The above factors have a great impact on participation of women in political process. Generally participation of women in political process implies the degree of equality and freedoms enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of powers and value that is given by society to the roles which their male counterparts enjoy. Political participation of women does not mean only women's participation in electoral and administrative processes. But also, it includes the whole range of voluntary activities which has a bearing on the political process including voting, supporting political groups, communicating with legislators, disseminating political views and opinions among the electorate and other related activities.

⁵¹ CIRDAP, *op.cit.*

⁵² Lester W. Milbrath, *op.cit.*

Until the dawn of Industrial revolution, women had a secondary status in society throughout the world. They were not granted to take part in social, political and economic activities and remained confined to the four walls of their family lives. Industrial Revolution spearheaded movements for democracy, equality and social justice,⁵³ paving the way for women to take part in industrial productivity and economic activities and thus bringing a change in their roles in society. In the later part of the 19th century when the idea of ‘equality of the sexes’ took shape in Western Europe and North America, the position of women in political arena started taking a new turn. During this period, Suffrage Movement and demand for political rights of women brought a new era for women’s participation in public space.

New Zealand became the first country to enfranchise women in 1893. Subsequently, Finland became the first European country to enfranchise women in 1906. Australia and Canada provided the voting right to their women counterpart in 1908. After a continuous struggle for equal political rights, women achieved voting right in 1920 in USA and 1928 in UK. In Germany, women were enfranchised by the Weimer constitution of 1919. Slowly and gradually, women got universal suffrage in almost all the countries of Asia, Africa, Europe, America, and Latin America. However, in most of the Middle-East countries women are yet to gain equal suffrage.⁵⁴

⁵³ K.C.Vidya, *Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroots*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

With the voting rights granted to women in most countries of the world, women's struggle for more political space in decision making arena started getting recognition. With the advent of feminism in USA in 1960s the concept of participation of women in political process (not only in voting but also in other political activities) took a new direction. In later decades, importance of the concept of participation of women in political process has significantly increased among political thinkers and researchers. In recent times, a large number of institutions and research centres have been established to broaden the scope of analysis of women's participation in political process.

Various International Organizations, Government Organizations and Non Governmental Organizations took initiatives to promote women's status in society. For example, in 1946, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) was set up as a permanent body of the Economic and Social Council.⁵⁵ In 1952, the General Assembly of United nations adopted the Convention on the Political Right of Women which stated that "Women shall be entitled to hold public office established by national law on equal terms with men without any discrimination".⁵⁶ In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitute discrimination against women and

⁵⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United-Nations-Commission-on-the-Status-of-Women>.

⁵⁶ Convention on the political rights of women, 193 U.N.T.S.135, enforced on July 7, 1954, Article-3.

sets up an agenda to end such discrimination. The CEDAW also highlighted the participation of women in politics.⁵⁷

The first World Conference on Women was held in 1975 in Mexico City. The Conference, along with the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) launched a new era in global efforts to promote the advancement of women by opening a worldwide dialogue on gender equality. The Conference called upon governments to formulate national strategies and identify targets and priorities in their effort to promote the equal participation of women in political space. By the end of the United Nations Decade for Women (i.e. in 1985), 127 Member States had responded by establishing some form of national machinery, institutions dealing with the promotion of policy, research and programmes aimed at women's advancement and participation in development. The fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 also took plan of actions empowering women to take part in politics and decision making process. Besides, many other organizations such as United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), took initiative to provide institutional framework for research, training and operational activities in the area of women and development.

⁵⁷ G.A. res.34/80.3U.N.GAOR. Supp. (No.6) at193 U.N.Doc. A/34/46, entered into force September 3, 1981.

Though in recent times a large number of strategies and measures have been taken to promote women's political status around the world, yet women in almost all the countries continue to be under represented and marginal in political decision making bodies. Women's worldwide representation in politics also shows an unsatisfactory picture. Despite the widespread movement towards democratization in most countries, women remain invisible at various levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies or in achieving the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of having 30 per cent women in positions at decision-making levels by 1995. Globally, only 10 per cent of the members of legislative bodies and a lower percentage of ministerial positions are now held by women. United Nations Human Development Report has pointed out that there are only twelve countries where women held 33% or more seats in the parliaments.⁵⁸In most of the other countries, whether developed or developing, women's presence in the political process is marginal and low.

Various studies conducted in different parts of world have shown that as compared to men, women have very negligible impacts in political process all over the world. A study conducted in 43 countries on women's political engagement, reveals the fact that, women everywhere have a

⁵⁸ Farza Bari, Women's Political Participation; Issues and Challenges", Paper Presented in Expert Group Meeting, Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), Bangkok, Thailand, 8-11 November, 2005.

secondary political status.⁵⁹ According to Niroj Sinha, it is an international experience that despite loud proclamations of constitutional equality between men and women, the few women who enter politics seldom enjoy political power or are involved in decision making bodies.⁶⁰ A statistical study conducted by Herbert Tingsten on electoral behaviour and party attitude of women shows that women nowhere make use of their vote to the same extent as the men do.⁶¹ Marjorie Lasing points out that woman as compared to man are less politically efficacious, less politically interested, have less political information and are less likely to participate in politics.⁶² Angus Campbell finds that average American women are lower in political efficacy, lower in political involvement and less in political concept formation than the average male.⁶³

Regarding Indian women M.L Goel finds that as compared to men, women are less involved in politics. They are less likely to take interest in politics, to discuss politics to attend public meetings and to influence decisions.⁶⁴ According to Anuradha Bhoite, on one hand Indian women cast their votes in large numbers, take part in agitational activities, but on the other hand they lag behind in enjoying power positions and occupying prestigious

⁵⁹ Barbara Nelson and Najma Choudhury (ed.), *Women and Politics Worldwide*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

⁶⁰ Niroj Sinha, "Women as Marginal in Politics" in Pramila Dandavate, *Widows, Abandoned and Destitute Women in India*, Rediant Publishers, New Delhi, 1989, p. 68.

⁶¹ Herbert Tingsten, *Political Behaviour*, The Bedmister Press, New Jersey, 1963, p. 229.

⁶² Marjorie Lasing, "The American Women: Voter and Activist", in Janes S. Jaquette (ed.), *Women in Politics*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1975, pp. 5-24.

⁶³ Angus Campbell, *The American Voter*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1967, p. 229.

⁶⁴ Madan Lal Goel, *Political Participation in a Developing Nation: India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1974, pp. 89-98.

political offices.⁶⁵ Rounaq Jahan indicates that since 1960 a large number of women have been leading either governments or opposition in four South Asian countries (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka). But all of them get into politics through their family connections. All of them have either husbands or fathers or other relatives' already in politics which provide them with readymade network of communication and support. But despite the prominence of several women leaders in the region, opportunities for female leadership have been rare.⁶⁶ Khursid Jalal points out that though the women of Bangladesh have political and legal rights like any other developed countries, but in reality women of Bangladesh don't have meaningful participation in political process.⁶⁷

In a society, participation of women in political process is essential to attain the goals of development and to share the fruits of development equally among people. Especially in a democratic society, participation of women in political process has a great significance to preserve democratic values. In a present day modern society, it is realized by all that without equal participation of both men and women in all spheres of lives and levels of decision making process, democracy; in the true sense of the term cannot be established. Women's participation in political process is essential to

⁶⁵ Anuradha Bhoite, "Women and Democracy in India", *Kerala Sociologist*, Vol. XVI, December, 1988, pp. 62-66.

⁶⁶ Rounaq Jahan, "Women in South- Asian Politics", *Mainstream*, Vol. 25, No. 48, 1987, pp. 35-44.

⁶⁷ Khursid Jalal, "Women in Politics" in *Women for Women*, Published by the Women for Women Research and Study Group, Dacca University Press Ltd., Dacca, 1975, pp. 204-214.

solve various social problems related to women. A woman better understands women's problems. Therefore unless women participate in political process, their problems cannot be solved.

Though, universally women's political participation is viewed as inevitable to deal with various social problems and to improve women's status, yet the level of women's participation in political process is low and marginal all over the world. Women constitute half of the world's population but are hardly visible in the arena of politics. Therefore, it is an urgent need to investigate the conceptual and material bases of women's historic exclusion from the formal arena of politics; analyze strategies adopted around the world to promote women's political representation in politics; identify internal and external conditions and factors that facilitate or hinder women to participate in political process.

Different research works done by various scholars indicate that, as compared to men women everywhere participate less in politics and have less political interest and less feelings of political efficacy.⁶⁸ Traditional, ideological, psychological, socio-economic, political and structural variables account for women's low participation and involvement in politics.

Traditionally politics has been viewed as a male domain⁶⁹. Men always enjoy higher visibility in public and political affairs while women have to stay away from political affairs and remain in private domain. Women are

⁶⁸ Farza Bari, *op.cit.*, P. Oakley, *op.cit.*

⁶⁹ Sushila patni, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

considered as subordinate to men. According to Milbrath, it is a tradition in almost all societies that politics is mainly an affair of men and that women should fall in line with them politically⁷⁰. Traditional mindset of people supports exclusion of women from political life. According to Lipset, traditionalism and conservative outlook of people is the main hindrance for women to enter into politics.⁷¹ Subordination of women in society acts as a structural constraint to their participation in political activities.⁷²

Ideological factors such as patriarchy and gender discrimination which still exist in society, shape women's participation globally. Patriarchy as a system of male domination shapes women's relationship in politics. It constructs the hierarchy of gender relations where men are privileged. Adrienne Rich defines patriarchy as "A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play."⁷³ The gender role ideology is used as an ideological tool by patriarchy to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere. This male public and female private dichotomy in social perception has been found to be greatest hindrance in the way of women's access to power and political decision making bodies. Henry Chafe finds that discrimination against women is deeply rooted in the

⁷⁰ Laster W. Milbrath and M.L. Goel, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

⁷¹ S. M. Lipset, *op.cit.*

⁷² Kavita Mishra, *Women's Role in Politics in Modern World*, Omega Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 20.

⁷³ Quoted in Farza Bari, *op.cit.*

structure of society which restricts women primarily to the domestic sphere of life.⁷⁴ According to J.B. Elshtain, public-private divide has been used to legitimate women's exclusion from politics.⁷⁵

Psychological factors are also responsible for women's low political participation. Generally men are more psychologically involved in politics because they have more 'sense of civic duty', 'feelings of efficacy' and above all they regard politics as their respective sphere, while women are generally unfortunate in these matters. Politics is a very risky game. Elections have also become very complicated, violent, and dirty. Therefore women want to keep themselves away from politics.

Social factors are also important which effect women's participation in public spheres. Women find it difficult to participate in politics due to limited time available to them because of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive sphere. With the primary roles as mothers and competing domestic responsibilities and care work, they are left with little time to participate in politics. In some of the countries, particularly in South Asia, women also face cultural constraints on their mobility. The mechanisms of sex segregation and *purdah* are used to restrict their mobility.⁷⁶ According to Sakina Yusuf Khan, due to social condition and the double work, women can seldom

⁷⁴ William Henry Chafe, *The American Women: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁵ J.B. Elshtain, *Public Man Private Women*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1981.

⁷⁶ Farza Bari, *op.cit.*

make the time to participate in electoral politics.⁷⁷ According to Annapurna and Pati, social traditions engulfed with various taboos continue to look down upon women as a part of the households, not as a part of the public life.⁷⁸

Political atmosphere is also considered as one of the deterrents which create an unfavourable condition for women's participation in political processes. Political processes have not only become complicated but many decisions are also made behind the scenes. In the present political situation where corruption has become a phenomenon in politics, money in some way or the other has played an important part. Power games are controlled by monetary deals.⁷⁹ Political processes have become expensive. The cost of election also put hindrance as few women have own income and hardly they own productive resources. Further, the atmosphere of growing violence, character assassination and unscrupulous struggle for power, have been a serious deterrent to women's participation in political process. Further it has to be noted that much of the political participation today requires information, knowledge and exposure to the various experiments, strategies and models. Lack of political skill, training, proper information and patronage are the various causes for which women are not able to take part in political activities equally with their male counterpart.

⁷⁷ Sakina Yusuf Khan, "Sorry, It's a stage Party," *The Times of India*, 19 May, 1991, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Annapurna Devi and N.M. Pati, "Women in State Politics," *Political Science Review*, Vol. 20, 1981, pp. 143-144.

⁷⁹ Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, *Women in Indian Society*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2001, p. 112.

The nature of political process is also an important factor for inclusion or exclusion of women in politics. Male domination on politics and political parties and culture of formal political structure hinder women's political participation. Political parties do not regard women candidates as much capable and efficient winning candidates as the men candidates. For political parties, women are good voters but not good candidates.

The larger democratic framework and level of democratization also effect women's political participation. Secular democracies in Europe and also in some developing countries have crated relatively more space for women's participation in politics as compared to countries where religious orthodoxy has been shaping politics and democracy.

Poverty, illiteracy, casteism, unhealthy living condition, backwardness, corruption, criminalization are the various causes for which women are not interested to enter into public life. Besides, many other reasons account for women's diminished role in political area. Women in all over the world face some peculiar problems which are totally unknown to their male counterpart. It is not only the incapacity of women to join in politics but men also do not encourage them. Men like to retain their monopoly in power. This keeps women out of political activities.

Women's participation is considered as an essential pre-condition for the success of development programmes, both by government and non-governmental organizations. If development implies popular participation, there

could be no development in the absence of the active participation of women, who constitute almost half of the total population, in any development effort. It is now understood by all that women have a positive role in the development of all nations and therefore women should be involved at all stages of development process from the beginning. Although the participatory process was initiated by voluntary organizations much earlier, the government organizations followed this example very recently. In contemporary period most of the states have become development state which prefer equal share of both male and female in political power structure and equal participation in decision making arena. It is now an urgent need of all nations to increase women's participation in all areas of development- planning, implementation and at all levels of administration- locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Gender equality is a pre-requisite for effective participation of women in strengthening the democratic values. India as one of the largest democratic country of the world with women constituting about half of its population, the idea of equal participation of both male and female in political processes has gained immense socio-political significance. Women have been marginalized because of several socio-economic constraints. The number of women in leadership positions at the local, village, district and national level still does not commensurate with their numbers in society. Women are still left on the periphery of the political processes, and political participation remains elusive to most of them. Participation of women in political processes is required to

facilitate women empowerment and to bring equality between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Economic development and political empowerment are seen to be linked and inseparable. For the productive use of human resources, attention should be given to the role women play and the role women could be play in development. This attention must be devoted to empower women to have an impact on development decisions. The need and potentiality to get women represented must be realized. Though political representation is just one aspect, yet it is a crucial one in empowering a hither to disadvantaged and excluded group like women through organized deliberative process. This will open up avenues for further inclusion of women in many other fields of socio-economic and political significance.

CHAPTER II

**PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS:
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE
FOR DEMOCRACY**

The term 'democracy' literally means the rule of the people. It is derived from two Greek words Demos (people) and Cratos (rule). Greek philosopher Cleon defined democracy as power of the people.¹ Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy is very close to its literal meaning. To him democracy is a government 'of the people by the people and for the people'. Cranston writes that democracy is nothing but different doctrines in people's mind.² According to Sartori, democracy is the most confused concept of political theory. It is not simply a form of choosing and authorizing government, it has also been defined as 'a type of society and a manner of life', as an ideal or as an end in itself.³ According to Hagopian, democracy is 'one of the most defused and pervasive concepts of history'.⁴ To provide any precise definition of democracy, difficulty lies in the fact that the term has been understood not only as a form of government but also as an ideal or a way of life.

Several exponents of democracy have treated democracy chiefly as a form of government. John Austin (1790-1859), James Bryce (1838-1922), A.V. Dicey (1835-1922), A.L. Lowell (1856-1943) and John Seeley are prominent supporters of this view. For instance, Lowell says that democracy is only an experiment in government. Seeley describes it as Government in which

¹ Quoted in R.C. Vermani, *An Introduction to Political Theory*, Mehra Offset Press, Delhi, 1996, pp. 362-66.

² *Ibid.*

³ Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory*, Oxford and IBH, New Delhi, 1965, pp. 118-19.

⁴ M.N. Hagopian, *Ideals and Ideologies in Modern Politics*, Longman, New York, 1978, p. 17.

everyone has a share.⁵ A number of other definitions have appeared from time to time associating democracy with the process of government. According to Schumpeter, *The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.*⁶ Lipset has defined democracy as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the government officials and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office.⁷ *In short, democracy implies that ultimate authority of government is vested in the common people so that public policy is made to conform to the will of the people and to serve the interests of the people. In that sense Democracy belongs to the sphere of collective decision making.*⁸ It embodies that decisions, affecting an association as a whole, should be taken by all its members, and that they should each have equal rights to take part in such decisions. Democracy, in other words, entails popular control over collective decision making and equality of rights in exercising that control. Therefore, free and fair election, open and accountable government, civil and political rights etc are considered as the pre-requisites of democracy.⁹

⁵ Quoted in O.P. Gauba, *An Introduction to Political Theory*, Macmillan, 1981, p. 421.

⁶ Jose Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1976, pp. 269-277.

⁷ R.C.Vermani, *op.cit.*, p. 367.

⁸ David Beetham and Kevin Boyle, *Introducing Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

*Democracy aims to treat all people equally. The principle of equality requires not only that people's interest should be attended equally by government policy, but also that their views should count equally. Democratic government is more likely than other types of government to meet the needs of ordinary people.*¹⁰

In modern era, democracy is considered as one of the best forms of government because it ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision making. Participation and control of governance is the essence of participatory democracy.¹¹ Such participation is possible only when the powers of the state are decentralized to the district, block and village levels where people from all sections of society can sit together, discuss their problems and suggest solutions and execute as well as monitor the implementation of the programmes.

Decentralization has been accepted as one of the pillars of democracy. The term 'decentralization' refers to a process of gradual devolution or transfer of decision making powers, functions and resources to the lower level of democratically elected bodies.¹² To the liberal democrats, *decentralization is a 'way to make government more responsive to local needs and preferences'*.¹³ In the present decade, the transfer of political,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ R.P. Joshi and G.S. Narawani, *Panchaytai Raj in India*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2002, p. 11.

¹² Girish Kumar, *Local Democracy in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 13.

¹³ Richar Crook and James Manor, *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

administrative and financial power to local government bodies has received singular attention all over the world. Decentralization is considered as one of the most important elements as far as goal of development is concerned and has been accepted as one of the pillars of democracy. It has got global recognition and most countries have attempted to implement it as a tool for development, as a political philosophy and as a mechanism for sharing responsibility at different levels of administrative and political structure. In brief, decentralization is regarded as a mechanism to share power required for redistribution of benefits of development among the masses and making an impact on the people at all level.

The term 'democratic decentralization' has thus been understood as a mechanism to transfer authority and responsibility from a higher political and administrative entity to the lower level political and administrative entities to ensure wider participation of people in the process of decision making, planning and implementation of programmes. It provides opportunity to people to participate directly in decision making processes. However, decentralization is not an end in itself, but it depends on the circumstances under which democratization occurs.¹⁴

Local self government is regarded as an integral part of democracy. The institution of local self government was thought of as an instrument to bring decentralization. Participation at grass root level also

¹⁴ R.P. Goshi, and G. S. Narwani, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

translates the dream of Gandhiji into reality. *My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic independent of its neighbours for its vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual judgment.*¹⁵ According to Lord James Bryce the practice of local self government is the best guarantee for the success of democracy. No democratic foundation will have sound footing without grass root involvement. Local self government is not only a form of administration but also a democratic way of life.¹⁶ Administratively it is accountable for efficient performance both upward and downward and politically it is responsible downward, with the recognition of the right of the local people to have government of their own choice. To John Stuart Mill, that form of government was best which develop best citizens. He felt the need of local self government on three grounds: Division of labour, political education and common interest.¹⁷ Lord Bryce concurred with Mill when he held that local self governments “train local people not only to work for others but also to work effectively with others. It develops common sense, reasonableness, judgment and sociability among people.”¹⁸ Panchayati Raj Institutions were conceived by the Constitution of India as bedrock of self governance. Part IV of Indian constitution underlines the idea of self governance. Article 243G of the Constitution of India provides that the States/Union Territories may by law,

¹⁵ Quoted in Vasant Desai, *Panchayati Raj :Power to People*, Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay, 1990, p. 330.

¹⁶ Quoted in Muttalab and Khan, *Theory of Local Government*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p. 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institution of self-government and to prepare plans for economic development and social justice and their implementation including those in relation to the matters listed in the 11th schedule.

The Indian system of local self government comprises of two sub systems-rural local bodies (Panchayati Raj) and urban local bodies-(municipal corporations, municipalities, town area committees and cantonment boards).¹⁹ Both this sub systems are run by the popularly elected representatives of the inhabitants of the villages, towns and districts respectively. The rural people are governed by Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is a three tier organic structure, comprising of gram panchayat at the village (gaon) level, Panchayat Samiti at the block(taluka) level and Zilla parishad at the district (zilla) level.

Thus we see the institution of Panchayati Raj (PR) is essentially meant for enriching the processes of democratic decentralization. It does it so, in many ways. First, it expands the scope of social and political participation, which in turn makes the system more accessible to the people. Second, it makes the system more accountable, responsive and transparent. This happens largely by virtue of its location, as it is closest to the people. Third, it enables people to articulate their needs and demand so that they be addressed, at the local level. Fourth, it gives an opportunity to ordinary citizens to learn how to operate in the public domain and practice the art of collective decision making without

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

resorting to intimidation and violence. Finally, it functions as a nursery for upcoming leadership, which eventually nurtures and prepares leaders for higher level of institutions.

It is being recognized by both developed and developing countries that local self government is desirable not only for the service it renders to the community, but also for the opportunities it offers to men and women to enjoy an active participation in the governance and, in the process to develop responsibilities at the grass root level.

Historical foundation of Panchayati Raj in India

The village is an important unit in the organization of Indian social life. The institutions of Village Panchayats have been in existence in India, in one form or the other from a long period of time. Literatures indicate that in India, there existed a well established system of local self government which was run on a set pattern of age-old traditions and customs. Though the present Panchayat system has no direct connection with the system of rural local self government which existed in ancient and medieval times, much of its inspiration and faith people have in it today, are derived from the Panchayat system in the past.

In ancient time, the village communities were more or less self sufficient, self reliant and independent. According to Sir Charles Metcalf, "*The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want*

within themselves. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution, but the village communities remain the same".²⁰ According to Metcalf the village republics were the most democratic, genuine, highly organized and successful village system in ancient India. Indian village systems are also referred to in the *Vedas*, the *Epics*, the *Manusmrities*, Buddhist and Jain Literature and in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. In the Vedic period, the headman of the village was known as the '*gramini*' or the '*grampal*'.²¹ According to *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, there existed two types of villages- '*ghose*' and '*gram*'. The former was bigger in size and the latter smaller. Villages were used to be administered by an official called the *gramini*. He was generally appointed by the king and enjoyed a very high status not only in the public life but also at the 'court of the king'. Although he was a nominee of the king, he had to work strictly on the advice of the village elders who were variously called the '*gram bridhas*', the *samiti*, the *sabha*, the panchayat. The number of these bodies also varied from place to place and from time to time. Manu and Gautama are of the opinion that it ranged between three and ten. Dr. Satyaketu Vidyalankar states, "the sabha was the centre of the multifarious activities of the village. It discussed religious and social matters. It arranged numerous types

²⁰ Quoted in R.V. Jather, *Evolution of Panchayati Raj in India*, Dharwar Institute of Economic Research, Dharwar, 1964, p. 11.

²¹ B.A. Saletora, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1963, pp. 417-18.

of entertainment for the village inhabitants.”²² Besides, it also played a very important role in the judicial and legislative fields.

During the Buddhist and Jain periods, the village headman was known as the ‘*bhojak*’²³ who was elected by villagers, but in practice his post was usually hereditary. The duty of the ‘*bhojak*’ was revenue collection on behalf of the state and to undertake construction works. Under the Chanakya’s system, villages were classified according to their population and the duties were clearly distributed, leading to the creation of various posts for village administration.²⁴ During the Maurya and post-Maurya period too, the headman assisted by the council of elders continued to play a prominent role in the village life. This system continued through the Gupta period, but there were certain changes in the nomenclature, as the district official was known as the *vishyapati* and the village headman was known as the *grampati*.²⁵

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that in ancient India, there flourished a more or less developed system of local self government. Popularly elected ‘*sabhas*’ and ‘*samitis*’ functioned in the innumerable villages, dotting the length and breadth of the country. The state functioned separately never

²² Quoted in H.D. Malaviya, *Village Panchayats in Ancient India*, All India Congress Committee, New Delhi, 1956, p. 106.

²³ S.N. Mishra, *Politics and Society in Rural India*, Inter India Publications, Delhi, 1980, p. 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Pamela Singla, *Women’s Participation in Panchayati Raj*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2007, p. 90.

encroaching into the functioning of village Panchayats. The central government had granted perfect autonomy to village Panchayats.

However, with the passage of time the much cherished independence of the village began to diminish. As Jadunath Sarkar has described, the Mughal rulers who succeeded the Hindu Rajas, were essentially urban people. Their feudalistic bent of mind and their quest for larger finances for the state made them centralize their administration. They worked out a new land policy where under all lands, situated in the length and breadth of their domain, were integrated into one central revenue system. The Mughal rulers introduced new administrative arrangement to replace the existing system of village governance. Under this new arrangement the provinces, districts, and villages were put under the charge of centrally appointed *subedars*, *amalguzars*, *muqaddams* and *patwaris*.²⁶ Gradually the ancient village self governance system began to decline and lost its glory.

When the East India Company came to India, Panchayats in most places were almost dead as units of administration as Maheswari described. The British policy of economic exploitation of India ultimately shattered the self sufficient character of the village system. As an imperialist power, the main concern of the British was to maximize land revenues and maintain law and order in the newly established colony. The Panchayats during the British rule were firmly told not to interfere in the administrative and judicial functions of

²⁶ H.D. Malviya, *op.cit.*, p. 139.

the state. To destroy the inherent strength of the village life in India, the British adopted several measures. For instance firstly, the Zamindari system was introduced to damage the collective village life. The Ryotwari and Mahalwari system were the two other systems introduced in different regions for collecting land revenues.²⁷ In place of the traditional 'sabhas' and 'samities' the government nominees, such as the village headmen, 'patwaris' and 'lambardars' started administering the villages. Because of the officially acquired powers, they faced no opposition or criticism from villagers. The authority of the panchas, and the sarpanchas, to deliver justice was jealously taken away and was vested in the centrally created courts.²⁸ Thus by the dawn of the nineteenth century, the traditional Village Panchayat more or less vanished from the land of its origin. If a few 'Panchayat' still existed in certain remote villages; they had practically no say in the administration of the locality.²⁹

Revival of Panchayati Raj

It is pertinent to note that in India; the British were in favour of highly centralized imperial structure which provided little scope for decentralized administration. However, among the British officers in India, also there were liberal democrats who were interested in the creation of

²⁷ B.S. Khanna, *Rural Local Government in India and South Asia*, Deep and Deep Publishers, New Delhi, 1979.

²⁸ B. Mahaswari, *Studies in Panchayati Raj*, Metro Politan Book Company, New Delhi, 1963.

²⁹ Vidya Sagar Sharma, *Panchayati Raj*, Vidya Mandir Book Sellers and Publishers, Hoshiarpur, 1962, p. 20.

decentralized institutions based on local self government. In the later period of the British rule, more particularly after the takeover of administration by British Empire from the East India Company in 1858, Lord Rippon introduced the local self government in India for gaining co-operation of Indians and for decentralizing financial management.

In 1870, the policy of financial management was declared by Lord Mayo, which emphasized on the need for associating Indians in municipal administration, decentralization of resources to provinces, and strengthening of municipal governments.³⁰ In 1882, Lord Rippon, the then viceroy introduced reforms in local government through a resolution known as the 'Lord Rippon's Resolution'. The resolution emphasized the need for associating Indians in administration, endowing local bodies both in towns and villages with source of revenue and identifying ways and means to make these bodies work more efficiently.³¹ In 1907, Viceroy Viscount Morley appointed a Royal Commission on Decentralization headed by Charles Hobhouse. It is notable that the first ever reference in a document of constitutional significance to village Panchayats as local self government was made in the report of the Royal Commission on Decentralization in 1909. In 1917, Mr. Montague, the then secretary of state for India, enunciating the future policy of the British Government promised the gradual development of self governing institutions with a view to the

³⁰ Sahib Singh and Swinder Singh, *Local Government in India*, New Academic Publishing Company, Jalandhar, 1986, p. 79.

³¹ Hugh Tinker, *The Foundations of Local Government in India*, Lalvanti Publishing House, Bombay, 1967, p. 19.

progressive realization of responsible government in India.³² To give a practical shape to this promise, the government of India issued a resolution in May, 1918. In 1919 under the Government of India Act the subject of local self government was transferred to Indian Ministers so as to make the system more effective. As a result, a number of Panchayat Acts were passed between 1921 and 1926, which aimed at making these bodies more genuine and loosening official control on them.

The birth of Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885 had brought a new era to the concept of Panchayati Raj in India. Boycotting of British Court and the introduction of Panchayats as self legal system based on people's participation had given a new turn to the concept of Panchayat Raj. The hard work and sustained efforts of the congress workers, who had spread themselves in the villages, resulted into the springing up of innumerable Panchayats in various parts of the country.³³

The coming of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene marked a new beginning for Panchayats. He claimed that India lived in its villages and pleaded for the distribution of power among rural masses in India. He believed in the supremacy of people and insisted on people's democracy at the grassroots which he called the Panchayati Raj.³⁴ Gandhi fully realized the importance of local self government and wanted to raise a democratic

³² Sahib Singh and Swinder Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

³³ S. Bhatnagar, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

³⁴ V.D. Jadhav, "Impediments in the proper functioning of the Village Panchayats", in R.S. Rajput and D.R. Meghe, *Panchayati Raj in India*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1984, p. 108.

government in the country with village as a base. Gandhi said, “True Democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every unit.”³⁵ Gandhi’s vision was that democracy through people’s participation could be ensured only by way of ‘gram swarajya’. He wanted Gram Swarajya in villages where there will be a village republic and management of the affairs of the village would be done by the people themselves. They would elect their president and common decisions would be taken unanimously by the gram sabha of the village.

In 1935, the Government of India Act was passed. A new era of hope was ushered in. The Panchayat were recast. Efforts were made not only to constitution and the functioning of village Panchayats but also to physically expand their network.

In 1947, the country became free and the constituent assembly undertook the exercise of framing up of a new Constitution. In independent India, the role of the local self government acquired a new significance. Gandhi sought to recapture the ideal in the revitalization of village life. He wanted that Panchayats should be made responsible for the total development of the villages. But the constituent assembly did not accept Gandhi’s proposal and stressed that stability; unity and economic progress demanded more centralized government. In the first draft of the constitution no mention was made of the

³⁵ Quoted in P.C. Mathur, “Sociological Dimensions of Panchayati Raj”, *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. X, No. 6, 1964, p. 67.

village Panchayats. B.R. Ambedkar, the president of the drafting committee contended that the village communities were nothing but *a den of ignorance, sink of localism, narrow minded people and communalism*.³⁶ He was glad that the draft constitution had discarded the village and adopted the individual as unit. Gandhi insisted on inclusion of Panchayats in the revised draft of the constitution because Panchayati Raj was an important component of his vision of future India. Nehru also commented that *Local self government is and must be the base of any true system of democracy. People have got the habit of thinking democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top may not be a success unless you build on the foundation from below*.³⁷ Jai Prakash Narayan favoured power to the people of the village along with the government at the centre. He said, *“To me the gram sabha (council) signifies village democracy. The relationship between Panchayat and gram sabha should be that of the Cabinet and the Assembly”*. Lal Bahadur Shastri was also of the opinion that *“only the Panchayats know the needs of the villages and hence development of the villages be done only by the Panchayats. Prosperous people in villages should ensure that powers given to the Panchayats are used in the interest of the poor. The Panchayats are the foundation of democracy and if the foundation is based on correct leadership and social justice, there can be no danger to democracy in this country.”*³⁸

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Quoted in H. D. Malviya, *op.cit.*, p. 257.

³⁸ Quoted in R.P. Joshi and G.S. Narawani, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

After a good deal of thought and discussions, K. Sanathan Committee moved a resolution for the incorporation of the 'Panchayats' in the constitution. It was accepted by an overwhelming majority. Finally, the Panchayats got its place in the Constitution of India in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 40 of Indian Constitution says "The state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government."³⁹

The inclusion of the Panchayats in the constitution gave a new impetus to the growth of these institutions. Most of the states enacted Panchayat Acts with a view to democratizing the structure of village Panchayat and also to vest more and more powers of rural development in it. The government of Punjab, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh set up separate directorates for them. There was a rapid expansion in this sphere. Special departments were also established to organize the Panchayats and to look after their workings.⁴⁰

In 1952, the Community Development Programme was launched in India. It was conceived as a programme 'of the people by the people and for the people' with a reasonable amount of technical and financial assistance from the central government. The programme had a reasonably good start. But unfortunately the well thought of the Community Development Programme failed to encourage people's participation in its working.

³⁹ The Constitution of India, Article 40.

⁴⁰ S. Bhatnagar, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

Incidentally, there was also growing impression that democracy, though working well, has not developed its roots firmly in the soil. The institutions of local-self government held out a promise of effective cure against the twin ailment of stagnation in the Community Development Programme and the dangers to democracy. It was increasingly felt that, if these local government institutions were properly developed and strengthened, they could not only provide a firm base to our democracy but would also accelerate the process of development.⁴¹ In 1957 the National Development Council constituted the Balawanta Rai Mehta Committee (BMC) to study and report on the working of Community Development Programmes. The BMC observed that the main factor that caused the failure of Community Development Programme was the absence of people's participation. This committee found in the local government institutions the necessary institutional device which would made the Community Development Programme a self-generating process. This committee recommended for creation of three-tier Panchayati Raj System namely Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the village level, Panchayat Samities (PSs) at the block level and Zilla Parishads (ZPs) at the district level to make people's participation meaningful and effective. In January 1958, the recommendations of BMC were approved by parliament and the new Panchayati Raj System (PRS) started with renewed enthusiasm and high hopes. The recommendations were considered by the National Developmental Council and later on by the Central Council of Local Self Government. Both these bodies liked the scheme

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

and recommended to the State Government. Rajasthan was the first state to implement the new system in 2nd October, 1959. By the 1960s, PRIs as suggested by the BMC had taken deep roots all over the country. People were satisfied with the new PRS. They felt that they had sufficient powers to enable them to mould their future.

Gradually, by 1969 the PRS started losing its popularity. Irregularity in Panchayat elections in various states started getting reported. Things further worsened with the national emergency and Panchayats in many states were literally breathing their last.⁴² To take care of the system at the national level, the newly formed Janata government set up a high level committee on PRIs in 1977 under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta. The Ashok Mehta committee observed certain pertinent characteristics existing in the PRS which had adversely affected the objectives of PRIs. Some of these were dominance by rich and high caste people, influence of caste consideration, corruption, inefficiency and political interference. This committee recommended for two-tier system of Panchayati Raj in place of the existing three-tier system with one body at the district level and one body at the block level. During the period of 1980s and 90s many other committees and commissions were formed at the centre to study and suggest ways of making Panchayati Raj more effective. Some of these committees included the Hanumantha Rao Committee appointed by Planning commission in 1983, The

⁴² Pamela Singla, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

G.V.K. Rao committee appointed by the planning Commission in 1985, the Singhvi Committee in 1987 and the Sarkaria Commission on the centre-state relations in 1988.⁴³

The Rajiv Gandhi Government introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill In 1989 seeking to strengthen the PRIs. It faced stiff resistance from the opposition and was criticized on various grounds. The bill was reintroduced and finally passed in Parliament as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment on December 23, 1992 and came into force from April 24, 1993.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act aimed at transforming the structure and pattern to Panchayati Raj system by inserting a new part (part xi) in the Constitution. The new system has been given a constitutional status and by which it has got permanence in the Indian political system as a third government. It has a three tier structural arrangement namely, district panchayat, middle level panchayat and gram panchayat. This new system has been vested with the power of taking decisions on twenty nine subjects listed in the 11th schedule. One of the important aspects of the 73rd Amendment, which is relevant to this study, is reservation of seats for women. The 73rd Amendment declared that not less than one third of total seats (33%) in every Panchayat institution shall be reserved for women and such seats have to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies (wards) of the Panchayat. The 33% reservation of seats for women has led a sudden surge in the number of women

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

in the decision-making positions at the local level. The reservation of 33% seats for women in all tiers of Panchayats on a rotational basis has facilitated representation of about 75,000 women in the elections conducted soon after the conformity laws were passed by the states.⁴⁴

Women in Panchayati Raj

In India, participation of women in political process has a long history. In the early Vedic period Women actively participated in public affairs. They had full freedom for spiritual progress and intellectual development. They were free to attend and visit public assemblies and social gatherings.⁴⁵ According to Sumana Pandey, during the early Vedic period, women enjoyed relatively high position in Indian society. In later Vedic period the status of women was declined considerably.⁴⁶

With the advent of Muslim Turks, social rules and norms towards women became more rigid. Social evil practices such as the system of early marriages, *Purdah* system, *Sati* system, the practice of polygamy, dowry system and female infanticide slowly and gradually started taking roots and women lost most of the rights and privileges and got confined to the four walls of their family lives. During the Mughal period, seclusion of women was looked upon as a symbol of respectability among the higher classes.

⁴⁴ Snehlata Panda, *Political Empowerment of Women*, Raj Publications, Delhi, 2002, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Sachidananda Ramesh P. Sinha, *Women's Right: Myth and Reality*, Printwell Publishers, Jaipur, 1984, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Sumana Pandey, *Women in Politics*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1990, pp. 12-13.

They were denied the benefits of education and occupied a subjugated and inferior position in society. However, with the coming of British in India, things started changing. In the later part of British period, the status of women started changing with the introduction of education for women and some legal and administrative changes.

The Christian Missionaries, Voluntary organizations, British and Indian social reformers took initiatives to provide education to women and to promote their standing in the society. The activities of Christian Missionaries in the field of female education gave rise to an enlightened public opinion and in spite of the hostile opposition from the orthodox section; realization of the necessity and importance of female education grew apace in the country. Social reformers raised their voice for restoration of women's lost prestige, glory and rightful place in society. In this regard, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Iswarchandra Bandyopasdhay (Vidyasagar) contributed a lot. From 1811 to 1828 Raja Ram Mohan Roy carried on a 'one man campaign' against *Sati*. It was due to the long struggle of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and other reformers that Lord William Bentinck passed the "Regulation No XVII" on 4th December 1829 which declared *Sati* illegal and punishable by criminal courts.⁴⁷ In Bengal, Vidyasagar opened up many schools for girls. He started vigorous campaign in favor of widow remarriage. It was for his constant effort that, Widow Remarriage Act was passed by the Government in 1856.⁴⁸ The efforts of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Keshab Chandra Sen against early marriages facilitated the enactment of Civil Marriage Act of 1872. For the introduction of female education, remarriage of Hindu widows, prevention of child marriage, Debendranath Tagore established an organization called 'Samajonnati Bidhayini Suhrid samiti' which attracted prominent public figure to work for emancipation of women. He submitted a memorandum to the legislative council for removal of legal disabilities of remarry of widows. He donated a large sum, for the propagation of female education. Rabindra Nath Tagore visualized women as great moral forces who add strength and stability to social order. Other social reformers like Hujur Maharaj Rai Saligram Bahadur, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Behramji Malbari, Swami Vivekananda, Gopal Krishna Gokhle all fought hard for upliftment of women by disseminating knowledge with the help of educational institutions.⁴⁹

Although men were the first to take up the cause of women, women too did not lag behind. Some outstanding women of the nineteenth century struggled against the prevalent condition and pursued with all sincerity the object of women's emancipation. Pandita Ranabai, Ramabai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi, Francina Sorabjee, Kadambini Ganguli, Malanika Karlekar, Begum Rokea Sekhawat Hussain, Begum Sufia Kamal were constantly engaged in their efforts to raise the social position of women. They gave guidance and direction to a movement which at that time was only in an

⁴⁹ Sachidananda Ramesh P. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

embryonic stage. Their dauntless struggle against orthodox society became a source of inspiration for many women.

The Independence Movement provided further impetus towards uplifting the position of women in Indian society. The Indian national Congress (INC) which was established in 1885 became a cornerstone in encouraging women to enter into political arena. A large number of women became members on INC. They came forward to participate in the freedom struggle defying all social taboos, sacrificing physical comfort and denying the validity of all restrictions which has been enforced against them. Mahatma Gandhi emerged on the Indian political scene in 1918 and adopted the technique of passive resistance or 'Satyagraha'. In his opinion, women were most suited to fight with the new weapons of non-violence and truth. Gandhi commented that in Non-Cooperation Movement women's participation was more important than that of the men, because women were the symbol of strength. His message encouraged the womenfolk of India to come out of the four walls of their homes and participate in social and political activities. They became active Satyagrahis and even courted arrest. They held meetings at different places and declared their firm decision to participate fearlessly in the Independence Movement. Women freedom fighters like Sarojini Bose, Sushila Devi, Purani Devi, Radha Devi, Sister Nivedita, Basanti Devi, Urmila Devi, Sarla Devi, Kasturba Gandhi, Swarooprani Nehru, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Uma Nehru, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Margaret Cousins, Nelli Sengupta, Kanaklata Baruah, Bhogaswari Phukanani, Anupriya Baruah,

Sudhalata Dutta, Matangini Hazra, Pritilata Waddeder all played memorable role in the freedom struggle of India.

Initiatives were also taken by many organizations like The Ladies Association (1886), Sarada sadan (1892), Gujrati Hindu Stree Mandal (1908), Seva Sadan (1909), Chimnabai Maternity and child Welfare league (1914), Bhagini Samaj (1916) to mobilize and organize women and to provide them a platform to enter into public life.⁵⁰ In 1910 Bharat Stree Mahamandal was inaugurated, in 1917 Women's Indian Association was established again in 1925 the National Council of women was established and in 1927 the first All India women's conference took place.⁵¹ All these organizations took various effective steps for bringing women on an equal footing with men.

In 1921 women got the right to vote in the election of Madras Legislative Council. Gradually, Indian legislatures; one after another started enfranchising women of their respective provinces on the same term as men. In April 1926, women got the right to sit in legislative councils of Madras, Bombay, Punjab and Central provinces. Kamladevi Chattopadhyay and Haunan Angelo became the first women to contest the elections to legislative councils. In 1927, the Governor of Madras nominated Muthulakshmi Ammal to be a member of Madras legislative council, who was known to be the first Indian women member in Legislative Council.⁵²

⁵⁰ Pratima Asthna, *Women's Movement in India*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, pp. 80-86.

⁵¹ K.C. Vidya, *Political Empowerment of Women at the Grass Roots*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p. 7.

⁵² Pratima Asthana, *op.cit.*, pp. 112-115.

After independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for bringing improvements in the socio-economic status and empowerment of women. For example, the constitution of India has laid down the foundation of participatory democracy and has guaranteed the 'Right to Equality' to all its citizens. The Indian Constitution guarantees political equality through adult franchise. Article 14 provides for equality-substantive as well as procedural. Article 16(2) forbids discrimination in respect of any employment of office under the state on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them. This normatively ensures a significant position and status to Indian women. The Articles which concern women directly and have a special bearing on their status include Article 39(a)-right to an adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally; Article 39 (d)-equal pay for equal work for both men and women; Article 39 (e) - protection of the health and strength of workers- men, women and children; Article 42-just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. These provisions and the chapters on Fundamental Rights envision a new socio-political order based on the principles of equality and equity.

In view of providing a concrete and actual shape to the initiatives and measures underlined in the constitutional provisions for social and economic upliftment of women, the economic development planning was

introduced in 1951. The government had also formed various social legislations and passed several acts for raising the legal and social status of women.⁵³

However, these constitutional provisions and measures had not helped much the Indian women to play a direct and dominant role in political life. Traditional mindset of Indian people also goes for exclusion of women from political life. The traditional attitude of Indian people towards women work assumes that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities and upbringing of their children. They have been considered inferior to men in different spheres of knowledge and life. Thus though women constitute half of the total population of the country, they are not visible in political and economic sphere. Women's representation in state assemblies and in parliament also reflects low level of women's political participation. Women members occupy only 44 seats in the present Lok Sabha (14th Lok Sabha, 2009-2014) out of total 539 seats⁵⁴ (i.e., 8.16%) and only 23 seats in the present Rajya Sabha (2009-2010) out of total 243 seats⁵⁵ (i.e., 9.47%). The statistics shows that the political strength of women till today has never crossed 10 percent of the total members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Women who want to enter politics find that the political, cultural and social environment often becomes unfriendly or even hostile to them. Though it is remarkable that after independence we have seen women as Prime Minister, President, as Members

⁵³ Condition of Employment Act, 1966, The Plantation of Labour Act, 1951, The Contract Labour Act, 1970, The Factories Act, 1948, Maternity benefit Act, 1961, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, Employments' State Insurance Regulation Act, 1950.

⁵⁴ <http://nrcw.nic.in>

⁵⁵ <http://www.ipu.org>

of the constituent assembly, Ministers at central and state level, Governors and other administrative posts, yet this does not translate into active participation of women in political processes as true sense of the term.

The attitudes of society which is openly disfavoring women for availing certain opportunities have deeply distorted their social and political status both in urban and rural areas.⁵⁶ The socio-economic condition of women in rural areas have been found more serious and dissatisfactory than in urban areas on account of the prevalence of backward traditional, social and cultural system of the society. Keeping into consideration the unsatisfactory progress of women it has increasingly felt desirable that involving rural women with any political institutions including in the affairs of decision making process, would be an important instrumental measure for improving the socio-economic status of women and thereby empowering them. In view of these assumptions the policy of providing 'reservation' for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has been thought as an important governmental intervention for maximizing the participation of women in local level political institutions in the decision making process.

Many thinkers totally opposed reservation for women. According to them the system of reservation is unfair and undemocratic therefore it should not be followed. However, some other thinkers opined that despite the existence of constitutional and legislative provisions, women remain invisible in political

⁵⁶ G.S. Mehta, *Participation of Woomen in the Panchayati Raj System*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2002, p. 14.

and administrative posts. According to them, it is only through reservation that the presence of women in political institutions can be ensured which in turn may encourage many other women to come out of the age-old barriers imposed on them and to share political power on equal footing with men.⁵⁷

Though Panchayati Raj system is age old, yet women did not figure in it. Different research works have indicated that no woman was found as a 'gramini' or a member of village assembly in ancient Indian village system. In the traditional village Panchayats and in the British scheme of local governments women remained entirely excluded.⁵⁸ The Franchise Committee set up by the British Government that discussed the constitution of statutory village panchayats, did not also consider the question of women's representation in Panchayats.⁵⁹ After independence the political leaders took care to see women in the realm of decision making process.

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru envisaged the inclusion of women in PRIs. When Swaraj was declared, Mahatma Gandhi said, *As long as women of India do not take part in public life there can be no salvation for the country; the dream of decentralization could never be fulfilled. I would have no use for the kind of Swaraj to which such women have not made their full contribution.*⁶⁰ Nehru said, *In political life everyone has a vote, in economic matters everyone has equal opportunities, and in our Panchayats also everyone*

⁵⁷ K.C. Vidya, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁸ Amal Mandal, *Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2003, p. 13

⁵⁹ Pamela Singla, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Vasant Desai, *Panchayati Raj: Power to People*, Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay, 1990, p. 335.

*should be considered equal. There should be no distinction between man and woman, high and low. We have to march ahead in a spirit of unity and brotherhood and with faith in our work and ourselves.*⁶¹

Initiatives towards providing an opportunity to women in the form of associating them with the village Panchayats were first mooted by Balawanta Rai Mehta Committee in 1957. The Committee recommended that at least two women should be included in the Panchayats as co-opted members. The Committee also specified that the selection of the two women would be based on the interest they took in activities relating to welfare of women and children. This indeed was the first occasion when women were able to have a role in the Panchayati Raj System, though not as elected members. In establishing Panchayats most state governments appended the provision of co-option of two women in case no women could come through direct elections. In 1978, the Ashok Mehta Committee provided the same co-option opportunity for women in PRIs. The fourth meeting of the central Council of Local self Government in 1958 also suggested for reservation of two seats for women in PRIs.

The Maharashtra was the first state which introduced the provision for the nomination of one or two women to each of the three tier PRIs under its Zilla Parishad and Panchayati Act of 1961. Later Karnataka in 1983 and Andhra Pradesh in 1986 introduced the policy of reservation of 25 seats for women in Gram Panchayats and Zilla Parishads. The state like West Bengal,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Orissa had also made the provision to reserve 20 percent to 30 percent of the total seats for women candidates in different tiers of local bodies in their respective states.

However the provision of co-option could not bring a large number of women members to PRIs. The method of co-option was not made compulsory and therefore the women members could not get the benefit of it. The requirement of co-option was not followed uniformly for all PR bodies and in every state. Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir for instance did not follow the scheme. Co-option was primarily used as patronage. Most of the women were from the politically connected families. The co-opted women hardly attended Panchayat meetings. They were called in only when quorum was the problem, otherwise their signatures were obtained from houses after the meetings.⁶² According to Pam Rajput most of the women members were neither aware of their role, rights or duties nor did they know much about the functioning of the Panchayats. They were just satisfied with the prestige and status symbol of being a member. They did not feel confident enough to discuss various issues relating to rural development or women's development.⁶³ Women members consequently could not play an important role in the Panchayati Raj Process.⁶⁴

⁶² Hazel D. Lima, "Participation of Women in Local Self-Government" in Sushila Kaushik (ed.), *Women's Participation in Politics*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1993, pp. 22-23.

⁶³ Pam Rajput, "Women Leadership at the Grass-root Level in Punjab", in Sushila Kaushik (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 39-41.

⁶⁴ Amal Mandal, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

The realization that women always have been disadvantaged and marginalized from various development processes had led to a conscious effort among the development planners to provide equal space to women to participate in development process. Development planners had learned that without women's full and informed participation, development projects are unlikely to succeed and women's empowerment cannot be achieved. Attempts had been made at national level to bring equality and to provide equal opportunity to both men and women to participate in development programmes. Government started many development projects especially for women to help them overcome their inequalities. But unfortunately, the developments since independence have not produced the desired results in actual practice due to social inhibitions and organizational deficiencies. An enormous disparity still exists between formal political equality of women and their meaningful exercise of political power. Despite all the legislation, policies and programmes of the government, it has been realized that women still continue to be one of the most oppressed sections of society. Government sponsored development activities seem to have benefitted only a small section of women, mainly of the urban middle class. The large majority of women have not benefitted from development.

Its reflection is found in a report titled 'Towards Equality' published by the Committee on the Status of women in India (CSWI) in 1974. The Committee very strongly recommended that women should be provided

with special opportunities for participation in the representative structure of Local Government. This committee also suggested for establishment of women's gram Panchayats to involve more women in the activities of Panchayats.

The National Perspective Plan (NPP) for women (1988) also highlighted that co-option of women in PRIs did not bring about any perceptible impact on women's participation in Panchayats. The NPP also asserted that special intervention was necessary to give more thrust and responsiveness to the policies and programmes related to empowerment of women in the participatory democracy. The final report of NPP therefore recommended for women the following policy perspectives. (a) 30 percent reservation of total seats in local governments-both panchayats and municipalities, (b) 30 percent reservation of executive heads in all PR bodies, (c) reservation of certain percentage of constituencies in lower PR tiers as exclusively women constituencies and (d) 50 percent of all grass-root functionaries would be women.

Consequent upon the recommendations of the NPP regarding reservation of seat and post for women in local governments, the 64th Amendment Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on 15th May 1989. The special feature of this Bill was 30 percent reservation of seats for women in the three tier PRIs. Despite of putting so much effort on the Bill it was not passed. The bill was defeated in the upper house. Another Bill was introduced in September 1990 but it could not be taken up because of the fall of the then government.

After the general elections of 1991, new government came to power and introduced the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Bill. The Bill was referred to the Joint Committee of Parliament and after incorporating suggestions of the joint committee the Bill was finally passed in Parliament on December 23, 1992 and came into force from April 24, 1993. The 73rd Amendment Act opened up a new vista in Indian politics as far as women's political participation is concerned. It reserved constitutionally 33% of seats for women in PRIs. This Amendment aimed at making rural women not only beneficiaries of development but more importantly contributors to it.

Following this Amendment, states and Union Territories have modified their Panchayat Acts to conform to the new dispensation within the stipulated date of April 24, 1994. Panchayats Acts of the States and union territories have reserved not less than one third seats and posts for women, Till the end of 2000, elections were held in 20 states and 4 union territories reserving panchayat seats and posts for women.

Some states have gone further to incorporate in the Panchayati Raj Acts the provision to enable women to assume the post of vice chairperson if the post of chairperson does not befall to them. In Maharashtra every chairperson is to hold office for one year instead of usual five years. In Karnataka, the tenure of chairperson is to rotate after 20 months so that majority of member including women, will get the chance to head the PR body.

The reservation provision for women provided by the 73rd Amendment Act has been hailed as a bold, revolutionary and a right step. The

reservation provided to women in PRIs created the 'necessary enabling conditions for women empowerment' their sustained interest and involvement in public affairs. It is presumed that gradually an environment would evolve which will deepen the concept of participatory democracy by providing gender equality, justice and equity in India.

In the post 1993 phase women's participation seems to have improved in relative terms but still women members are to overcome a number of hindrances. The Act itself is considered as a significant step to make inroads to democratization process. It is a beginning which needs to be substantiated by changes in many other fields related to socio-economic, political and attitudinal values of our society. Various social restrictions still prevail in our society to lend support to the policy perspective provided by the 73rd Amendment Act. The changes in PRIs structures over the years have certainly ensured higher visibility of women in grass root level democracy but whether that translates to real empowerment of women is subjected to corresponding changes in many others fields.

CHAPTER III

JORHAT ZILLA PARISHAD ELECTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION.

In any modern democratic political system, elections occupy a central place. Election is the contrivance through which a modern state creates amongst its citizens, a sense of involvement and participation in public affairs. It is through popular election that the authority of a government gets legitimacy. An effective electoral system is therefore, regarded as the bed rock of a representative government.

Among the various ways of political participation, electoral participation either by voting or contesting is regarded as an important means of participation. Through the participation in electoral process many issues of public interest gets highlighted. The campaign processes, public meetings of candidates, publish of manifestoes; all these are important aspects of political participation which are regarded as an essential tenet of democratic practices. Political participation not only serves to democratic ideology related to 'of the people by the people and for the people' but also regarded as added resources to participatory processes.

The Panchayati Raj election has a great significance in Indian political system as it spreads the sense of involvement of people in democratic process at local level. In Panchayati Raj election rural populace can participate as voter, campaigner and candidate without having high level of experience. In the earlier Panchayati Raj system women did not have much space. The provision of co-option system recommended in Balawanta Rai Mehta Committee and Ashok Mehta Committee did not leave scope for women to acquire adequate power and authority to perform actively in the PRIs. They

were utilized as rubber stamp Members and could not really participate in decision making process. In 1993 the 73rd Amendment Act was passed and declared 33% reservation of seats for women in PRIs. Through the implementation of reservation policy in Panchayats, women have got an opportunity to raise their presence and voice their opinion in PRIs. A large number of women entered in PRIs as elected representatives in post 73rd Amendment phase. In national level, after the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act was implemented about one million women entered in the first elections of Panchayats. About 40% of women got elected and got the opportunity to represent the marginalized sections of our society.

Assam has experimented with Panchayati Raj right from the dawn of independence. In post independence period, a total of five Panchayati Raj Acts have been passed in Assam (1948, 1959, 1972, 1986, and 1994).¹ Assam has introduced three tier (village level, block level, district level) Panchayati Raj System with the provision of 33% reservation of seats for women under the Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1994, in conformity with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Under this new system two elections of PRIs have been held in Assam in December 2001 and December 2007.² In both the elections women have secured more than 50% seats in PRIs. In the first election women secured 50.38% and in the second election women got 50.39% of seats. Assam occupies

¹ <http://pnrassam.nic.in/state-profile-modified>

² Panchayati Raj system was formed in Assam with 2203 Gaon (village) Panchayats, 189 Anchalik (block) Panchayats and 20 Zilla (district) Parishads.

the second position among the eight other states, which have gone beyond the 33% reservation of seats for women.³

Jorhat Zilla Parishad (JZP) is one of the three tier PRIs in Jorhat district of Assam. The district is located in the north-eastern part of Assam. At present the district is spread over 2851 sq.km with a population of 10, 00,091, which comprises of 630057 (63%) male and 370034 (37%) female.⁴ Literacy rate of the district is 77.9% which includes male literacy rate of 82.8% and female literacy rate 72.54%. The sex ratio of the district is 913 per 1000 men.⁵

Before the 1994 Assam Panchayati Raj Act, the Jorhat Zilla Parishad was known as Jorhat Mahkuma Parishad. It was only after six years of the implementation of 1994 Assam Panchayati Raj Act that the Jorhat Zilla Parishad was officially formed on 1st June of 2002. It consisted of 8 blocks and 111 Gaon panchayats. In Jorhat Zilla Parishad so far, two elections have been held, in December 2001 and December 2007. In the first election, women Members got 9 seats (i.e., 39.13%) out of total 23 seats, and in the second election also, women Members got the same number and percentage of seats.⁶ In both the elections in Jorhat Zilla Parishad the number of elected women representatives has gone beyond 33% reservation.

³ <http://www.localgovernmentindia.org>. (Kerela-57.24%, Assam-50.38%, Gujarat-49.30%, Karnataka-43.3%, Chattisgarh-33.75%, Tamil Nadu-36.73%, Uttaranchal-37.85% and West Bengal-33.15%) are the states, which got women members beyond 33%).

⁴ Census of India, 2001.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jorhatdistrict>.

⁶ Official Record of Jorhat Zilla Parishad.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyse the factors that have contributed towards participation of women in contesting Jorhat Zilla Parishad (JZP) election and helped them in winning the same. The 73rd amendment Act itself has created a base for women to enter into political processes. The study seeks to further identify other variables which have worked behind women's participation in PRIs. Some of the variables which have affected women's participation in political processes were identified by various studies of CIRDAP which can be categorized as socio-economic and political variables.⁷ It is a widely accepted fact that the analysis of demographic, socio-cultural and political variables like age, religion, education, occupation, political affiliation and political experience, political experience of Members provide a general picture of women's participation in Panchayati Raj election. In the present work, some of such variables have been selected for detailed analysis and to develop an understanding of women's participation in JZP. These variables are **age, social category, religion, education, marital status, type of family, economic status, occupational status, political affiliation of family, political experience, party affiliation, support of political party and political awareness** of the women Members of JZP.

Age

Age is considered as an important factor in respect of one's status and prestige, particularly in rural societies; it was once the privilege of older

⁷ CIRDAP, People's Participation in Rural Development, 1984.

people to occupy the various key positions in villages.⁸ It was an accepted principle and practice in rural set up to see aged people dominates the village administration in India.

Age is an indication of experience gained over a period of time. Maturity and age are assumed to go together. Politics is a complex game frequently involving quick decisions. The ability to take decisions or influence decisions depends on experience and this ability is known as maturity.

Age of women Panchayat Members is critical from both social and political standpoint. Rural society in India is said to be highly traditional and rigidly conservative particularly towards women. The mobility and outside exposure for young and unmarried women is not welcomed and is highly restrictive. One of the covert causes for confining young women indoors has been to safeguard female chastity. It is a widely held view that elderly women should be representatives of PRIs, for it symbolizes experience, maturity and equanimity of mind. In the northern states of India it is the older women who get preference over the younger ones in public forums such as Panchayats.⁹ The predominance of women from the higher age groups can also be attributed to the fact that by that age the rural women are relatively free from child caring and thus they will be able to acquire position to assume responsibilities outside

⁸ B.S. Bhargava, *Grassroot Leadership: A study of Leadership in PRIs*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972.

⁹ Pamela Singla, *Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj: Natura and Effectiveness*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2007, P. 139.

the home. But this is not reflected in Jorhat Zilla Parishad. Majority of women in JZP are younger compared to all India statistics.

Table1.1. Age composition of the Members

| Age Group | No of Women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|-----------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| 25-35 | 4 | 25% | 1 | 4.16% |
| 36-45 | 10 | 62.75% | 11 | 45.83% |
| 46-55 | 2 | 12.5% | 4 | 16.66% |
| 56-65 | ----- | ----- | 5 | 20.83% |
| 66-75 | ----- | ----- | 2 | 8.34% |
| 76-85 | ----- | ----- | 1 | 4.16% |

From the above table it is evident that out of total 16 women Members in Jorhat Zilla Parishad, 4 women (25%) belong to the age group of 25-35 (younger age), 10 women (62.75%) to the age group of 36-45 (lower middle age), 2 women (12.5%) belong to the age group of 46-55 (upper middle age) and no woman is above 56 (old age). Data analysis indicates that nearly 12 (75%) of women representatives of Jorhat Zilla Parishad belong to the middle age group (36-55). Absence of old women Members is a sign of change from the traditional attitude which tended to provide leadership only to those women who belong to older age group. *In contrast, only one male member belongs to*

the younger age group (25-35), 15 belong to the middle age group (36-55) and 8 Members are above 56 years of age (old age group).

Taking the age composition of the women Members as a whole, it is evident that changing attitude of the society has helped the women of younger age to come out and take part in JZP election. During interview the younger women showed more enthusiasm with regard to participation in political affairs and they felt happy that society did not put bar on them.

Religion

India is a land of variety of religious groups. It is sometime argued that all religious groups have to be fairly representative.

Table 1.2. Religious background of the Members

| Religion | No of women | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|-----------|-------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Hindu | 16 | 100% | 24 | 100% |
| Muslim | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Christian | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Buddhist | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Jain | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Sikh | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |

The above table provides an interesting finding that all the elected representatives of Jorhat Zilla Parishad are Hindus. This is in line with the census data on Jorhat district, according to which, the large majority of the people (9,27,858 out of 10,00,091, 92.8%) of the district profess Hinduism. Though, Muslim constitute 4.8% (47658 out of 10,00,091) of the population,

yet not a single person from this religion is elected as member of JZP.¹⁰ It has been revealed by many interviewees that area wise Muslim population is very low that political parties do not prefer to provide them party candidacy. Other religious communities also have low percentage of population. Therefore, they also find it difficult to get party backing. This implies that women from every religious community do not find suitable environment to enter in JZP.

Social category

Social category is also one of the important variables which affect people's participation in political sphere. Generally social category means a division of class of people having the same social, economic, or educational status. The influence of social category is well marked in rural society. Traditionally, the rural leadership in India has been a monopoly of people belonging to upper caste. People who belong to lower strata of society remain secondary and excluded from formal process of representation.

The data regarding social categories of the Members of JZP is presented in following table.

Table 1.3 Social Category of the Members

| Category | No of women | Percentage | No of male | Percentage |
|----------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| General | 1 | 6.25% | 5 | 20.83% |
| OBC/MOBC | 9 | 56.25% | 13 | 54.16% |
| TGL | 2 | 12.5% | 1 | 4.16% |
| SC | 1 | 6.25% | 2 | 8.33% |
| ST | 3 | 18.75% | 3 | 12.5% |

¹⁰ During the course of interview it has been found that women from this religious community did not contest nor expressed any desire to become a part of JZP. Though the male members contested they could not win.

From the above Table it is apparent that in JZP, women find represented from various categories [(1 from General category, 9 from Other Backward Community (OBC) and More Other Backward Community (MOBC), 2 from Tea Garden Labour Community (TGL), 1 from Schedule Caste (SC) and 3 from Schedule Tribe (ST)]. Among the male Members 5 belong to general category, 13 belong to OBC and MOBC, 1 belongs to TGL, 2 belong to SC and 3 belong to ST.

The data is a reflection of the fact that in JZP there exists no prejudice against any category. Women from various social categories have been able to find new identity and new expression as elected representatives with equal status. They are able to participate equally in Panchayati Raj bodies. This certainly has helped women as a category to come and participate in political realm. That is why in JZP the number of women Members has gone beyond 33% reservation.

Education

Education is the key that opens the door in life to many avenues. Illiteracy restricts one's capacity to move upward, give thoughtful judgment on issues of importance. Education facilitates help in the development of a progressive outlook in individuals, and makes a person more aware of political, social and economic problems confronting society. In PRIs capacity to understand the issues and problems facing the community and the ability to

communicate one's ideas to others are important qualities for a member.

Education is now one of the means for acquiring such a capacity.

Education plays a crucial role in one's personality, development and career. Education is supposed to play an important role in opinion building and in guiding action. An illiterate person would not be able to understand all the rules and regulations governing the institutions of Panchayati Raj. For women education has vast potential both for themselves and for society. It is one of the primary conditions for women's empowerment. Education provides women the means to move from passivity to assertiveness and with it women will be able to participate actively in social, economic and political processes which affect their ability.

Hence the role of education cannot be undermined. The data regarding educational qualification of the elected representatives of JZP is tabulated below in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4 Educational Backgrounds of the Members.

| Level of education | No of women | Percentage | No of male | Percentage |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Primary | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Below matriculate | 1 | 6.25% | 1 | 4.16% |
| Matriculate | 7 | 43.75% | 5 | 20.83% |
| Higher secondary | 5 | 31.25% | 4 | 16.66% |
| Graduate | 3 | 18.75% | 10 | 41.66% |
| Post-graduate | ----- | ----- | 4 | 16.66% |

It is evident from the above Table that all the Members of JZP are literate and have some kind of education. Among the women Members 1 woman is educated up to class IX, 7 women are matriculate, 5 have passed higher secondary school and 3 are graduates. Among the male Members 1 member is below matriculate, 5 Members are matriculate and 4 have passed higher secondary school. There are a good number of graduates and post graduates- with 10 and 4 Members respectively. It appears that with regard to high level of education, men are at a more advantageous position in comparison to women. As seen in the table 1.4 that 4 male Members are post-graduated, while there is no single woman who falls under this category. Only 1 woman member is continuing her post-graduation. During the course of interview, interestingly many women (who are not Members) came out of curiosity. When asked whether they are also interested to participate in political processes, they expressed their regret of not having any sort of education. They feel that education is necessary to participate in formal meetings and public dealings etc.¹¹ It is remarkable to note that most of the male Members gave up studies at various levels of primary, secondary and under graduate level to enter political arena. On the contrary, women Members say that they discontinued their studies mostly due to marriage and domestic responsibilities.¹²

¹¹ The interviews to those members were not originally thought of. It was a spot decision to understand the value of education.

¹² Interview with the women members of Jorhat zilla Parishad.

From the table one can find that education has certainly given women Members an edge over others who do not have any formal education.

Marital status

In India the normal upbringing of a girl in rural society is directed towards marriage as soon as she reached maturity.¹³ Be it rural and urban circumstance, most of the girls tend to get married at an early age to keep up the tradition. It is considered necessary to investigate the marital status of the Members whether marriage has contributory affect or act as a hindrance for them.

Table 1.5 Marital status of the Members.

| Marital status | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|----------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Married | 14 | 87.5% | 23 | 95.8% |
| Unmarried | ----- | ----- | 1 | 4.2% |
| Widow | 2 | 12.5% | ----- | ----- |

Based on the information given in the above table, it has been observed that all the women Members of JZP are married and they seem to be fulfilling their obligations to both family and office. To a query whether unmarried women face any restriction from family or from outside the family, to participate in political affairs, the general response was that unmarried women are very young and usually families do not like them to expose to public life. Though for male, such societal values do not exist, yet we find that

¹³ K. Subha, *Women in Local Governance*, RBSA Publishers, Jaipur, 1994, pp. 86-87.

among the male Members only one male member is unmarried. Since the study concern women, it was not explored why unmarried men find it difficult (if the case at all) to enter Panchayati Raj. Thus we may safely conclude that absence of unmarried women is a reflection of the fact that the young and unmarried women are not encouraged to enter politics. The women Members further seemed convinced that their marriage has helped them to be in politics and enable them to perform better with the advice extended by husband and in-laws. The Members have acknowledged that marriage is a source of confidence-generating measures for them.

The overall analysis indicates that marital status is an important factor for women to contest in JZP election. One interesting fact that came out is that most of the women Members are prompted by their husbands to contest in PR elections. This is due to the fact that most of their husbands try to wield political power in Panchayati Raj bodies in the name of their wives.

Presence of widows as Members in the JZP shows that the position of widows in society has improved and they are slowly being accepted in public life.

Type of family

A family is more or less a durable association of husband and wife with or without children. Family structure could be joint or nuclear. In Indian social structure, families are generally distinguished on the basis of joint family and nuclear family. Marriage and family occupy a very important place in women's life in India. When most people think of family, they think of one

unit consisting of husband, wife and their offspring. This type of family is commonly known as nuclear family. In the joint family, a couple, their unmarried sons and daughters, married sons with wives, grand sons and daughters all live together under one roof and share food from same hearth. The joint family is associated with a traditional, agricultural society in which family interest tend to dominate over individual interest. The institution of joint family has deep roots in the Indian tradition and culture. The nuclear family is a development of a mobile, industrialized society which, it is believed permits of a greater flexibility and self expression among its Members.¹⁴

In India, joint family has withstood the force of social change and acted more like an institution than merely one household structure. It usually serves as a productive enterprise, a moral community and a support group. Psychologically “family ties are the warp and wool of Indian social fabric”.¹⁵ However, today joint family system in conventional sense is not so prevalent in rural society as it was earlier. Consequently, the joint family is going through a process of transformation. Owing to the inflow of western individualistic attitude of life, the joint family has come under heavy strains. It is sometimes held that the environment of joint family is not always conducive for development of the total personality of an individual.

It is not possible for a person to choose the type of family in which one would be born, but it is possible to do so later in life to one’s

¹⁴ K.C. Bidya, Political Empowerment of Women at The Grassrotts, Kanishka Publishers, 1997, p. 113.

¹⁵ Robert W, Stephen, *Changing India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1948, p.46.

preference and requirements. In order to find out whether women representatives of JZP come from traditional joint families or nuclear families, they are asked to specify the type of family.

Table 1.6. Type of families of Members.

| Type of family | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|----------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Joint family | 5 | 31.25% | 14 | 58.33% |
| Nuclear family | 11 | 68.75% | 10 | 41.67% |

On analyzing the types of families of the Members of JZP as depicted in Table 1.6, it has been found that most of women representatives (68.75%) come from nuclear families; only 31.25% women come from joint families. On the other hand most of the male Members (58.33%) come from joint families.

This appears that women from joint families find it difficult to take active part in political activities. Responses show that the reason behind this is joint family pressurized to conform to the established norms. Nuclear families with less domestic responsibilities have proved it's easier for women to come out of that traditional role and perform public responsibilities.

Economic status

Economic status of a woman's family is a major factor which opens up the opportunity channels in her life. In Indian context, contesting election and organizing campaigns requires considerable resources.

Economic status can be broadly determined by possession of wealth as well as other kinds of goods or property like lands, houses, vehicles etc. In determining the economic status it is certainly desirable to know the source of income also. But to get the correct information on economic status from a person especially a leader is difficult. The respondents seemed to hesitate to disclose their real income and assets. This difficulty is even more real when it comes to interviewing women who in most cases are not quite knowledgeable of family income, property or wealth. The table 1.7 would help us in drawing an idea of the respondent's economic status as determined by their asset.

Table 1.7. Economic status of the Members

| Property owned | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Land | 16 | 100% | 24 | 100% |
| House(Assam type, one storied) | 15 | 93.75% | 19 | 79.16% |
| R.C.C (two stories) | 1 | 6.25% | 5 | 20.83% |
| Two-wheelers | 9 | 56.25% | 23 | 95.83% |
| Car | 3 | 18.75% | 9 | 37.5% |

As has been shown in the above table, all Members of JZP have their own land and houses. But distinction is made between Assam type- one storied house, and R.C.C. two storied house. It is seen in the table that among the women Members only 1 (6.25%) women has two storied house, while the rests of the Members have one storied houses. Normally the general perception

is that the RCC two-storied houses indicate better economic status. 56.2% are in possession of two-wheelers while cars are owned by a meagre percentage of 18.75%. Though these properties either belong to their husbands or other family Members it has been noticed that majority of the women Members of JZP come from families having good economic background. This shows that economic status has been an important factor for the women to get represented in PRIs. It has to be noted that all the male Members of JZP have their own land and houses.

Among the male Members, 20.83% male Members have two storied house while 19.7% have one storied house. Two-wheelers are owned by 95.83% and 37.5% have cars. It is remarkable that four male Members (16.7%) posses more than one car.¹⁶ This implies that the male Members have a better economic status than women and it also underlines the importance of economic status in politics even in rural areas.

Occupational status

Occupation is one of the important characteristics for the status and prestige of a person who aspire for leadership. Though man works for income arising out of it, his occupation also determines his status, power position and prestige in society. In determining the question whether occupational status of women have any bearing on the participation or not, it has been found that a large number of women Members (68.75%) are housewives

¹⁶ Interview with the members of Jorhat Zilla Parishad.

while others (18.75%) are involved in helping their husbands on cultivation and the remaining two are employed as government servants; one of them is working as medical nurse and the other is a practitioner lawyer in Jorhat district court. This shows on one hand the dependence of women on their husbands and on the other hand it appears that those have a stable income, are not interested in JZP. It is rather easy to persuade housewives to contest for public responsibilities. Service holders were found to be quite averse to enter into politics.

On the contrary, the occupation of men representatives, as shown in the table 1.8 are quite varied. Out of the 24 representatives, 3 (12.5%) men are working in government school as teacher, 15 (62.5%) are involved in business like tea garden, small hotel, restaurant, wood mill etc. One is self employed who has a contract agency. The rest (20.83%) are involved in cultivation. Table 1.8 reveals that in JZP elected representatives had come from different occupational group. However presence of less number of government employees has showed that government employees are not interested to contest in ZP election. The service holders do not want to take additional burden.

Table 1.8 Occupation of the Members

| Occupation | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|---------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Service | 2 | 12.5% | 3 | 12.5% |
| Business | ----- | ----- | 15 | 62.5% |
| Self-employed | ----- | ----- | 1 | 4.17% |
| Agriculture | 3 | 18.75% | 5 | 20.83% |
| House keeping | 11 | 68.75% | ----- | ----- |

Political affiliation of family

The nature and type of family contributes the individual Members, especially women to equip her with the necessary potential for playing her role in community. The family exercises a strong influence in inculcating political ambitions. The position and status of women depends almost invariably on family status. The position of father for unmarried women and the position of husband for married one matter a lot. If the family enjoys a political role, it becomes very conducive for the women of that family to find an easy and ready entry to politics. Hence, political affiliation of family members of women representative cannot be undermined.

The engagement of family members in socio-political activity reflects a certain atmosphere in family environment which influence the members of the family. Many studies have revealed that rural women do not participate in public activities on their own interest. They have less opportunity to be informed in order to make their own judgment. They generally depend on the members of the family in the areas of political activity. Therefore if women get public exposures through the family members, it becomes easier for them to get a readymade platform to enter in public arena.

Table 1.9 Political affiliation of family

| Response | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | percentage |
|---|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Family Members are Involved in politics | 13 | 81.25% | 4 | 16.66% |
| Not involved in politics | 3 | 18.75% | 20 | 83.34% |

It is clear from the above table that majority of the women (81.25%) Members of JZP, come from families which are associated with socio-political activities in one way or the other. This provides an exposure to them as far as the issues of political affairs are concerned. As their families are connected with political activists they know a bit of what is going on in their area. This implies that the engagement of the family members in socio-political activity create a favorable atmosphere in family environment which encourage them to take part in PR activities. Only 3 (18.75%) women were found coming from families which did not have any political base. This indicates that family exposure is an important factor for women's participation in JZP election. In contrast, it has been observed that, majority of the male Members (83.34%) come from families which did not have any political base. Only 4 (16.66%) male Members come from families with political background. This also explains the fact the acceptance level for women as public figures has a direct linkage with their family's political status. Women, who come from a family which has known public faces, find it far easier to approach public and get accepted also. Whereas women with no such background face problem both in approaching public as well as getting accepted also. Political affiliation certainly provides an edge to them who are fortunate to have such link.

Political experience

Participation in politics requires an acumen as well as skill. Without experience it is difficult to enter into politics. Therefore it is considered

imperative to examine whether women Members of JZP had prior experience before contesting in JZP election.

Table 1.10 Political experience of the Members

| Responses | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Contesting election for the first time | 13 | 81.25% | 18 | 75% |
| Contesting election before | 3 | 18.75% | 6 | 25% |

As has been observed in table 1.10 only 3 women (18.75%) had participated in Gaon Panchayat (GP) election as candidates before contesting for JZP. All the 3 women won GP election in 2001. While for other Members, JZP election provided the first opportunity to enter into political arena. It is important to note that these three women Members also have some kind of exposure to political issues through family. Though none of them had contested election before the implementation of the 73rd Amendment Act, yet their families were associated with political activities. The family environment has helped them to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the 73rd Amendment Act. This implies that 33% reservation is an important factor in providing the opportunity for participation of women in Panchayati Raj election. In absence of the reservation such women did not get a platform to use their knowledge and awareness for participation in political representation.

As it has been observed that though only a few women Members had prior experience of participation in PRIs election, the same case applies to

male Members, as we find that only 6 (25%) male Members of JZP had contested in 1991 Panchayat election.

Party affiliation

The political parties have an important role as catalysts in boosting up representative aspect of local-self government. The most obvious contribution which the political parties can make is to assist the local body in assuming the responsibility of creating an enthusiasm among masses regarding election, candidates and focusing the support of the electorate. They are the brokers in transforming public interests into public action. They are sometimes indispensable in aiding the public to select their representatives. Whether in opposition or not, the party man is in a more effective position than an isolated independent to create a support base for him or his party candidate.

The involvement of political parties in the Panchayat Raj has been a controversial subject for many years. There are two schools of thought. One school of thought emerged under the intellectual leadership of Jay Prakash Narayan, which is associated with the theory of party less democracy in rural areas and non partisan elections and the principles of unanimity. The other school of thought believes that that entry of political parties in PRIs is inevitable. In modern political system, the political parties play a very important role. It is the party which puts up the candidates, assists them and transforms public interest into programmes of public action.¹⁷

¹⁷ K.C. Vidya, *op.cit*, p. 120.

Table 1.11. party affiliation of the Members

| Name of the party | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|-------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Congress | 16 | 100% | 22 | 91.66% |
| B.J.P. | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| A.G.P. | ----- | ----- | 2 | 8.34% |
| C.P.I | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Other | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |

It is clear from the above table 1.11 that all the women Members of JZP belong to the Congress party. This seems that the Congress party takes more initiatives and provides support to women for contesting in PR election as compared to other parties. It has been observed that majority of the woman Members are in the opinion that party support is the basic factor to win in election. They justified their statement by saying that only a political party can provide funds and other necessary support to win at any level of election. Among the male Members, 22 belong to Congress and 2 belong to A.G.P. Absence of Members from B.J.P., C.P.I. and other party indicates that these parties have very minimal impact in Panchayati Raj election as far as JZP is concerned.

Support of political party

In modern democratic election where political parties have played a vital role, support of political party is very important for a candidate to win. In JZP since none of the member is elected as independent candidate it is considered worthwhile to find out 'what sort of support was provided to the

Members by the party in PR election’. The following table 1.13 shows the responses:

Table 1.13 support of political party

| Responses | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male Members | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Declared candidate of the party | 16 | 100% | 24 | 100% |
| Financial assistance from the party | 10 | 62.5% | 14 | 58.3% |
| Campaign | 16 | 100% | 24 | 100% |

It is seen in the table 1.13 that all elected women representatives have responded that the party had supported them in declaring them as candidates for JZP election. Party workers had helped them in campaigning, appealing and requesting people to vote and support their party candidates. 62.7% women have responded that they also got financial assistance from the party. Others were reluctant to comment on the financial help or disclose the source of finance.

During the course of study it has also been observed that on choosing women candidate political parties do not follow any special policy. Since 33% reservation has been implemented, the party tries to find eligible women (member of party) of particular place to contest for reserved seats. Generally the party gives more importance on political background and social position of the family of women candidates for reasons already analysed with regard Table No. 1.10. Personality of the women, their political experiences and

their involvement in party activities are also considered important criteria for providing party candidacy. From the facts stated here, it may be said that the women candidates have been successful in getting representation in JZP not only because of the opportunity provided by 73rd Amendment Act but their personality, capability and support of political parties also become important determinants for their entry to political realm.

Political awareness

Political awareness is essential for the proper functioning of the Members to enhance and facilitate their performance. The term ‘political awareness’ is used here to indicate the extent of knowledge of the Members related to the system of PRIs. The political awareness of the elected representatives have been studied through some basic components such as knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Acts in Assam, provision(s) of some Acts, implication of 73rd Amendment Act, knowledge about JZP, and awareness about women’s reservation in Panchayati Raj.

Table 1.13 Political Awareness of the Members.

| Responses | No of women Members | Percentage | No of male mebers | Percentage |
|---|---------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| Awareness about the functioning of PRIs | 13 | 81.25% | 24 | 100% |
| Knowledge of the Panchayati Raj Acts in Assam | 11 | 68.75% | 22 | 91.66% |
| Knowledge about JZP | 16 | 100% | 24 | 100% |
| Awareness about women’s reservation | 16 | 100% | 24 | 100% |

It is observed from the table that 13 (81.25%) women Members know that there are 29 subjects related to PRIs and that these are listed in 11th schedule of Indian constitution which concern rural development. When Members were asked to point out some of those subjects listed in 11th schedule, to my surprise majority of them could correctly tell many of these issues. 68.75% have the basic knowledge regarding five Panchayati Raj Acts that were passed in Assam. They could correctly recall the years of implementation of those Acts. Even one or two provisions also known to them of some Acts. 31.25% women Members are not aware of these Acts. They only know about the current Panchayati Raj Act 1994. However, all the women Members know that JZP was previously known as Jorhat Mahkuma Parishad (JMP) and all the women Members are aware of the 33% reservation for women in PRIs. Here it is pertinent to note that though majority of the women Members (81.25%) of JZP are politically aware because of family exposure, the other women Members (18.8%) also emerged as politically conscious because of their own initiative, involvement in social activities and party (political) activities. This implies that most of the women Members of JZP are politically aware. This indicates that basic knowledge regarding PRIs has helped the women Members to contest JZP election and participate in various stages of Zilla Parishad activities.

From the analysis of all the data gathered, it is evident that family income, facilities at house, attitude towards participation and social mobility are

on the sides of the males. The 33% reservation has no doubt worked as a catalyst for women but some other socio-economic determinants have worked both in positive and negative direction in offering a platform to women in political realm. Family emerged as a strong force behind their success. Party support also emerged as prime factor contributing towards their selection. However, for unmarried and younger generation of women, still the attitude of society does not seem to be encouraging one. Level of education also found to be disfavoring them in assuming active role in participatory democracy.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN MEMBERS OF JORHAT ZILLA PARISHAD: ROLE AND LEVELS OF THEIR PARTICIPATION

The idea of democracy is to ensure “a government of the whole body by the whole people, equally represented”.¹ Though India has an impressive mechanism, install arrangements and structures, legislation which guarantee equality, yet lot of groups remain excluded from enjoying equal position in society. Women constitute one such group.

It is seen from the most primitive socialization experiences that women find it difficult to assume positions and responsibilities in politics. The most frequently offered explanation for the absence of women from high offices as well as their lack of political participation is that women’s role in household stands in conflict with political roles. In the political field today women stands on a cross roads on one hand and discrimination on the other hand. They have yet to build up adequate experience to add to their capacity and potential to carry out political role as offered by the 73rd Amendment Act.

In this chapter an endeavor has been made to study the level of performance of women Members of Jorhat Zilla Parishad (JZP) at various stages of Zilla Parishad activities. The level of participation of women Members in JZP are analyzed with the help of some selected determinants which include **attendance in meetings, taking part in debate and decision making, discussion on woman’s issues, average time invested in village affairs per day, addressing group of people, contact with the voters and attending the grievances of voters, role in implementation of programmes,**

¹ Mill, *Consideration on Representative Government*, Re Guers, Chicago, 1962, p. 256.

gains from participation and desire to continue in office. These determinants are studied on the basis of responses of the elected Members.

Attending meetings

JZP conducts a general body meeting once in three months i.e., total four meetings are conducted in a year. Sometime special meetings are arranged if required, particularly when new schemes and programmes are launched by government. The dates of the meetings are being fixed by the president. In doing so, the president takes the advice of the Chief Executive Officer and other official staff. The Members are informed at least 10 days ahead of the scheduled meetings. The agendas are circulated to the Members in advance. Meetings are always held at JZP Office. Meetings are generally presided over by the president and in absence of president vice-president of JZP conducts the meetings. According to the views of majority of Members, meetings start on time and majority of the Members are found punctual in the meetings. According to the president of JZP, since majority of the Members come from a distances, they wish to start on time so that they can leave on time. In the meetings large number of district government officials like district engineers and officers from electricity, water, agriculture, food and civil supplies, public works, public health departments are invited. It is important to note that though local M.L.As and M.Ps are supposed to attend Zilla Parishad meetings (according to 1994 Assam PR Act), it is found that hardly they attend Zilla Parishad meetings. It has been observed that when major decisions are

taken in Zilla Parishad meetings, the president informs local M.L.As and M.Ps later.

Attendance in meetings is considered as one of the important variables to study participation of women in PRIs activities. Policy making is a vital task for any administration. A major responsibility of leadership conforms to set goals and this is done in the meetings. So, it has been considered necessary to see how often women Members attend meetings; what is their level of participation in these meetings and how far they are able to affect the decision making processes.

Table 1.14 Member's attendance in meetings.

| No. of meetings attended | No. of women Members | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Attend all meetings | 10 | 62.7% |
| Absence in more than three meetings | 6 | 37.5% |
| Absence in more than six meetings | ----- | ----- |

A simple analysis of data presented in Table 1.14 reveals that majority of the women Members of JZP attend meetings regularly. It is interesting to note that out of 16 women Members 10 Members (62.7%) have ever missed a meeting. The Members have opined that attending the meetings of Zilla Parishad is essential as they get information on many issues. This is the best place to get a general picture of works undertaken by the Parishad or to be undertaken up in future. Most of the women Members prefer to attend meetings

as the meetings help them to keep touch with the development in JZP. It has been observed that 6 (37.5%) women Members are not regular in attending meetings. Efforts were taken to find out the reasons of their absence and irregular presence. The reasons of irregularity in meetings are summarized below in table 1.15.

Table 1.15 Reasons for non-attendance

| Reasons for non attendance | No. of women Members | Percentage |
|----------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Sickness | 2 | 12.5% |
| Domestic work | 4 | 25% |
| Do not get information | ----- | ----- |
| Other reason | ----- | ----- |

This shows that getting information regarding meetings is not a problem. Despite getting prior information they fail to attend primarily because of sickness and domestic burden.

Members' performance at the meetings

The Members' performance at the meetings is selected as another important determinant of studying the level of women's participation. An attempt has been made to examine the nature of participation of the women Members in JZP meetings with the help of two indicators. These are: **taking part in debate and discussion in JZP meetings and taking part in decision**

making processes. The following analyses are made to understand the nature of women's participation in JZP meetings.

Taking part in Debate

Taking part in debate and discussion is an essential component of participation in representative institutions. Thus it is considered crucial to observe as to what extent the women Members of JZP partake in debate and discussions in the meetings.

Table 1.16 Participation in debate and discussion

| Participating in debate | No. of Members | Percentage |
|---------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Always raise their voices | 9 | 56.25% |
| Try to raise voices | 7 | 43.75% |
| Do not raise voices | ----- | ----- |

It was found that 9 (56.25%) women Members are regular in voicing their opinions in the meetings. Others (43.75%) also try to raise their voices but due to the lack of confidence and ignorance on the subjects discussed in the meetings; they prefer to keep silent. However, it has been observed that all the Members remain very conscious during debating hours. They eagerly want to gain knowledge of new facts as well as of procedures of Zilla Parishad activities. For the first timers it is a learning experience.

Women Members do not feel any type of discrimination during meeting hours. The president provides equal opportunity to all the Members to express their views and argue in meetings.

Taking part in decision making

In JZP major decisions are taken by the committee Members in committee meetings. There are four committees in JZP. These are General Permanent Committee, Finance and Account committee, Social Justice Committee and Planning and Development Committee. Every committee has five Members and in each committee only one woman (20%) is included. Therefore in four committees there are only four elected women Members who could participate in decision making process. There are 23 Members in JZP and this means that only four women Members (17.39%) can participate in decision making process. Others remain outside the perview of decision making further. As compared to male Members, women do not enjoy the numerical strength to be effective in JZP's committee deliberations.

Type of issues/problems handled and discussed

The type of issues which are handled by the women Members is an important indicator of their involvement in Panchayati Raj System. On analyzing the data it is found that water supply, educational and vocational training, agricultural farm, medical facilities etc. are the issues which generally

attract the women member's attention of JZP and they express their opinion on these subjects.

Table 1.17 The type of issues handled by the women Members

| Types of issues | No. of women Members | Percentage |
|--|----------------------|------------|
| Water supply | 3 | 18.75% |
| Medical facilities | 4 | 25% |
| Construction of road and bridges | ----- | ----- |
| School building, youth club public auditorium, temple etc. | ----- | ----- |
| Educational and vocational training | 6 | 37.5% |
| Agricultural facilities | 3 | 18.75% |

Discussion on women's issue

One of the important explanations for giving representation to women was the fact that women could understand women's problems more. So by way of electing women leaders they could redress their grievances better. The idea allows women to play an important role in development processes particularly on the issues which directly concern them. In this perspective, it is quite natural to see whether these women Members are able in solving the problems of rural women and bringing women development issues into discussions.

Table 1.18 Discussion on women's issues

| Discussion on women's development | No. of women Members | Percentage |
|--|----------------------|------------|
| Rarely held | 12 | 75% |
| Frequently held | ----- | ----- |
| No need on discussion on women's development | 4 | 25% |

In response to the question as to whether or not the 'interests of women' as a subject, figures in the various meetings of JZP, 12 (75%) of women Members said that rarely discussion is held on women's issues. The rest (25%) feel that there is no need to discuss the women's issue as a separate subject because it automatically finds inclusion in the discussion on general development. It has been found that the male Members usually do not show interest in the women specific development issues. It was also observed that there are not many programmes for women in particular which benefit them directly. As a matter of fact women have benefitted indirectly by most of the development programmes launched but hardly any scheme on women oriented subjects have been passed by JZP.

This appears that women's interests are not adequately represented because of women themselves fail to take initiatives and men Members also don't show keenness on their part.

Average time invested in village affairs per day

The time spent by the women Members in village affairs is indicator which signifies women's participation in PRIs.

Table 1.19 Average time spent by the Members in village activities

| Time | No of woman Members | Percentage |
|------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Less than 1 hour | ----- | ----- |
| 1-2 hours | 10 | 62.5% |
| 2-4 hours | 6 | 37.5% |
| 4-6 hours | ----- | ----- |
| No time limit | ----- | ----- |

From the study, it has become clear that majority of women Members are warrant of spending time in village activities, majority of them are married of spending time in village activities, majority of the women Members were found investing one to two hours per day in Panchayat work. This indicates that women Members of JZP do not invest enough time for village affairs and do not take their role as serious as it should have been.

Addressing group of people

To address, a group, requires an ability to communicate and skill to interact.

Table 1.20 Experience of addressing people

| Response | No of woman Members | Percentage |
|----------|---------------------|------------|
| Never | ----- | ----- |
| Rarely | 6 | 37.5% |
| Often | 10 | 62.5% |

It has been observed from the above table that 10 (62.7%) women Members have good experiences of addressing group of people both in formal and informal atmosphere. Informally they address groups of people in *mahila mandals*, women's club, youth club and formally they address groups of people in public meeting, *gaon* panchayat meetings, party meetings and schools during school functions like sports day, children's day, Independence day and Annual day. During the course of interview it came out that they are more comfortable at the informal level than in formal level. On the other hand 6 (37.5%) women Members rarely accept the responsibility of addressing group of people. Basic reason behind this is that they hesitate to speak in the meetings and the inhibition comes from lack of exposure and training to participate in public affairs.

Relation with the voters and redress their grievances

Being elected representatives of JZP, women Members are required to serve the people and to redress their grievances. So, it was considered necessary how far the women Members are succeed to build up relations with the voters and redress their grievances.

Table 1.21 Frequency of visiting constituencies

| Responses | No of woman Members | Percentage |
|--------------|---------------------|------------|
| Rarely | 9 | 56.25% |
| Regularly | 7 | 43.75% |
| Do not visit | ----- | ----- |

As depicted in the above table, responses reveal that majority of the women Members i.e., 9 (56.25%) don't frequently visit the villages and meet the people. Only 7 (43.75%) women Members responded that they used to visit the villages regularly. On the other hand it was found that most of the male Members visit the villages regularly i.e., four or five times a month. Male Members travel much more frequently and extensively in their constituencies than women Members. Women have to depend on male Members of their family to escort them. Transports in rural areas also are not easily available. It is important to note that elected status has nothing to do with their domestic responsibilities. They have to look after their homes, do the domestic work and then fulfill their household responsibilities whereas men do not have such compulsions. Male Members can travel alone and financially they are in a better position too to spend money on travelling. In this context, it is interesting to know as to how the women Members redress the grievances of the local people.

Though it was found that majority of the women Members don't regularly visit the villages and meet the villagers, it does not mean that they are not interested in redressing the grievances of the voters. It has been observed that all the women Members had opened up offices in their homes so that people could contact them. In this way they have found an arrangement avoided going to distances, save time and energy and perform the dual functions without getting hampered. Very often people visit and most of them come with problems

regarding inadequacy of drinking water, bad conditions of rural roads and bridges, inadequate medical facilities and shortage of electricity.

It has been found that for redressing the grievances of people, majority of the women Members directly contact the concerned authorities to get the work done. It has been observed that the official staffs of many departments are not cordial and take too much time for a simple work.

Table 1.22 Methods of redressing the problems of people

| Mode of dealing with complaints | No of women Members | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Direct people to the proper authority | 2 | 12.5% |
| Personally contacting the authorities | 14 | 87.5% |

They visit the authorities in their offices or get in touch with them by telephone wherever possible, discuss the issue with them and direct them to take necessary action. Sometimes problems are very complicated that it takes times. So, in that situation they have to convince the people and promise them to solve their problems as soon as possible.

In this regard, it was observed that the Members face problems due to long procedure of various departments and delay in functioning. Majority of the women Members have responded that due to departmental rigidity works were not completed in proper time which create dissatisfaction among the people. The official staffs of various departments are not cordial and

take time for a simple work. It is a problem for the Members to visit the same offices again and again.

Implementing programmes

Enquiring about the nature and participation of woman Members in implementation and supervision of different developmental programmes, it is observed that 3 (18.75%) women representatives have not participated in implementation programmes at all. Burden of household related activities is cited as the basic reasons behind this. On the other hand a vast majority of the woman representatives i.e., (81.25%) regularly participate in all stages of implementation programmes including supervision, monitoring and evaluating programme benefits. In doing so, women Members told that they do face problems in the allotment of schemes and later in the release of funds in favour of allotted schemes. A large proportion of women representatives were found not getting proper and timely information from different government departments regarding various development programmes. Besides, they face problems in identification of beneficiaries to be proposed for covering under various development programmes and selection of sites and location. For them lack of knowledge and experience in dealing with such work proves to be big hindrance in executing the schemes and programmes. Some of the women Members responded that local people do not understand the programme benefits and so they do not co-operate with the Members. This can be attributed again to their lack of experience, lack of exposure and lack of understanding on

part of the people also. This may be seen as failure on part of the Members to communicate with people and convince them.

Gains from participation

The anticipated gains from the participation play a very significant role in determining whether Members would like to participate in Panchayati Raj activities or not. Regarding the gains from holding the present position, the following responses are given in table below.

Table 1.23 Gains from participating in PR activities

| Responses | No of woman Members | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Confidence | 8 | 50% |
| Respect/popularity/power | 3 | 18.75% |
| Own identity | 2 | 12.5% |
| Satisfaction/Opportunity to serve people | 3 | 18.75% |
| Any other | ----- | ----- |

The table shows that increase in the confidence level is an important gain for majority of the women Members. These 8 (50%) women Members had narrated that when they became Members and attended meeting for the first time, they felt very nervous. But later, with frequent attendance in meetings they felt comfortable not only to sit at these meetings but also to speak in the meetings. 3 (18.75%) women said that as JZP member they are getting prestige, power, status and popularity. 2 (12.5%) women have said that as JZP Membership has given them an identity and the rest said that as JZP

member they are getting the opportunity to serve the people. Therefore they express their desire to be in the post as their now found identity has given them the confidence.

Desire to continue in office

The women Members have been asked whether they are interested in holding the present position. This was asked in order to re-confirm their participation. How seriously they take their new status and identity. Interestingly, all women Members of JZP expressed their desire to continue their present position.

Women Members regard their Membership as an avenue to be in position and power and enjoy privilege of PRIs Members. This Membership was considered as one of the best ways of serving the community because without political power no developmental work could be taken up in the division. Their social contacts have become widened which they feel will not be possible as housewives. So, none of them are willing to leave the position. It is pertinent to note that out of them 10 (62.7%) women Members not only desired to continue in office but also want to contest for M.L.As and M.P.s position. They want to take part at the higher levels of decision making bodies so that people in general and women in particular can lead a better life. This indicates that the women Members have very high political aspiration to be in public life.

After examining the above aspects, it is considered essential to discuss on perception of male Members and chief executive officer towards participation of women Members in JZP. An attempt has been made to know whether the male Members have varied attitude towards women's participation in JZP.

The perception of male Members with regard to the nature of participation and the role performed by the women Members in JZP is grouped into three broad categories i.e., positive, negative and neutral.

Table 1.24 Perception of male Members on women's participation

| Responses | No of male Members | Percentage |
|-----------|--------------------|------------|
| Positive | 22 | 91.6% |
| Negative | ----- | ----- |
| Neutral | 2 | 8.4% |

On analyzing the data it is found that majority of the male Members i.e., 91.6%, have positive attitude towards participation of women Members in JZP. According to these male Members women Members are participating actively in Zilla Parishad activities. However, 2 male Members (8.4%) have expressed their discontent regarding women's participation in JZP. It is to be noted that these 2 male Members belong to Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) party. Inference can be drawn that since all the women Members of JZP belong to Congress Party, the support of the male Members from the same party assumes importance. The male Members from opposition party on the other hand said that women should not be

in politics. They are not against the women Members of JZP but in general they are against of women entering into politics.

As far as the view of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is concerned women Members of JZP are very active and they participate equally with their male counterpart in various stages of Zilla Parishad activities. The CEO opined that the women Members maintain punctuality in meetings and they always follow rules and regulation strictly. They also keep regular contact with the CEO, as well as other Members of JZP.

Thus it is evident that women Members are participating regularly in the activities of JZP as stipulated in the constitution of JZP as expected out of them as responsible Members. Their enhanced status in the society by virtue of their Membership also encourages them to take their work seriously. They are the first generation learners. Gradually it is expected that more and more women are likely to contest for PRIs and would make their presence felt in representative system.

CHAPTER V.

CONCLUSION

Participation of women in political processes is an essential input to facilitate empowerment of women and to bring equality between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. With the growth of literature on development and social change the concept of participation of women in political processes has assumed enormous importance. Attempts have been made at global, national and local level to find out the root causes of gender discrimination and their poor presence in various fields particularly in political field where they are almost invisible. Consequently various steps have been taken to improve their political status. However, it has been observed that though rigorous efforts are being made throughout the world and various schemes and programmes have been launched to minimize gender bias to offer opportunities to bring women at par with men in respect to education, employment, human rights and decision making roles etc., still women remain excluded politically. Women's worldwide representation in politics shows an unsatisfactory picture. Despite the widespread movement towards democratization and equal participation in most countries, women remain invisible at various levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies. Though women all over the world vote in near equal proportion to men, but nowhere do they serve in equal numbers in political office. There are only few countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark where women occupy 33% or more seats in parliaments. In other countries, whether developed or developing, women's participation is still marginal and low.

A peep into the past regarding the political status of women in different countries of the world indicates that traditionally women had been considered as inferior to men. The inferior status and socially constructed constraints have made them fearful of taking part in political sphere. The wave of democracy, equality, socialism and justice in the 18th and 19th centuries, brought significant changes which affected the women. During that period, ‘Suffrage Movement’ and demand for ‘Political Rights’ of women brought a new era to women’s participation in public space. Slowly and gradually, women got the right to vote in almost all the countries of Asia, Africa, Europe, America, and Latin America. However, even after getting the universal suffrage, women did not get enough success in enjoying equal status with men in every sphere of life. Thus equality with equity continues to be a distant dream for them.

As far as the status of Indian women is concerned, we find instances that during the Vedic period Indian women enjoyed an equal status with men. They participated in the political activities and religious functions along with men. Women’s position started deteriorated during the Mughal period and early British period. Practice of *purdah*, Child marriage, prohibition of female education confined them to the four walls of home and restrictions were imposed upon their public life.

In the later part of British period, the status of women started changing with the introduction of education for women and some legal and

administrative changes. The Christian Missionaries, Voluntary organizations, British and Indian social reformers took initiatives to provide women education and to promote their standing in the society. Social renaissance and women's education in the 19th and the early 20th century gave rise to a new consciousness among the educated women. They began to demand social and political rights for women. A large number of women from all sections of the society took active part in the national freedom struggle.

With the advent of independence, Constitution of India guaranteed equal rights to all its citizens. In consonance with the right of universal adult franchise and all other political rights conferred on them by the constitution, women's participation in political activities was ensured to some extent. The dream of Gandhi and Nehru to include women in the political affairs feel expressed in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Initiatives towards providing an opportunity to women in the form of associating them with the village Panchayats were first mooted by Balawanta Rai Mehta Committee in 1957. The Committee recommended that at least two women should be included in the Panchayats as co-opted Members. The Ashok Meha Committee also recommended the same co-option opportunity to Indian women.

However, that did not bring satisfactory changes to the participation of women in political sphere. Barring a few exception, women have remained outside the domain of power and political authority due to social restrictions. Women remain confined to the four walls of family life.

Constitutional provisions have not helped much the Indian women to play a direct and dominant role in whatever capacity they participate. An enormous disparity still exists between formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power. Political parties are still reluctant to choose women as candidates. Even today in India there is no political party which has a strong women's wing

As a result, though participation of women in electoral process as voters is not too low in comparison to men, their participation and representation in decision making and law implementing bodies is still disappointing. This is evident when we look at the configuration of women Members in the parliament of India. Political strength of women till today has never crossed 10 percent of the total Members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Different studies show that women who want to enter politics often find the political, cultural and social environment unfriendly or even hostile to them. The same situation could be seen at the rural local government level also. Despite the provision of co-option women did not get adequate opportunity to participate in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

It was to improve this situation that the policy of 33% of reservation of seats was introduced by the government of India in 1993. The implementation of 33% reservation for women at the grass root level has opened up new horizons for women's entry to Indian politics. In post 1993 phase a large number of women entered in PRIs as elected representatives.

However, it has been felt that even after getting 33% reservation, women are still facing lots of obstacles which put impediments on their participation. Though there are no constitutional obstacles for women's political participation at grass root level or any level of administration, in reality, various structural, functional, attitudinal and environmental constraints still exist which do not provide conducive environment for women's participation in PRIs.

Jorhat Zilla Parishad (JZP) is also not an exception to the disappointing state of affairs with regard to women's participation in PRIs. Though in JZP women Members have been elected beyond 33% reservation they still face lots of hindrances as far as their active participation is concerned.

The term 'participation' has generally been conceived as the involvement of the people in the affairs which affect them. In the context of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), participation implies involvement of people in the process of decision-making, implementation and evaluation. In this present work, the concept of women's participation in PRIs is employed to refer involvement of women as elected representatives in various stages of Panchayati Raj activities. Women's participation in PRIs depends upon a variety of demographic, psychological, socio-economic and political factors.

The present study reveals that apart from 33% reservation for women provided by 73rd Amendment Act, some other factors like education, marital status, family structure, political affiliation of family, party affiliation of

Members, support of party, economic background of family have played an important role with regard to women's participation in Jorhat Zilla Parishad.

On analysing the role and level of women's participation, it is found that majority of the women Members take their responsibility seriously as they regularly participate in meetings. On examining the experience in addressing group of people, it has been found that some of the women Members have gained confidence and experiences in addressing group of people both in formal and informal atmosphere. However, many other women Members have a very rare experience of addressing group of people. They feel nervous and unconfident particularly at the formal meetings. It has been observed that basic reasons behind this have been the low level of education and lack of public exposures. In presence of highly educated person, they hesitate to speak in the meetings.

Regarding the gains from holding the present position, it is found that raising the confidence level is an important gain for majority of the women Members. The first experience of attending meeting was not a comfortable experience for them. They felt uneasy. Slowly and gradually with increasing frequency of attendance in meetings, they felt more confident of their presence.

All the women are interested in continuing their present position. It is pertinent to note that majority of them not only desire to continue in present office but also want to contest for MLA's and MP's position. They want to take part at the high levels of decision making and want to gain more knowledge and experience because they feel that by occupying political

position they are getting prestige, power, popularity, identity and the opportunity to serve the people. Women are proud of their new position and see it as an acknowledgement of their capability.

On analyzing the perception of male Members on the nature and role performed by the women, it is found that majority of the male Members have positive view towards participation of women. However, some male Members have expressed their dissatisfaction regarding women's participation. It is to be noted that these male Members belong to Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) party and they are in the opinion that women should not be in politics. On the other hand, according to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), women Members are very active and they participate equally with their male counterpart in various stages of Zilla Parishad activities. The CEO opined that the women Members maintain punctuality in meetings and they strictly follow rules and regulations.

Despite of these perceptions and observations of male Members and chief executive officer of JZP, the study reveals that women Members do not invest enough time for village affairs. This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of women have still not been relieved from their household duties. From the study, majority of the women Members were found investing only one to two hours per day in Panchayat work.

The study also reveals that the issues related to welfare of women do not receive enough attention at the meetings. Discussions are rarely held on women's issues. Women's interests are not adequately represented because

women Members are themselves failing to take initiatives. This can be seen as a failure on the part of women Members, though they do not see it as a failure. Majority of the women Members feel that there is no need in discussing the women's issue as a separate subject because it is included in the discussion on all round development programmes.

Regarding decision making, it has been observed decisions are made in the four committees of JZP. Every committee has five Members and in each committee only there is only woman member. In four committees there are only four elected women Members who participate in decision making process. The role of other women in decision making process, who are not Members of these committees, becomes insignificant. This implies that women's participation in decision making is very low as compared to male Members.

Coming to the question of keeping contacts with the voters, it has been found that majority of the women Members don't frequently visit the villages and meet the people. Unavailability of good transport and domestic responsibilities have been cited as the major reasons behind this. Though it appears contradictory, yet it is a fact that male Members of families encourage the women Members to contest election and participate in Zilla Parishad activities but do not share domestic burden to help them manage time to fulfill public responsibilities.

It has also been found that the burden of household work is one of the major reasons for women's absence in the meetings. Women Members

have to look after their household work and then fulfill their responsibilities as elected representative. This implies that in our society despite development in certain areas, the traditional outlook has not changed so much so as to do away with the dichotomous division of society. The private world with its narrow restricted boundaries is still considered as the right place for women. The primary role of women is still considered as wives, mothers, child bearers whatever may be their level of education and professional career.

From the foregoing analysis it cannot be said that there is full participation on the part of women Members in JZP. The study has brought out that there are very few women who are active, articulate at the Zilla Parishad while there are few others who are passive, quiet and do not place their views much. The analysis reveals that their participation as elected Members is itself a new experience and they are not exposed to the formal official procedures. They depends a quite often on the male Members and officials for advice and for clarifications. Though the numerical strength of the women Members have increased they have not been able to affect decision making substantially.

It is also appeared in the present study that majority of the women Members of JZP economically depend on their husbands or other male members of their family. Further it has been noticed that economic dependence of the women Members leads to the curtailing of their position in both family and political office. This implies that economic backwardness of women is one of the reasons of their poor political record. This also indicates that without economic

empowerment, for women, equality with equity in political sphere will not convey much many.

Further, we see that most of the women Members of JZP contested election not on their own will but under the pressure from family. Very few Members i.e., 3 out of 16 have confided that their decision to contest in the election (JZP) is based on their own desire. Influence of family members thus assumes more importance. This leaves an impression that our socio-economic and political structure is such that it leaves little space for the women Members to be in domineering presence. In JZP it has been found that majority of the women Members are prompted by their husbands to contest in election. The study reflects that men still play a proxy role through the female representation in PRIs. This shows that real empowerment of women as desired by 73rd Amendment Act through PRIs is still a far cry.

All the women Members of JZP have been facing problems due to departmental rigidity of different government offices. Government department do not release the development funds timely, which creates problems for the Members. It has been revealed by the women Members that attitude of government officials towards them is not very cordial. Official staffs of various departments do not provide proper and timely information to the Members regarding various development programmes. Besides, women Members are found facing problems in the allotment of schemes and later in the release of funds in favour of allotted schemes. Women Members also face problems in

identification of beneficiaries to be proposed for covering under various development programmes and selection of sites and location. Too much interference of state government and high level political leaders is also another problem for the women Members in JZP. This shows that 73rd Amendment Act has been accepted in letters but not in spirit.

Support of Political party is also another feature of PR election, which affect women's participation in JZP. Since all the women Members of JZP contested the ZP election on support of political party, the study reveals that party support act as a catalyst in getting the women represented in JZP. During the interview, it emerged that political parties have direct bearings on women's participation in JZP. Many of the women Members of 1st JZP (2002-2008) did not get party support to contest for the second time. Many new aspirants, who wanted to contest, did not find it easy to contest election because of lack of party support. In PRIs a seat which is reserved for a woman candidate becomes unreserved in the next election. So there is no certainty that the Members will get re-elected. Here the party plays an important role. It is unfortunate that political parties always do not want to field women candidates for these unreserved seats. Adding to this problem is that women do not want to contest as independent candidates, as that they feel lessen their chance to be re-elected. This clearly indicates that political parties who are supposed to play a very important role in fulfilling the goal of 73rd Amendment Act, have accepted 33% reservation for women as a compulsion not as an avenue for social change.

To conclude, until and unless structural change occurs at all levels of social-economic, political, mental and attitudinal set up of our society, the goal of women's empowerment through political representation will remain unfulfilled.

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire

A. Social Background

Name:

Age:

Religion:

Caste:

Educational Qualification:

Marital Status:

No. of Children if married:

Joint Family/ Nuclear Family:

B. Economic Background:

Occupation:

Individual property or family Property:

Husband's Profession:

C. Political background of the family

1. Whether your husband/ father/ guardian take part in politics?

Yes/No/ No Response.

2. If yes, does he attend political meetings?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

3. Is he a member of any political party?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

4. How did you enter into politics?

D. Factors of contesting elections

1. What are the factors that prompted you to contest in the elections of Jorhat Zilla parishad.
 - A. Personal interest.
 - B. Party initiative.
 - C. Family encouragement.
 - D. All the 'A' 'B' 'C' factors.
 - E. Any other factor(s) you want to say.

2. Which factor you consider as most important behind your success in election?

F. Support of political party

1. Did you get support of any political party to contest the election of Jorhat Zilla Parishad(JZP).

Yes/ No/ No Response.

2. If yes, name of the political party.

3. What sort of support was provided by the party in the election?

Tell us briefly.

4. In the next term, if the party will not give you party ticket to contest, then will you be interested to contest as independent?

Yes/No/ No Response.

G. Political experience of the members

1. Did you contest in any election of any political body before?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

2. If yes, for which position did you contest?

3. Did you win?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

4. If no, (a) what was the reason behind that? (b) Do you find any problem as a first timer contestant in election process?

H. Political Awareness

1. Do you know how many Panchayati Raj Acts were passed in Assam in Post independence period? What is 73rd Amendment Act?? Do you have any idea of the meaning of Amendment Act? Do you know all the provisions/any provision in these Acts.

2. Do you see any change in Panchayati Raj System after the 73rd Amendment Act?

3. Do you know the functions of Jorhat Zilla Parishad?

4. Who was/ is the president of Jorhat Zilla Parishad during your term?

I. Attending meetings and discussions

1. In what duration general body meetings are arranged in JZP.

2. Do you attend all the meetings? If not how frequently do you attend the meetings of Jorhat Zilla Parishad?

A. Rarely.

B. Now and then.

C. Frequently.

3. Do you participate in the discussions?

Yes/No/No Response.

4. If yes, then tell us how frequently.

A Rarely participate.

B. Frequently participate.

5. What are the issues that are generally discussed in the meetings?

6. What are the subjects of your interest in discussions?

7. Do you speak in the meeting?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

8. Do you frequently visit the office of JZP?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

9. Do you have any training facility in Panchayati Raj Institutions for newly elected members?

Yes/No/ No Response.

I. Decision Making

1. Generally who play the key role in taking decisions?

2. Do you express your opinion on the decisions that are taken in the meeting?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

3. If yes, how the other members react to your opinion?

- A. They Ignore.
- B. They Accept.
- C. They Discuss.

J. Monitoring

1. Do you take active part to see the implementation of the decisions that are taken in the meetings of Jorhat Zilla Parishad?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

2. Do you take active part in supervision?

Yes / No/ No Response.

3. Do you take interest in monitoring the distribution of funds and resources of JZP?

Yes/ No/No Response.

K. Ability of members

1. What types of activities you have performed during your term.

2. Are you satisfied with your activities?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

3. How do you solve the problems of village people?

4. Did you face any problem in performing your activities?

5. Are you interested in to get re-elected in the present position in future?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

6. Do you want to contest in higher level of governance in future?

Yes/ No/ No Response

M. Support of family

1. Whether your family support or encourage you to participate in Zilla Parishad?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

2. Do you take suggestions from the family members to take decisions in Zilla Parishad?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

3. When you get busy in Zilla Parishad activities, who take care of household work?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

4. Whether your dual role comes into conflict with each other?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

(On 73rd Amendment Act)

1. What is your opinion on reservation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions? Is it necessary?

Yes/ No/ No Response.

2. Do you see any change with regard to women's participation in PRIs after constitutional provision of 33% reservation of seats for women?

(To women members only)

1. Do you feel any sort of discrimination or a feeling of isolation as a woman member at the meetings?
Yes/ No/ No Response.
2. Tell us about the behaviour of male members towards you?
 - A. Cordial.
 - B. Official.
 - C. Helpful.
 - D. Negligence.
3. What should be done in your opinion to increase women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions?

(To male members only)

1. Do the women members of Jorhat Zilla Parishad regularly attend the meetings?

Yes/ No/ No Response.
2. Are they active in debate and discussion?

Yes/ No/ No Response.
3. Do they participate in decision making process?

Yes/ No/ No Response.
4. Do you think that there is a need to increase women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions?

Signature of the interviewees

President/Vice-president/Members

Jorhat Zilla Parishad

Date

Note

These questions were asked to both male and female members. Further utmost care was taken to cross check the responses. Apart from individual interview the female members were also engaged in group discussions to get a proper idea.

APPENDIX II

LIST OF MEMBERS OF JORHAT ZILLA PARISHAD (10th JUNE, 2002 TO 27TH MARCH, 2008)

| Sl.No | Name of Zilla Parishad member | Zilla Parishad Constituency (ZPC) | Date of interview |
|-------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Ratul Das (M) | Parbartia Zilla Parishad Constituency | 26.07.2009 |
| 2 | Golap Kakoti (M) | Sarucharai Zilla Parishad Constituency | 03.09. 2009 |
| 3 | Rina Nayak (F) | Khongia Zilla Parishad Constituency | 30.07. 2009 |
| 4 | Prabhat Kalita (M) | Nowboisa Zilla Parishad Constituency | 03.09. 2009 |
| 5 | Sarat Saikia (M) | Charigaon Zilla Parishad Constituency | 08.08. 2009 |
| 6 | Rita Saikia (F) | Charaibahi Zilla Parishad Constituency | 23.07. 2009 |
| 7 | Rana Goswami * (M) | Karaga Zilla Parishad Constituency | 20.08. 2009 |
| 8 | Mahendra Payeng (M) | Madhya Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 03.08. 2009 |
| 9 | Umeswari Pegu ** (F) | Namoni Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 07.08. 2009 |
| 10 | Punya Bharali Bonia (F) | Dakhin Pub Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 08.08. 2009 |
| 11 | Kaliram Kuli (M) | Uttar Pub Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 02.09. 2009 |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------|--|-------------|
| 12 | Manjula Rajput (F) | Titabor Zilla Parishad Constituency | 04.08.2009 |
| 13 | Rita Saikia (F) | Thengal Zilla Parishad Constituency | 04.08. 2009 |
| 14 | Someswar Handique (F) | Madhapur Zilla Parishad Constituency | 20.08. 2009 |
| 15 | Sonadhar Rajkhowa (M) | Borholla Zilla Parishad Constituency | 18.08. 2009 |
| 16 | Aroti Gogoi (F) | Lahing Zilla Parishad Constituency | 25.07.2009 |
| 17 | Vacant | Na-Kachari Zilla Parishad Constituency | ----- |
| 18 | Bobby Patnayak (F) | Kathalguri Zilla Parishad Constituency | 24.07.2009 |
| 19 | Late Debeswar Buragohain (M) | Katoni Zilla Parishad Constituency | ----- |
| 20 | Dolima Baruah (F) | Kakojan Zilla Parishad Constituency | 28.07.2009 |
| 21 | Mahendra Gogoi (M) | Holongapar Zilla Parishad Constituency | 26.08.2009 |
| 22 | Jibon Baruah (M) | Teok Zilla Parishad Constituency | 26.08.2009 |
| 23 | Holi Baruah (M) | Boloma Zilla Parishad Constituency | 30.07.2009 |

APPENDIX III

LIST OF MEMBERS OF JORHAT ZILLA PARISHAD
(28TH, MARCH, 2008 TO 2013)

| Sl.No | Name of Zilla Parishad member | Zilla Parishad Constituency (ZPC) | Date of interview |
|-------|-------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1 | Prahlad Das (M) | Parbartia Zilla Parishad Constituency | 02.09.2009 |
| 2 | Anu Kakoti (F) | Sarucharai Zilla Parishad Constituency | 02.08. 2009 |
| 3 | Bidya Tangla (M) | Khongia Zilla Parishad Constituency | 09.09.2009 |
| 4 | Prabhat Kalita (M) | Nowboisa Zilla Parishad Constituency | ----- (re elected) |
| 5 | Dibyajyoti Saikia (F) | Charigaon Zilla Parishad Constituency | 01.08.2009 |
| 6 | Jogen Gogoi (M) | Charaibahi Zilla Parishad Constituency | 09.09.2009 |
| 7 | Putul Buragohain (M) | Karaga Zilla Parishad Constituency | 07.08.2009 |
| 8 | Rumi Hazarika (F) | Madhya Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 07.08.2009 |
| 9 | Rameswar doley (M) | Namoni Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 15.08.2009 |
| 10 | Rajib Saikia (M) | Dakhin Pub Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 02.09.2009 |
| 11 | Nibedita Doley (F) | Uttar Pub Majuli Zilla Parishad Constituency | 03.08.2009 |

| | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| 12 | Manjula Rajput (F) | Titabor Zilla Parishad Constituency | ------(re elected) |
| 13 | Rita Saikia (F) | Thengal Zilla Parishad Constituency | ------(re elected) |
| 14 | Atul Buragohain (M) | Madhapur Zilla Parishad Constituency | 03.09.2009 |
| 15 | Jiban Chutia (M) | Borholla Zilla Parishad Constituency | 12.08.2009 |
| 16 | Sanjib Gogoi (M) | Lahing Zilla Parishad Constituency | 15.09.2009 |
| 17 | Kunjalata Lahon | Na-Kachari Zilla Parishad Constituency | 27.07.2009 |
| 18 | Dulen Nayak (M) | Kathalguri Zilla Parishad Constituency | 23.08.2009 |
| 19 | Late Debeswar Buragohain (M) | Katoni Zilla Parishad Constituency | ------(re elected) |
| 20 | Bipul Borah (F) | Kakojan Zilla Parishad Constituency | 20.08.2009 |
| 21 | Sewali Gogoi (F) | Holongapar Zilla Parishad Constituency | 25.07.2009 |
| 22 | Kamal Gogoi (M) | Teok Zilla Parishad Constituency | 24.07.2009 |
| 23 | Sangita Baruah (F) | Boloma Zilla Parishad Constituency | 25.07.2009 |

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