

CHAPTER-II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Reservation for women in local self-government is a step towards the improvement of status of women. With the 73rd Amendment, a new era has dawned in the Panchayat movement in India. This Amendment gave the opportunity to women to participate in the decision-making process at the local level.

In 1992 the 73rd Amendment Bill was introduced but it came into effect from 24th April 1993. This 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has stated that “not less than one-third (including SC and ST) of the number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women”. This Act provided “at least one third of the total seats at every level” of panchayat for women and also introduced this in chairpersons’ posts.

West Bengal has a long past in development of Panchayati Raj Institutions. In 1957 and 1963 two West Bengal Panchayat Bill were passed. In March 1972, when a new Congress ministry came to power in the state, a new West Bengal Panchayat Act was passed towards the end of 1973, replacing both the earlier Acts of 1957 and 1963. But after passing the 1973 Act, the Government did not take any step to implement it and till 1977 no elections were held to local self-government bodies. Election to the local self-government bodies were held regularly when the Left Front came to the power in 1977.

It is necessary to mention here that before 1973 Act, there was no legal provision in Panchayat System for reservation of seats for women. The 1973 Act provided that the state Government could appoint two women as members in Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Parishad with the condition.

This provision continued up to 1992 when the state Government amended the West Bengal Panchayat Act to include a provision that not less than one-third of the total seats of each tier of the panchayats were reserved for women. Immediately after 73rd Amendment Act, the West Bengal government passed its own amendment to the Panchayat Act introducing one-third reservation for women (including SC/ST) at all levels of the Panchayati Raj Institution.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides not only the political empowerment of women but it also gives the opportunity to women to take decision, improve capability and efficiency to work. The Act has been instrumental in increasing consciousness and power, establishment of their identity and increased awareness, effective thinking. It has also given the scope to develop village economy through upliftment of rural women. Participation of

women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has been considered as the most effective instrument to remove women's inequality, invisibility and powerlessness.

The key issue in the present study is concerned with the inquiry into the empowering process of women in the context of their representation in the panchayat bodies due to the passage of the Seventy Third Amendment to the Constitution of India. With the Amendment Act (1992) a new era has dawned in the Panchayat movement in India. The catchword empowerment of woman has a long history with the publication of the report on Committee of the Status of Women in 1974. The term 'empowerment' has a contextual connotation. Different researchers, development planners and others in the field attempted to define empowerment in different perspectives. A modest effort is being made here to present a brief review of some of them.

Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control resources in favour of women. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. (**Mokta, 2014**)

According to **Government of India in 1986** women can be considered as 'empowered' through their collective reflection and decision-making. Its parameters include building on positive self-image and self-confidence, development of the ability to think critically, building up group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action, ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change, encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society, providing the wherewithal for economic independence and so forth (Banerjee,

According to **Banerjee (1992)** empowerment implies a fundamental redistribution of power between different groups. In the case of poor women the groups include families, communities, classes and agencies of government and intermediaries. It is a process of equity enhancement and can be achieved only through disempowering some structures, systems, processes, institutions etc. It is, by implication, an inherently induced process / mechanism of change towards ultimate equality. It is journey from one position to another. Equality encompasses a range of components and ultimate realisation of equality means satisfaction of all these. Empowerment as an enabling process for equality demonstrates selectivity, unevenness, unexpected behaviour pattern, self generated momentum and compulsions. Empowerment is the vehicle which enables women to renegotiate their existence on an equitable basis.

Das (1991) has observed in his article that empowerment can be muchmore effective by group rather than by an individual. He said that empowerment of women can be possible only through a people's movement.

Loes (1991) in his article said that women empowerment could only occur through mass women organizations which could have the capacity to mobilize them at the grassroots. Without women organization the power of empowerment would not see the reality and improvement of the living conditions of the poorest women may be an unfulfilled dream only.

Stromquist (1993) makesan assertion thatit is very difficult to define empowerment with a universally accepted definition. It is a holistic concept and multidimensional in nature. According to him empowerment is socio-political concept that goes beyond "formal political participation" and "Consciousness raising". Stromquist identified four interdependent dimensions of empowerment – cognitive, psychological, economic and political where cognitive empowerment refers to knowledge about and understanding of the conditions and causes of subordination. Psychological empowerment relates to the self-esteem and self-confidence. Economic empowerment is the ability to earn and control over economic resources. Political empowerment involves the ability to analyze one's own world and to organize and mobilize for social change.

Monoranjan (1995) in his article observed that with the process of liberalization and privatization i.e. integration with the global economy, the term empowerment, certain unprivileged section of the society for giving full strength of their potential capacities towards development. This section includes unorganized workers and poor peasants, tribal people, dalits and women.

Roy (1995) in his article explained that empowerment is a variant of a self-conscious social movement. The process of empowerment means the power distribution dynamically. Empowerment as a social process challenges the fundamental imbalances of power distribution and relations. It is a process of redistribution of power within and between families /societies; and a process aiming at social equality which can be achieved through disempowering some structures, systems and institutions. Empowerment, therefore, is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. Empowerment is thus visualized as an enabling process for the disadvantaged sections. Women's empowerment can be seen as a means of creating a social environment in which women can take decisions and make choices of their own, either individually or collectively, for social betterment. Since women are still in a disadvantaged position in society, the process of women's empowerment will also help empowering of other disadvantaged sections of a

society. It would also help men of lower socio-economic strata to liberate themselves from the clutches of traditional bondage, hierarchy and exploitation.

Ramanmohan and Reddy (1998) in their paper made an observation that the term 'empowerment' has a contextual connotation. Empowerment gives expression to the emergence of creativity, self-reliance, the blossoming of thoughts drawing on both external and internal resources to secure self – determination, productive self-improvement, an individualistic identity and personality for the women at large.

Menon (1998) referred some gender issues in the sense that women need to be more involved in the development policy, planning and programmes in underdeveloped countries. In this context, the basic parameters of women's empowerment are awareness, emancipation, social status, sexual liberation and professional achievement.

According to **Sen and Batliwala (2000)** empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both controls over resources (physical, human and intellectual, financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). It means not only greater extrinsic control, but also a growing intrinsic capability, greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers according to resources or changing traditional ideology.

Suguna (2000) in her study has observed that empowerment of women gives them due status in society and enables them to make substantial contributions in the society. She also emphasized that woman empowerment gives them decision making power in both inside and outside of their houses which in turn enable them to participate in two dimensions – quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative indicators of empowerment for women are increased knowledge, enhanced awareness levels in respect of health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy, child marriage, dowry etc. Quantitative indicators of empowerment are awareness of demographic trends like maternal mortality rates, fertility rates, social, economic and political participation.

UNDP (2001) has identified two crucial routes considered as imperative for empowerment. The first is social mobilization and collective agency, as poor women often lack the basic capabilities and confidence within themselves for countering and challenging existing disparities and barriers blocking them from participation in the mainstream of the society and the economy as well. Secondly, the process of social mobilization needs to be accompanied and complemented by economic security. As long as the disadvantaged suffer from economic deprivation and livelihood insecurity, they will not be in a position to be mobilized.

Ghosh (2002) said in his article that participation in three tier panchayati system is the political empowerment of rural women. He had shown in his work by considering two districts of West Bengal, Nadia and Burdwan, how rural women are empowered themselves by participating in three tier panchayati system.

According to **Panda (2002)** empowerment means “to invest with power”. The power endows women with the ability to gain control over resources, develop physical and psychological capacity to challenge the prevailing gender norms and ensure change.

Sharma (2006) said in her article that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, economic spheres and at various levels, such as individual, group and community and challenges our assumptions about the status quo, asymmetrical power relationships and social dynamics. According to her empowerment of women means economic opportunity, political representation, social equality, personal rights and so on.

Vyas (2008) has brought that Empowerment is a continuous process for realising the ideals of equality, human liberation and freedom for all. Women's Empowerment, thus, implies equality of opportunity and equity between genders, ethnic groups, social classes and age groups, strengthening of life chances, collective participation in different spheres of life—cultural, social, political, economic, development process, decision making etc.

Neeta (2010) mentioned in her book that the process of empowerment begins when an individual realizes / becomes aware of his/her situation, the social reality and his/her rights with the assumption that this awareness should be followed by education, knowledge, skills and actions.

According to **Mishra (2014)** empowerment means women must exercise full participation in decision-making process in all walks of life, and full participation with men in all walks of life, and fully participating with men in finding equitable and practical solutions to issues in family and society.

2.2 Educational Empowerment

The concept of 'empowerment' is dynamic. It is concerned with education, decision making, and information access, along with economic and political participation. In building up the present study a host of literatures dealing with different kinds of empowerment of women, in particular are browsed.

Kaushik (1993) placed her view about women position in Panchayat in the 6th Manual of 'Women's Studies Perspective' in Mysore, where she asserted that women should get the opportunity to make the decisions for themselves and others and they should be able to participate and become visible at the decision making platforms and managerial levels in higher education, so that their capacities should be enhanced and that their skills in governance would equally be sharpened.

Mohanty (1995) has written in his article that although Indian culture and social structure have been influenced by patriarchal values but indeed there are regional variations of attitudes towards women. He said that women are unable to exercise any political power because they do not have much social and economic power. In his article he placed a host of factors behind low participation of women in the political process. Of them the most important factor is lack of awareness regarding existing legal and economic aspects governing the society. He said that presently all development programmes and allocations of funds for women welfare are routed through Collectors, BDOs and other officials. But women of the households get neglected because of the unawareness about the programmes for their benefits. Implementing agencies (mostly government officials) in general do not take much interest in the specific problems of women. Since the elected women representatives would not immediately be in a position to grasp the significance of the programmes / schemes, administrators would have ample opportunity to by-pass them most often. On one hand there are very little women officials available in the team of programme implementing agencies and on the other hand all women officials are not so much sensitive to the women's problems. Many women officials think that they have attained a certain status; they belong to a superior category and can deride village women. For all these reasons women panchayat members should be aware of the functioning of the bureaucracy and they have to cross many hurdles before becoming effective partners in decision – making process. The reservation of seats is necessary but not a sufficient condition for women to take part in the political process in an effective manner. Along with the reservation of seats, other steps like awareness generation through propaganda, training, media publicity etc., should be taken up to make it really effective in empowering women.

Ghosh (1997) said in his article that rural women participate in the three tier Panchayati system in large number irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Mostly women of younger age group come to the forum of PRIs. But the education status of women members are comparatively lower vis-à-vis male members. This sometimes creates barrier in effective interaction. For removing it, launching of effective training programme is necessary.

Bommai (1997) the then Hon'ble Minister for Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, remarked in the conference that education and empowerment of women are inter-related. Mrs. Leila Seth, Former Chief Justice of Himachal Pradesh, also suggested that primary education should be a legal right for everybody including the girl child. If she is given education, success in the programmes of family planning, health care and sanitation would be higher and in the follow through empowering process of women would get momentum. Ms. Asma Jahangir, Chairperson of Human Rights Commission, Pakistan, stressed that woman empowerment is a women's movement for justice i.e., for women's right. Mrs. Devaki Jain in her lecture emphasized on political power of women as a part of women empowerment.

Saini (2002) in her article said that equal status and equal power in the society is limited. Women generally are in disadvantages in different sectors of the society. Over the years the Government of India has been launching programmes for the upliftment of women with the adoption of a host of policies for women benefits. Specially they include reservations in education, jobs and in political front. In spite of all the endeavours of the government, women still are more involved in playing prominent role as a bread earner of the family – this is predominantly true in the rural society. It matters hardly whether women are elected as a Pancha or a Sarpancha in the village and gain a respectable status in the eye of law. The writer said that the position of women in Panchayat does not appear to have effective change in the interactional position of the women. There always exists a gap between theory and practice. It is not merely equality under law that determines the status of women in a society but traditions and customs are more powerful than law in determining women's position within a social structure. According to her, if the government is really serious in enhancing the status of women, then efforts should be made first to literate them and make them aware about their status and role in the society

Brhar and Aiyar (2003) in their article discussed about the formation of networks and associations of elected representatives particularly women representatives. In the past few years several networks of elected women representatives (EWR) have been initiated and formed without much fanfare across the country, with a higher density in the West and South India. They said that it is not sufficient to develop the capacity building of the elected panchayat members through some training programmes in organizations, but new ideas and alternative strategies for capacity building are required. One such idea, according to them, is an institutionalized system indicating formation of associations of elected representatives with the objective of building members' capacities. This idea is rooted in the successes of lateral learning processes often demonstrated by the techniques of learning and sharing with the peers. This method is seen to have high efficacy for capacity building of elected

representatives and also the potential of networks and associations to strengthen the institutions of local self-governance. Mahila Swaraj Abhiyaan in Gujarat, Mahila Samakhya and Sakhi with SSF in Karnataka and Kerala respectively are the associations of elected women representatives. According to them through the process of working together as a network, women also learn from each other and are getting exposure to each other's work, problems and private life resulting in strengthening of solidarity. This type of networking is significant for empowering women which in turn have the potentialities to strengthen the leadership capacities of women panchayat members. In the process the status of the network members, within the family and in official circles improves which adds to the sense of empowerment. Have high efficacy for capacity building of elected representatives and also the potential of networks and associations to strengthen the institutions of local self-governance. Mahila Swaraj Abhiyaan in Gujarat, Mahila Samakhya and Sakhi with SSF in Karnataka and Kerala respectively are the associations of elected women representatives. According to them through the process of working together as a network, women also learn from each other and are getting exposure to each other's work, problems and private life resulting in strengthening of solidarity. This type of networking is significant for empowering women which in turn have the potentialities to strengthen the leadership capacities of women panchayat members. In the process the status of the network members, within the family and in official circles improves which adds to the sense of empowerment.

Pal (2004) has written in his article that although the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act provides the one-third reservations for women but there is a need to launch the political literacy camp for women members across the state along with the reservation. Through the training institutions, awareness will be developed among women members about the PRIs. He has suggested that NGOs should participate and involve as friend, guide and philosopher of women members in performance of their duties as panchayat members.

Patil (2008) in her work said that educational empowerment of women plays an important role in development and poverty eradication. According to her, literacy, education, better health facilities and nutrition for the mother and child, political representation and financial security are the pillars of women's empowerment. This empowerment is only possible when women are aware about their rights which in turn generate affirmative feeling within them. This creates a conducive atmosphere and gives them opportunities to live with dignity. It would help to reduce domestic violence and social discrimination and also reduce the number of dropout cases from schools. To rescue the damage or loss of half the talent, half the progress, half the development of the country it is urgent that of all sections of society namely social organization, media and the government should work collectively for women development.

2.3 Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment indicates empowering the economically disadvantaged sections of the population through different interventions. For example, micro finance like SHG is an entry point in the process of economic empowerment of women. For economic empowerment it requires that women have access to and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy.

Bennet (1992) said that better female health and nutrition and higher levels of female educational attainment and economic participation are important in their life. As outcomes of development and critical elements in the quality of life, they are valuable in themselves and indicate a more equitable distribution of what society produces. As means for raising women's economic productivity, they are essential inputs to development. Correcting the past deficits in women's stock of human capital can bring better distribution of aggregate growth across socioeconomic groups and within the family.

Mukhopadhyay (1995) in his work on Kultikri village (dominated by schedule-caste and schedule-tribe population) of Jhargram sub-division in Midnapur district of West Bengal said that without significant academic background, economic strength and political experience, women members cannot perform their work satisfactory in all sections of the society like education, environment, employment etc. For economic empowerment of local women the panchayats did a lot of things, for example they set-up a basket manufacturing centre at Phulbari, they arranged all infrastructural facilities to start training-cum-production centers of readymade garments etc. He also said that on the basis of the works which were accomplished by the women panchayat members, it can be said that in many cases women members are found to be more efficient than their male counterparts.

According to **Lalitha (1998)**, empowerment of rural women relates to several factors like equality of work and wages, expansion of girls' education, autonomy over reproductive life, access to ownership of land and property, training and technology, access to bank credit and markets, safe water, sanitation and energy. She said that to improve the status and position of rural women at home and in society at large, economic empowerment through income generating activities is indispensable. For economic empowerment access to bank credit is a crucial factor. According to her, economic empowerment is not an automatic consequence of the provision of financial resources in favour of women. Only disbursement of loan in the name of women alone does not ensure their empowerment - who uses the loan and controls the business are the factors to be probed into.

Yadav (1999) said in his article that the concept of employment of women has assumed a dominant role in the economic structure of the world. Employment opportunities for women are expanding exponentially with the advent of industrialisation in developed and developing countries alike. He also said that prosperity of a country depends upon the harmonious progress of both genders. Men and women have to have meaningful roles in the economic life of the nation.

Jhabvala (2001) said in her article that poor people feel strong powerlessness, because of their daily struggle for survival against strong economic and social forces. She said that this is increased in the case of the women who face not only the external economic and social forces but also those within the household. Empowerment is the process by which the disempowered or powerless people can change their circumstances and begin to have control over their lives. Economic empowerment results in a change in the balance of power, in the living conditions, and in the relationships.

Kaur (2001) said in her article that woman has to be free to take her own decisions not only in economic matters but in social, cultural and political spheres of lives as well. The rights given on papers, policies and legislation make her empowered only but she has to face century's old biases, prejudices, and mind set generated by patriarchal value system and that is where she has to have strength, courage and capacity to accept the challenges and march ahead. Women's participation in all aspects as a part of leadership gives the path of empowerment. She is a person in command of herself and for necessarily all the resources physical, social, economic, political cultural and spiritual to be equally accessible to her.

Kokila (2001) has brought out that much of rural credit is based on agriculture and since most of the land is in the name of men, women find themselves by-passed by financial institutions. For village women to be able to gain a small foothold in the process of capital formation many voluntary organisations, like "Samakhya" tries to give them access to credit in order to set them on the road towards self-employment.

Aiyar (2002) said in his article that economic reforms have hardly touched the lives of the common people. This is because the reformers regard panchayati raj as being as irrelevant to their purposes as the people regard reforms as being irrelevant to their lives. He said that reformers have no great objection to panchayati raj; the tragedy is they regard panchayati raj as a side show. Not until economic reforms are integrated with planning and implementation through institutions of self-government will grass roots empowerment lead to grass roots development.

Bandhyopadhyay, Yugandhar & Mukherjee (2002) observed in their article that there is a rationale of building linkage between panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) and self – help groups (SHGs). They worked on SHGs in Andhra Pradesh. They said that these groups, given some inputs of capacity building and skill, could be a formidable social force and pressure lobby in promoting development in the state through promoting and protecting their respective interests and weal. These SHGs interface with a large number of government and elected institutions at the grass-roots level, particularly the Panchayati Raj Institutions, because the PRIs have insufficient understanding of the constructive role that the SHGs can play in upliftment of the masses.

According to **Chiranjeevulu (2003)**, incorporating gender concerns in the development process is an important element of development strategy. Andhra Pradesh Government has taken up the theme of women's empowerment as one of the main agenda items to tackle rural poverty and social economic issues. According to him micro finance programmes are not only used as a tool for economic upliftment or as a tool in poverty alleviation but also as an effective way to meet women's practical and strategic needs.

According to **Bardhan and Mookherjee (2004)** elected local governments (panchayats) are the important factors to implement the various poverty alleviation programmes in West Bengal and it has been doing since 1978. These poverty alleviation programmes are land reform, delivery of credit, farm inputs and local infrastructure projects. For their study they had taken 89 villages covers four successive panchayat administrations. They showed that while average levels of poverty alleviation efforts were high, there were significant variations both across and within villages over time. Poverty alleviation efforts within villages improved when land was distributed more equally, the poor became more literate, there were fewer low caste households and local elections were more contested.

According to **Ghirme (2005)** economic empowerment of women means increase in women's access in economic aspects and command over tangible and intangible resources such as, wealth, property, employment, knowledge and information.

Kadharlal and Premavathy (2008) in their work on Tamil Nadu said that entrepreneurial development among women can be considered as positive contribution towards economic empowerment of women. According to them a woman as an entrepreneur is economically more powerful in comparison with a mere worker because it gives her the freedom to take decisions and gives a modicum of control over some assets. This can lead to rise in her social status significantly. Through entrepreneurial development, a woman will not only generate income for herself but also employment for other women in the locality. Authors observed that entrepreneurial culture is developing among women entrepreneurs based on

the values of strengths, such as creativity, flexibility openers to cooperation, a human approach to business relations, and attention to social and cultural as well as financial goals in business.

According to **Choudhury and Basu (2012)** self-help groups have been viewed by the state as a strategy for both women's empowerment as well as poverty alleviation. They studied 1149 SHGs selected from 37 GPs in twenty blocks spreading over six districts of West Bengal. They find out that certain changes at behavioural level and in material aspects have already been experienced by the SHG members as well as by the rest of the society. It is evident from their study that SHGs can prove their potentiality to bring changes in social environment as well as in respect of income. The study also show that ownership of capital through savings and credit and access to resources for sustainable livelihoods can effectively alleviate poverty through micro enterprises.

2.4 Political Empowerment

Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39, 42, and 51(A) (e) in the Constitution of India contain various types of provisions for equal rights and opportunities for women and the provisions prohibit any kind of discrimination against women in different spheres of life. In spite of these constitutional rights and opportunities, in reality political participation of women was severely limited throughout the length and breadth of the country. Reservation for women in local self – government is a step towards the improvement of political status of women. With the 73rd Amendment, a new era has dawned in the Panchayat movement in India. The members of the three – tier Panchayat system are elected directly by the people with one –third of seats reserved for women along with the reservation for the members of the weaker sections so that all sections of people can get the opportunity to participate in planning process and implementation of programmes for their own development.

Accordin to **Bhargava and Vidya (1992)** political empowerment of women gives women the capacity to influence the decision-making process by integrating them into our political system. Reserving seats for women in the political institutions will provide them an opportunity to raise their grievances and other related social and economic problems in a formal forum, a political process necessary to ensure the improvement for all women in all spheres of life. Political participation includes the right to vote, right to contest and the right to candidacy. Reservation of seats is one of the instruments of political empowerment for women as it guarantees representation to women as a group.

Sharma (1998) stated in her article that politics is not only about representation, position and power but the concept of politics in terms of spheres, objectives and activities has

evolved much further than this. According to her ‘participatory democracy’ at the grassroots is an attempt to give a new meaning and dimension to the ‘political empowerment’ of women. The strong feeling of her was that a large participation of women in the political process can reverse the process of deterioration in public life. The expectation of gains from representational politics marks a shift in the strategy of the women’s movement since the 1980s. She said, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment has precipitated important changes in the democratic process.

Kaushik (1999) concluded in his article “Women in Panchayat Elections”, in the edited book “Decentralization and Local Politics” that “The women have to often face challenges and struggle to overcome them...some of the husbands or local men seek to act as proxies for the women. At times women have also complained that men do not allow them to talk....but these are the initial pains which the women (as they have already proved) will be able to overcome. The growing self-confidence, increasing commitment, firm determination to learn, the self-conscious pride as the movers of community and the consciousness that they are here as agents of socio-political changes, are writ large on the elected women’s faces all over.”

Bhargava and Subha (2000) in their article said that empowerment gives women the capacity to influence decision – making process, planning, implementation and evaluation by integrating them into the political system. Political participation implies right to vote, context, campaign, party membership and representation in political offices at all levels. These have the potentialities to influence decision making process which in turn augment the political empowerment process for women.

Ghosh (2001) in the study onplaced her view about women participation in politics and affirmed that political participation is an indicator of development. If this is effectively materialized then participation of women in politics will be successful in the sense of gender equality, equal opportunity in sharing of the resources and in the process of making rules and regulations. According to her, the hurdles for political participation of women are societal and negative cultural attitude towards women. Society in general, including women themselves, even politicians and political parties, prevent women from taking active and lead role in the political process. Men’s political concerns is labeled as “public” because society thinks it is related to business, competition and power concerns but women’s political concerns is labeled as “private” because it is thought to be based on extrapolations of domestic values. According to her, until and unless, the attitude of the society including women themselves changes, it would not be possible for women to effectively participate in the political process.

Ghatak and Ghatak (2002) discussed in their study that the experience of West Bengal panchayat system stands in sharp contrast with that of other states. They observed from their field survey in 20 selected village constituency meeting located under village councils in five blocks of their districts of West Bengal (North 24 Parganas and Dakshin Dinajpur) that there is serious problem associated with the lack of coordination between village level panchayat plans (which receive direct inputs from the people) and the plan prepared by the state government bureaucracy. They mentioned that the Kerala Planning Board pointed out that there were many instances of duplication of planning board activities and also critical gaps between the various tiers.

Sharma (2003) in her article said that due to economic complexities, and socio-cultural diversities, the intervention by the state to pay attention and respond to the diverse needs of the region and social groups' decentralization is advocated. The formation of social groups is based on class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender which demands political inclusion for political representation of power. Women argue that greater representation is needed to influence the redistribution of power and resources, redefine political agendas and articulate women's interests and critical questions of distribution of power. She argued that democracy does not mean paternalism. According to her, the elected women representatives faced the problems due to illiteracy, lack of formal knowledge of such power, resistance from male dominated political and bureaucratic structures and they fail to exercise themselves etc. Reservation is a principle imposed from above and is not going to change traditional mindsets, dominance and interference by male members, non-cooperation by bureaucracy or obstacles put by influential political leaders.

Subha and Bhargava (2006) stated in their article that reservation in local bodies have provided tremendous opportunity to women for their entry into the political arena. Being a step towards equality, the most striking participation of women in politics is found at this level. But numbers alone cannot indicate the adoption of gender sensitive policies. To conclude, they said the women have to move from 'critical masses' to 'critical action'.

Bhuyan (2008) in her article said that 73rd Constitution Amendment Act 1993 gives space for women in politics and gives the opportunity to share power with men and has given the identity of women in public life. She also said that after getting all these opportunities by 73rd Amendment Act, most of the women representatives in Orissa Panchayat Raj institutions remain silent spectators in Panchayat meetings, in decision making process, in budget preparation. Further, behind them male members in their family have done all their work except putting their signatures. She said that the Scheduled Caste women representatives are facing a lot of difficulties, harassment and humiliation at the

hands of upper caste people. Despite getting their responsible and prestigious post, their status in the families was not changed appreciably. She said that this negative side can be overcome if the women representatives increase their internal factors like – awareness, knowledge, skill, education etc. Besides the internal factors it is also necessary to become a good woman leader to change the outlook of the patriarchy society in respect of women representatives.

Ganguly and Chakravarti Banerjee (2012), said in their article, “all over the country, ‘empowerment’ has been seen as something that is much more important than mere ‘reservation’. Reservations for women are important, because they lead to greater representation of women in the local bodies. But, reservation alone will not lead to empowerment. Many social, political and cultural factors are required to be reengineered for empowering the women representatives. Women should themselves have to feel empowered and act in an empowered manner.”

According to **Misra (2014)** for political empowerment, women must have the capability to analyse, organize and mobilise for social change.

Inspite of different acts and schemes of government to empower the women in the country, they are discriminated and marginalized at every level of society, whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education and also reproductive health-care. Women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. Raising self-esteem and self-confidence and developing ability among women to think critically are the main parameters of women empowerment.

2.5 Research Gap

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) is a new era in the history of Panchayati Raj. This Act has given the opportunity to rural women to participate in the decision making process at local level development. From the above literature review we have seen that many researchers worked on participation of rural women in the three tier panchayati system which is related with my work partially. From these writings the present researcher has got some ideas about her work. Among them Bagchi and Guha's (2005) writing, Buch's (2000) writing, Ghosh's (1997) writing, Tyagi and Sinha's (2004) writing, Palanithurai's (2002) writings, Mathew's (2000) writing, Bardhan's (2004) writing, Ghatak and Ghatak's (2002) writing, Aiyar's (2002) writing, Bandhyopadhyay's (2003) writing and many others' writing (detail in Bibliography) influenced more the present researcherto think and to do research on the present topic “*Socio-Economic and Political Impact of Reservation in Local Self-*

Government on Empowerment of Women: A Study in the Districts of Cooch Behar and Nadia, West Bengal". Many researchers worked on women empowerment. But no comparative study has been done on these two districts, Cooch Behar (belongs to northern part of West Bengal) and Nadia (belongs to southern part of West Bengal). But one study titled "Panchayate Mahila Sangrakhan" (in Bengali) written by Ujjal Ghosh (2002) has worked on comparative study of women participation in three tier panchayati system in Nadia (belongs to southern part of West Bengal) and Bardwan (belongs to southern part of West Bengal) districts of West Bengal. There is a lot of difference between present study and Ujjal Ghosh's study. The present study deals with firstly on comparative study on North Bengal districts and South Bengal districts of West Bengal and secondly it deals with women panchayat members' performance in rural development by using their political power through development of rural women and children.