

# **CHAPTER- I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Active participation into democratic politics is considered one of the most important means to empowerment of women. It is all the more significant when it comes to empowerment of women belonging to tribal communities that constitute one of the most backward segments of Indian society. The tribal people in general and tribal women in particular could draw immensely in terms of capacity building if they come forward to take active part in democratic politics and take over political leadership at different levels of local self-government or trade union movements, or in other forms of political mobilization. Active participation of the downtrodden, the hitherto neglected segments of society, again, can go a long way to consolidate the foundation of the liberal democratic order that India as a society is trying to consolidate. Active political participation of the marginalized section of society can help their integration into the social order and can help reduce the scope for social unrest, if these people are convinced about its benefits. An iniquitous social order that promotes competition among the social groups for power and resources needs special protective measures for its weaker sections to sustain them at a healthy level of the social, economic and political order.

Panchayati Raj system is an effective means of decentralization of powers, whereby power is supposed to be delegated to lowest strata of society. However, this system has not been able to immune itself from the evils of corruption that is rampant in higher echelons of governance in India. Starting from the members of gram-sabhas to those of zilla parishads have quickly amalgamated themselves to the corrupt political scenario. Under these circumstances, checks and balances that are supposed to come from the general population are of extreme value. Members inculcated into the political system based on panchayati raj are either prone to corruption or have a general apathetic attitude towards the whole system.

The Panchayati Raj is the cornerstone of the entire scheme of democratic decentralisation in India initiated through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution. The success or failure of the Panchayati Raj system largely depends on effectiveness and powerful working of

Gram Sabha at the decentralised level to fulfil the desires and inspirations of the people. Recognizing the critical role of the Gram Sabha in village economy Gandhiji had said that true democracy could not be worked by some persons sitting at the top. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village. Later on, endorsing the view of Gandhiji, Jay Prakash Narain had said: "To me Gram Sabha signified village democracy. Let us not have only representative government from the village upto Delhi. In one place, at least let there be direct government, direct democracy. The relationship between Panchayat and Gram Sabha should be that of Cabinet and Assembly". It is due to the importance of this institution at local level that the Year 1999-2000 has been declared as 'Year of Gram Sabha' by the Government of India.

Article 243(B) of the Constitution defines the GS as a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of the Panchayat at the village level. With regard to its powers and authority, Article 243 (A) of the Constitution says that the GS may exercise such powers and perform such functions of the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide. It is in the light of this that State legislatures have endowed certain powers to this corporate body relating to the development of the village.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution gives the power to the masses to decide their destiny. This aims to further the process of democratic decentralization of power. Impediments at socio-economic and political levels are many fold for true realization of democratic decentralization. Participation of the masses at grass root level can still be termed as pseudo participation as there is a general lack of awareness and apathy towards political system as a whole. Need of the hour has to be in form of concerted efforts aimed towards modernization of the rural society whereby people become more aware. An aware and progressive rural India can hold the powers that be accountable, thus, ushering an era of good governance based on active participation of the rural population and accountability to the masses.

The initiatives for democratic decentralization undertaken in free and democratic India until early 1990s could enthuse the women to participate in the local self-governments and other democratic institutions in any massive scale. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, which came into effect in 1993, has reserved at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of seats at all levels of

local self-governments for the women. Women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will now have a share of seats in proportion to their population in an area. This Act has generated tremendous enthusiasm among the tribal women to come forward and explore this hitherto male-dominated political sphere and assume leadership in different walks of life. While a significant number of tribal women are now participating in different bodies of local self-government and in trade unions (in case of tea gardens), it is premature to suggest that the women have made a significant inroad into the village level or community level leadership. It would, however, be worth exploring the nature of their participation and its impact on various walks of the life of the participating women in particular and the tribal communities in general.

The lifeline of any democratic order lies in the active participation of all sections of the citizens, and particularly the weaker and otherwise marginalized sections of the society. In order to be more participative Indian democracy has always been taking new steps in line with the ideal of devolution of power down to the grassroots. The regular elections to the national and state legislatures, election to local self-governments, strengthening of organs of civil society like political parties and trade unions provide ample scope for the otherwise neglected sections to participate in political processes. Reservation of seats for the weaker sections and women following the principle of protective discrimination has widened the scope for political participation of a marginalized section like the tribal women.

Apart from political means the other means of empowerment could be to improve their educational status, economic status, health status, to grant them property rights, raise their social awareness, and to transform them into an active, confident, and **critical agency** of social transformation. In reality, all these means of empowerment are closely interrelated. Spread of education can enhance the 'life chances of the people', can get them jobs in the organized sector of economy and can significantly raise the standard of their living. Again, an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and realization of the usefulness of organized political and social movements, like the literacy movement, health movement, movements for the rights of the workers can help them develop a critical approach to traditional modes of life and to the established hierarchies and help them draw a new approach to life. The local self-governments are not merely the means of distribution of public resources; if used properly and consciously by the **active citizens**

these institutions could be transformed into the means of social transformation. By taking active part in the *panchayats* the tribal women can create new opportunities (from developmental perspective) for themselves and for the fellow members of the village communities and can transform them into active agencies to fight against the perpetual male domination and practices like witch hunting, liquor consumption, or polygamy.

Democracy and decentralization have meant a renewed emphasis on decentralization, but not all forms of decentralization are democratic. Even non-democratic systems can, and have had, well-worked-out schemes of decentralization. Advocacy for decentralization has been a part of the liberal political tradition. Decentralization is also advocated with reference to the size and socio-economic complexity of the country. A large territory is not easy to administer from one centre, which perhaps explains why states with large territories like Canada, China, USA, Australia and India have adopted federal forms of government.

Along with size, the complexity of the territory in terms of religion, language, economic development and cultural enclaves calls for decentralization. With such complexities it becomes necessary to recognize the special needs and demands of the regions and groups of people which get reflected in political institutions as well as in administrative process. While the polity finds it advisable to pay attention to the needs of diversities, the regions and social groups themselves become assertive about their identities, resisting uniformities and demanding effective voice 'from below'. Decentralization is thus affected by pressures both from above and from below.

The process of construction of a democratic social order cannot be successful unless the issues of mass poverty, landlessness, unemployment, widespread illiteracy, malnutrition, gender discrimination, superstitions, feudal and capitalist exploitation and political apathy among the masses are adequately addressed. The political empowerment of the people is possible only by ensuring economic development, spreading education and by making people conscious about their rights and responsibilities. A development of critical faculty in the average citizens would also sharpen public monitoring of the functioning of the system. In brief, the future of democracy in India will largely depend on the all-round economic, social and cultural development of the common people. Although Indian

women have a tradition of rich contribution to various walks of life and to the freedom struggle the arena of politics has predominantly been a male domain.

The level of political participation of women and its effectiveness would largely depend on their position or the status, and the patriarchal arrangement in the community they belong to or in the immediate social setup. An understanding of the economic, social, educational, and cultural position of the women under study is therefore absolutely essential to understand the nature of patriarchal arrangement the women have been subjected to and to understand what kind of freedom of free space they would be allowed in the otherwise male domain of politics. Apart from studying the nature of participation in the democratic institutions it would therefore be necessary to do a thorough study of the economic, social and cultural background of the tribal women and see what kind of linkages prevail between their background (including their self and social perceptions) and the nature of their political participation. There is a perception among a section of sociologists and social anthropologists that the women belonging to low-caste, low-class, and tribes enjoy relatively higher status than their upper-caste upper-class counterparts. However, a large number of empirical studies suggest that the tribal communities have all the elements of patriarchal arrangement as the women are forced into the low-paid or unpaid form of labour, deprived of property rights, deprived of formal education, sexually exploited, deprived of religious rights, often deserted by their husbands, made to suffer from mal-nutrition and kept out of the traditional or modern power structure (for details see Roy, 2005; Omvedt, 1990).

While the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal has a large concentration of tribesmen and women from central India who are engaged as tea labourers in the Terai region of Darjeeling district we find the concentration of tribal population from the same place of origin who are engaged in the agricultural sector as well as in tea gardens. In the present study we have done a comparative study of the nature of political participation of tribal women working in the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri Dooars and the women living in agriculture-based villages in Terai region of Darjeeling district. The comparison is meaningful in the sense that the two regions provide two significantly different economic, social, cultural and political contexts.

## **THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME**

The phrase “political participation” generally refers to those voluntary activities of the members of a society, in the selection of ruler and in the formation of public policy. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important element of democratic government. Political participation is also the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. Different scholars have defined political participation differently. To Ghosh (2000), political participation is a ‘process of growth of individual’. It is also the ‘index of democracy.’ The higher the form of participation healthier is the democratic system. Jha (2005) opines that political participation is the hallmark of a democratic set up. Success and effectiveness of democracy, according to her, largely depends upon the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is ensured by the system to all its citizens. Citizens’ participation is necessary because it assures the legitimacy of democratic systems.

The citizens in a liberal-democratic order like India do not constitute a homogenous mass; they are unequally placed in the economic, social and power hierarchy. Generally, people placed in the upper echelon of the social and economic hierarchy control power in a liberal democracy. The “bourgeoisie” (to use the Marxist terminology) or the “elite” (to use the terminology of Pareto, Mosca, Michel or C Wright Mills) constitute the ruling force in a democratic or otherwise political order (Mills, 1956). Liberal democracies all over the world have progressed a long way from the middle of nineteenth century to become much more broad-based (not always rigidly controlled by the bourgeois for furthering its narrow interest), “strategic”, “mass-based” and “integrative”. The social democrats in the West and the mainstream left parties in most countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia have drifted from the conventional Marxist critique of “bourgeois democracies”, which was dismissive of the system, and have discovered many positive aspects in the modern liberal democratic orders. They largely believe in participating in the multi-party (plural) democracies, and believe in giving a socialist or leftist twist to the bourgeois order or to create a social democratic order. The mainstream Indian Left parties in India perfectly fit into this scheme.

The neo-Left critique of the liberal democratic order could be drawn from the writings of Gramsci, the German Critical School, Poulantzas, Althusser, Miliband, and Foucault,

among many others. Gramsci explained how the bourgeois ruling classes take the ideological, social and cultural route and resort to coercive means in order to establish its totalitarian control or hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The German Critical School, Habermas in particular, spelt out how the system world, of which state and the power structure constitute a major component, colonizes the lifeworld of the citizens by means of transforming the “critical rationality” into “instrumental rationality” (Habermas, 1971; 1976). The French Marxist Althusser put across the concept of “ideological state apparatus”. In construction of his thesis Althusser explains how the modern bourgeois ruling classes have resorted to peaceful, democratic and ideological routes to sustain its rule. Althusser has shown how the modern ruling classes have acquired mastery over the art of integrating the mass mind into the bourgeois ideological order by controlling education, socialization and cultural processes (Althusser, 1971). They thus depend less upon coercion as a means of political control. Another French structuralist Poulantzas emphasized that the modern capitalist state is more than a combination of repression and ideological false consciousness. For him the state is more complex:

A strategic field and process of intersecting power networks, which both articulate and exhibit mutual contradictions and displacements.... This strategic field is traversed by tactics which are often highly explicit at the restricted level of their inscription in the State: they intersect and conflict with one another, finding their targets in some apparatuses or being shortcircuited by others, and eventually map out that general line of force, the State’s “policy”, which traverses confrontations within the State (1978: 136)

Poulantzas further elaborates the character of the modern state by observing that the state apparatus includes more than state power; it includes everything from postal service to the road system. Such services are not independent of power, because those in power need such mechanisms for themselves and for maintaining their support-base (1978: 14). The French post-structuralist thinker Foucault has been highly dismissive of the modern liberal orders by branding them “demonic”. According to his the modern liberal orders combine the city-citizen game, elements of pastoral power (or folk-shepherd game), and bio-power (or the politics of welfarism) to dupe and discipline the masses and integrate them into the order (Foucault, 2000: 8-25).

Gram Swaraj and Panchayati Raj system according to Gandhi's ideas can become the vehicles for ushering in the much-needed social and political change by including all the participants in the process of decision-making and public policy formulation. As Gandhi said, "Panchayat Raj represents true democracy realized. We would regard the humblest and the lowest Indians as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land." For a participatory democracy intensive, organized, and continued endeavors are needed on the part of gram swaraj for the empowerment of people.

Thus while addressing the question of political participation of the common, impoverished and hapless masses into the democratic order we find three theoretical positions of relevance. *One extreme view* is that the liberal democratic order has many things to offer to all classes of people, and that it can adequately address the concerns of the downtrodden. This view further propels the belief that by active participation into the system the common masses would make active citizens and thus gain much more in terms of empowerment, besides adding strength to the order. *The other extreme view* is that the liberal democratic order is demonic from the point of view of the liberational perspective of the marginal and exploited. Any participation in the system would therefore end in further "colonization" of the exploited common people. In-between these two extreme views there is a *third view* which believes that if give a Leftist or social democratic twist the liberal democratic order to be put to better use for the significant gain of the hitherto deprived classes, although it might not end exploitation altogether. Miliband (1969) is one who has suggested that the capitalist states of the West do not fit into the orthodox frame of Marxist class analysis. The state can at times go to the extent of serving the downtrodden even by contradicting the interests of the bourgeoisie in order to realize the objectives of a liberal, democratic, welfare social order.

The politics of decentralization, democratization, welfarism capture the spirit of the changeover of liberal democracy. Despite this change there is unequal participation of different classes and segments of citizens to the democratic order. The general pattern is that the segments, which are economically, historically and socially marginalized, are given a marginal place and a small role to play in the system. The social scientists in India are unanimous in identifying the 80.2 million tribal population (who represent nearly 700 Scheduled Tribes) as people living on the margin of social, economic and political order of our society. This is a reality despite nearly 60 years of nation building, development,

welfarism and the policy of protective discrimination. Taking advantages of the policy of protective discrimination and other opportunities thrown open by the liberal democratic order only a small minority of the tribal population has been able to cause some kind of social mobility and in the tribal dominated states of North East and central India a section of neo-elite has emerged from amongst the tribal population. Yet, the living standard of the average tribal population has largely remained unchanged, if not deteriorated. The tribal population in general and tribal women in particular thus occupy a very marginal place in the power sharing arrangement offered by Indian democracy.

Apart from theorizing the character of the liberal democratic order and the place of the “marginal” in it we have to examine the relevant feminist perspectives to locate the tribal women in the socio-economic-cultural locales of which they are a part. A comprehensive work on this part would take some time, as it will proceed alongside the field studies. For the moment, however, we can make some passing reference to the fact that in the agricultural set-up the tribal women are almost universally engaged as agricultural labourers. They are engaged as unorganized, low paid labourers, which involves high level of irregularity and insecurity. In the absence of education and skill they are constrained to accept whatever the agricultural economy can offer and they accept this without much of a grudge as a requirement of the subsistence economy. While extending their labour outside to add to the family income the tribal women are not relieved from their domestic activities, sexual activities and reproductive activities.

The value of the women in tribal societies is judged from this perspective, from the *perspective of their labour value* and their role and status in the society are determined accordingly. This is largely true of the tribal communities in the tea garden locales as well. There are, however, some significant differences in the two contexts: (1) the tea gardens have a heterogeneous social composition in contrast to the agricultural setup, (2) the tea garden labourers work in more capitalist-industrial arrangement while the tribes in the agricultural setup are still in pre-capitalist or semi-feudal arrangement, and (3) the labourers, including the women labourers, in the tea gardens are now part of organized trade union movements, while their counterparts in the agricultural setup do not have any such experience. Apart from this “rational” and utilitarian judgment, the predominant perceptions, institutional arrangements and cultural practices (like witchcraft, or bride-price) determine the position of tribal women in their respective societies. The other set of

forces that can set the roles and perceptions of the women constitute the exogenous forces, like the State-injected institutions and programmes, the organs of the civil society (like the political parties, trade unions, voluntary organizations) or social movements.

On the whole we would be addressing the question of interrelationship tribe and the larger society or between tribe and civilization to use the phrase of Surajit Sinha. Sociologists have in general looked into this interface from the dominant-dependent perspective, where the tribes constitute the losers. The state, the ideology of modernity, development and welfarism etc. are often read as the instruments at the hands of the dominant for subordination of the marginal. In modern India 'the stance of the civilization' is fast changing to create new conditions for the tribes. The conscious stance of the modern nation state, according to Sinha, is to make tribes fully participate as equals in the emerging civic order of the nation. In practice the tribal people, particularly the primitive groups, continuously lose command over the vital resources. The tribal populations have reacted to this arrangement of subjugation in a variety of ways. One of the ways is to take an aggressive stance. Such groups have tried to mobilize their population on dissatisfaction. But creative cultural movements accompany ethnic based political movements too, which accentuate and universalize the traditions. In order to make them authentic and prestigious, borrowing is often from the Hindu and Christian traditions (Sinha, 1982: 34). The range of movements launched by the tribal people cover a wide spectrum from cessation to seeking some educational and economic support. We have to keep this wide spectrum in mind to locate the nature of political participation and activism of the tribes of North Bengal and their women folk.

## **OPERATIONALISATION**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The present study is designed on the following framework:

1. Theoretical materials have been collected from books, journals, periodicals, Govt. reports etc.
2. The empirical data have been collected from the universe of the study through a questionnaire which included both open ended and closed ended questions.
3. The data so collected has been analysed with the help of computer and report has followed accordingly.

Accordingly, the work is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources of data has been supplemented by secondary sources of data.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Following from the brief outline of the problem of research given above we have drawn a number of preliminary research questions around which the present study revolves.

- Q1: What constitute the economic, social, and cultural background of the region and the people we are studying?
- Q2: What has been the political background of the region and the people we would study?; their political culture, political tradition, customary laws, traditional *panchayats* and so on, and how has been the relative participation of the tribal men and women in democratic politics?
- Q3. How has been the transition from traditional *panchayats* to the modern democratic institutions? What has been the nature of constraints and adaptations and how has the gender factor played its part in it?
- Q4. What has been the exact nature of participation (as leaders of political parties and trade unions, as members of *panchayat* and other democratic bodies, as ordinary and unattached voters, or as active workers of the organs of civil society) of the tribal women in the democratic processes thrown open by the institutions of Indian democracy and what are problems (economic, social and cultural) that constrain their political participation and activism?
- Q5. What have been the patriarchal arrangements that the tribal women have been subjected to and how such arrangements are coming in the way to their political activism and political participation?
- Q6. What are the rights and privileges that have come as a part of development packages to the tribal women? What democratic rights have been conferred on the tribal women by the Indian Constitution? Are they aware of their rights and privileges they are entitled? What level of awareness do they have about such rights and privileges and how are they making use of them in their empowerment?
- Q7. What are the major constrains for socio-political upliftment of tribal women especially in terms of their social, economic, educational, and health issues.
- Q8. Whether the support of organizations under which they are employed (especially tea gardens) are substantial enough for furthering their goals towards socio-political upliftment.

Q9. Whether involvement of political parties (thereby lending a political colours) at grass root panchayat levels is helpful or detrimental towards evolving of an independent tribal political leadership.

Q10. If the purpose of the extension of democratic rights to the tribal women is to build up a participatory and integrationist democracy to what extent the state has succeeded in its objective? Or alternatively, is there an undercurrent of disenchantment and nihilism being sustained by the otherwise marginalized communities which might explode in some form of disintegrationist movement? In other words, how far the tribal communities appreciate and accept or dislike and reject the democratic political space offered to them by the state and the dominant society. The persisting political mood shared at the community level could be grasped by closely following the political perceptions and behaviour of the tribal women in the study area.

### **HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses have been verified in connection with the proposed work:

- 1) India's democratic process has created open space for the wider participation of women, mainly tribal women in the political functioning of the country.
- 2) Lack of adequate knowledge about the political system of the country stands in the way for greater participation of the tribal women in the political process.
- 3) Without adequate participation of the tribal women in this region, a social equilibrium may not be easy to achieve.

### **METHODS OF ENQUIRY**

Among the identified groups of tribes in North Bengal, primarily having agriculture and tea garden employment as their means of livelihood, tribal population belonging predominantly to the Dooars and the Terai regions have been chosen as the target population for my studies. Both these regions have a proportionate representation of tribal population who are, for ages, employed in either pursuing agricultural activities or being employed as tea garden labourers. The varied demography amongst this tribal population further adds to this being a fertile field for conduction of my studies. The tribal groups of Darjeeling Hills have been left outside the scope of the present study. The scope of our study would be delimited to the tribes like Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Mahali, Chik Baraik, Lohar, Kissan and so on, i.e., the tribes which have migrated in the agricultural and tea-garden setups from Central India, or the region popularly known as Chotanagpur.

As the first it was proposed to prepare an exhaustive list of tribal women who have been participating in local self-governments in my area of study. They are classified into two groups: (a) those who are living in tea gardens in a block in Jalpaiguri Dooars and (b) those who are living in villages, in the agricultural setup in a block in the Terai region of Darjeeling district. The next step was to draw a sample of suitable size and study the participating women in the sample in the two selected blocks with the help of an elaborately drawn questionnaire-cum-schedule. It was proposed to substantiate the interview method with observation and case study methods. A close-range observation of the women in action (in *panchayat* meetings, in *gram sabha* and *gram samsad* meetings, in political and trade union meetings etc.) has helped us draw an insight of the nature of their political participation. Apart from the study of participating women it is proposed to conduct intensive study of tribal communities in two different locales, preferably of two blocks: (a) one in the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district, with high concentration of tea garden labourers, and (b) one in the Terai region of Darjeeling district, which has high concentration of agricultural tribes.

1. exploratory, descriptive, diagnostic in nature.
2. survey method
3. structured and unstructured schedule containing questions
4. purposive and probability

The selection of the sample respondents was both purposive and probability. So far as the women politicians in the *Panchayati Raj institutions* are concerned, the sampling was purposive so as to cover a large number of women. The selection of other sample respondents, namely, the common women citizens the sampling was probability. The selection of the district has been purposive as the district exhibits demographic relevance because a sizeable section of the inhabitants of the district belong to the tribal communities and the selection of the blocks was also purposive because the level of development, demographic configuration, geographical location were considered in selecting the blocks. In total, two districts of North Bengal namely Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts respectively were selected. Two blocks were selected and studied, they are Phansidewa block (Darjeeling district) and Matelli block (Jalpaiguri district) of North Bengal.

Census data, NSSO data and the findings of other scholarly studies on the same problem in other parts of the country were taken into account for the purpose of comparative analysis and generalizations. Analytical value of the study would be its possible contribution to the models of participatory liberal democracy. The study is expected to have some practical and policy implications as well as it aims to explore the responses of one of the otherwise marginalized section of the society, the tribal women, to the 'welfare', 'empowering' 'capacity building', and 'integrative' arrangements of the liberal democratic social order. Apart from its essence in the field of political studies the present study can hopefully contribute to the field of gender studies immensely.

### **UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY**

The proposed study had sought to examine the nature and extent of tribal women's participation in the political process in the Dooars and Terai region of North Bengal. Needless to mention, the region under investigation offers a number of unique features- the most important of it the demographic composition. It offers an example of a mixed society where people of different religions, castes, beliefs, languages and other reside. But one notable feature is the general level of mal-development of the people belonging to the background segment of the population. The segment of tribal population constitutes a sizable portion as these people belong to both to tea-garden and non-tea-garden areas. There is some kind of homogeneity among these people and it reflects in their group-behaviour in social and political areas. Moreover, because of political penetration into this section by political parties, a sense of commonness has developed. The trade union activities by different political parties have opened up new space for their participation. But the outputs of such activities have not reached a satisfactory level and there are gaps between these efforts and achievements. The proposed study looked into this aspect and contextualizes the problem by identifying the reasons behind and the policy needed to overcome these obstacles.

### **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

The prime objectives of the present study has been to study:

- a) the extent and nature of participation of tribal women in different levels of local self-governments and other democratic bodies and process; the role tribal women in local movements, like agricultural labour movement or tea-labour movement;

- b) the socio-economic, cultural and migratory background of the participating tribal groups and tribal women in the area of our study;
- c) the patriarchal arrangements (property rights, traditional authority structure, beliefs and practices) which leads to the subjugation of the tribal women in the agricultural and tea-garden setups; gender discrimination in terms of differential efforts in capacity building, health practices and determination of roles;
- d) the course and orientation, or political socialization that led the tribal women to take part in local self-governments and politics, the growth of the choice for a particular political ideology or party;
- e) the intensity of their participation and effectiveness of their participation in politics;
- f) the nature of capacity building, the change of perception and self-development that has resulted from their participation, the way the community in general and the women of the constituency in particular have been benefited and the way the fellow tribal men and women assess the benefits of political participation of tribal women;
- g) the way the participating women mobilize fellow tribal people in support of their respective political parties and in support of the various government programmes;
- h) the way the tribal women participate in *panchayat* meetings, party meetings, *gram sabha* and *gram samsads*;
- i) the way the women motivate themselves to continue in politics and the way they themselves assess their new role;
- j) the way the participating women adjust their new political role with their traditional role of worker and home manager;
- k) the way women's participation help generate awareness about the rights and responsibilities of the tribal women;
- l) the way the whole community assess this new experience in their life in terms of consolidation of the foundation of democratic politics and in terms of addressing the common problems of their everyday life; and
- m) to see if there is any disillusionment with the present democratic arrangement and processes and if the tribal women along with their male counterparts nurse any anti-systemic grudge or involved in any anti-systemic activities.

From 1993 *panchayat* election in West Bengal the tea gardens of Terrai and Dooars have been brought under local self-governments. With reservation of seats for STs and for the women the scope for political participation for tribal women has unquestionably

increased. Apart from the *panchayat* bodies and general political activities as a part of democratic polity the tea gardens provide an opportunity for the tribal men and women to participate in the trade union activities. With cent per cent unionization of the tea garden labourers the women workers have been participating in trade union activities in one form or the other. The present study has also explored the nature of women's participation in trade union activities and how this has helped arouse their political awareness and political self.

### **RESEARCH GAP**

Traditional Indian society through ages have always been patriarchal and male dominated in majority of India, few states of North-Eastern part of India and few other scattered societies across India. This gender bias has been a major hindrance towards wholesome development of India. This major lacuna has been sought to be addressed by political legislation, socio-economic measures, addressal and correction of various discriminatory social practices, and measures to bring parity to the male-female population ratio.

Studies on tribal women in their political activities are few in number. The region under investigation offers many unique features in terms of geographical position, demographic composition, cultural complexities and levels of political mobilization by different political parties. Apart from the fact that the tribal population in the region migrated long back from Chotanagpur area of Jharkhand, their long association with this region has enabled them to adopt many habits and customs of the local people while maintaining their own rich cultural tradition. At some points, this interaction between these two currents has led to conflictual situation but in most of the cases, this conflict situation has been suitably resolved through a process of assimilation. It is sociological perspectives. The proposed study would cover the political dimension of the problem.

The role of various scholars and researchers has always been to analyzed the effectiveness of such measures and highlight any deficiencies that crop up. Publications by scholars and luminaries across India have endlessly tried to point out the way forward to address this major obstacle for true realization of the potential of India as a country. Thus, over a period of numerous years' scholars across the country have tried to bring forth the true ground realities pertaining to the issue of women empowerment at the local

levels. There is thus, a lot of literature by various scholars' right from the southern part of India to northern extremities.

Tribal population comprises a substantial percentage of population in northern part of Bengal. This geographical place has a substantial number of tea gardens, the major of working force of which are tribal. Located in far flung and inhospitable terrains, this population of tribals has always been secluded, and there has not been enough research studies aimed towards assessment of the status of this population.

There thus arises a need of, comprehensive study aimed towards addressal of the ground level scenario of this population; especially the situation of the women of this society, a comprehensive study will also help to formulate strategies aimed at upliftment of these women so that they can be at par with women of other sections of the Indian society. Difficult terrains and remote locations make it extremely difficult to carry out any research activity amongst the tea garden working population. Furthermore, living in such societies for years, makes it extremely difficult for a researcher to penetrate into these isolated far-flung societies. These factors therefore contributed towards lack of meaningful research amongst these societies. This population is of course quite substantial, and cannot be neglected if a wholesome social progress is to be attempted.

Our sphere of study is principally directed towards this section of society and their ground reality so that a proper assessment of their progress can be done and also a direction towards means aimed at their further upliftment can be promulgated. Though *Panchayati Raj* system was adopted as a means of reaching democracy to the grassroots level, a sincere study to assess its effectiveness amongst these desolate and isolated sections of society is a must. Participation of women of this society can be taken as a litmus test for assessment of the effectiveness of the *Panchayati Raj Institutions*. Our study also aims to analyze effective women participation in *Panchayati Raj Institutions* of this strata of society. Lack of meaningful studies amongst the tribal population of North Bengal leaves a huge scope for research and analysis within these populations. Our sincere effort has been to carry out comprehensive research spanning across this population in Dooars and Terai regions of North Bengal.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the Constitution in Articles 29-30 every citizen has the right to protect and promote one's culture. The act ensures that the tribal people will be empowered to manage their affairs according to their own culture within the purview of the Act. In recent years there has been a lot of studies on the local self-governments and women's participation in them, yet, there is hardly any literature on the participation of tribal women in *panchayats*. Although women are enfranchised and are given Constitutional equality, they remain practically in a subordinate position to men in almost all the spheres of the socio-political life.

1. **Jha** (2004) asserts that local self-government Acts were prevalent even before independence. Government resolution of 18<sup>th</sup> May 1982, under Lord Ripon's vice-regal is considered as the pioneering Act aimed towards local democracy in India. Implementation of these ideas in Bengal were brought about by Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885 which set up district and local boards at sub-divisional levels and union committees for groups of villagers. In 1825, eight provinces in British India had passed Acts for the establishment for the village *panchayats*. By 1948, 20 native states had village *Panchayat* Acts. The earliest being the Cochin *Panchayat* Regulation Act 1919. The first draft of India's Constitution, despite our history of *panchayats*, did not find a place for democratic decentralisation below the state level. Gandhiji immediately opposed it stating that without provision of *panchayats* people's voice could not be truly reflected in political decision-making. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report subsequently forced almost all states under the Indian union to pass legislations for establishment of *panchayat* by 1959. These *panchayati raj* institutions were however, rendered ornamental and majority of the states did very little to promulgate the *panchayati raj* system in its true letter and spirit. The non-functioning *panchayati raj* institutions in majority of the country brought this repute to entire concept and practice.

By the end of 1988, a sub-committee of consultative of the parliament under the chairmanship of an MP, P.K. Thungon made recommendations for strengthening of *panchayats*. It was against this background that Constitutional Amendment Bill (64<sup>th</sup> Amendment) was drafted and introduced in the parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> may, 1989. Two major objections to this bill were:

1. The bill overlooked the state and was seen as an instrument of centre to deal

directly with *panchayati raj* institution, and

2. It was imposing a uniform pattern throughout the country instead of permitting the individual states to legislate the details.

We now have great expectations from the democratic decentralisation that has taken place in West Bengal. It may be noted that West Bengal has achieved this level under an uninterrupted rule of one political party. A three tier *panchayati raj* system comprising of village level *panchayat*, *panchayat samities* and district level *Zilla parishad* has however been set in motion through various constitutional amendments all across the country. The primary political and economic power has although been vested with the state governments. This remains a huge impediment towards actual empowerment of the population at the grass root level. A novel and extremely productive measure has the *panchayati raj* system aimed towards empowerment of the masse at the grass root level can never be successful without positive intends of political parties across the spectrum. (pp. 26-35)

2. According to **Pande** (2001) the 73<sup>rd</sup> which came into force on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1993, *panchayat* institutions were given constitutional status. Though the nitty-gritty's of these vision were put under the domain of state legislature. Article 343 B has laid down the provision of a three tier *panchayati raj* system constituted mainly by village level, intermediate level and district level. There has however been lots of power laid down with the state legislative vis-à-vis constitution of an elected *panchayat* body. The Amendment also provides that the seats for SC and STs shall be reserved in proportion to their population in territorial area of a *panchayat*. A new feature of the amendment is that it also provides for reservations of one thirds seats for women, whether they are general seats or reserved for SC or SC. This according to the amendment not only makes provisions for reservations of seats of members but offices of chairpersons. However, the decision-making power is bestowed with the state legislature.

The question of reservation in favour of backward classes as well as extend and manner of such reservation is left at the mercy of state legislature. Section 3 of the constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) has made it obligatory on the finance ministry of India to make recommendations for augmenting the financial resources of *panchayats*. It thus suffices to say that though numerous constitutional prerogatives aimed towards empowerment of tribal women populations have been laid down, the power to enact these measures are yet

under the prerogative of the state legislature. Thereby empowering them to manipulate the provision of the Act aimed towards furthering of their political agendas. Checks and balances, though in place, have not been able to rid the tribal women population of being used as stooges for narrow political gain. Pande (2001) further opines that participation of women members does not depend upon their social status or prosperity. He cites example from the village of Bhithauli Khurd in Lucknow district where he found that their voters never see most of the women members in village *panchayats* who belong to well to do families. They cannot recognize them by face, nor do they know their names. Even where she is the *Pradhan* of the village she never appears before the public. Her husband or some near relative does everything and he is known as the member or *Pradhan* as the case may be.

In this regard he observes that without the awareness and active participation of women nation cannot progress. If they remain dormant the country will be deprived of their contribution in nation building process. Studies suggest that political participation could be influenced by numerous factors like sex, caste, social, status, education, income, age, family background, etc. It is learnt from the past experience that women with a good record of political participation were highly educated and were from upper class families. Domestic pressure and over dependence on male members also make women politically neutral. He points out several factors that explain why the women members are incapable of functioning independently: 1) because of *pardah* system prevailing in Muslims and upper caste Hindus; 2) because the men, who have been so used to provide village leadership, do not sincerely want power to go to women; and 3) lastly if somebody asks her question or puts his problems before her she is not normally allowed to speak; others who act on her behalf start answering. This practice prevents generation of confidence in the women members and they are made to remain dependent upon men even for minor things (Pande, 2001: 180-81).

3. According to **Chandra** (2005) in the modern civilized society politics is chiefly a skilled controlled area. It is significant to note that since independence more and more number of women have been educated and have entered public life. However, ‘an enormous disparity exists between women’s formal equality and their meaningful exercise of political power’ (V.Raj Laxmi). Trade unions came into place principally aimed at providing power to the working labour class in industry. There is quite a

substantial percentage of women labour force in our country. These women laborers have shown that though it may be difficult to participate in day today activities of trade union, women laborers have during the course of time provided great strength during crisis period such as strike. A study on textile strike of Bombay in 1982 proved that without the support of the women textile workers and wives of male textile workers, the leaders would have found it difficult to continue the strike for their legitimate demands. It is however unfortunate that a patriarchal society like India is an obstacle to male colleagues accepting women's crucial role. Despite this it is heartening to note that today after more than a decade of our struggle we find it our satisfaction that the questions and problems of working women are discussed widely in our country by various organizations, individuals, and press and also by the government. The tenacity of women workers of the under privileged society like the tribal women working force aimed principally towards having their rights preserved is commendable.

The issues which concern women most such as equal wages, non- provisions of maternity benefits and child care facilities, retrenchment of women worker in the wake of equal remuneration act have not been taken up seriously by trade unions. Problem of women working in unorganized sector highlights the sexually biased attitude of mainstream trade unions. The trade union movement, principally aimed towards preservation of rights of workers can never fulfill its true potential without active and meaningful participation of the women labour force. In this regard he observes that participation of women in different organizations has two important connotations: (i) it gives them a status in the society; and (ii) it permits contribution of women not only in rural development process but also in their own development. It also gives them an opportunity to (a) work in group or project of common interest, (b) associate with the on-going development programmes; (c) participate in the decision-making process; (d) articulate women's needs, (e) leadership in the national development process. The *Panchayati Raj Institution* were in fact, considered to be the most effective instruments for realizing the goals of economic betterment and social justice for the least privileged. Participation of women, who constitute nearly half of the population, in *Panchayati Raj Institution* has been considered essential for enabling them to participate effectively and independently in democratic and political process and to influence decision-making. It has been recognized as a step towards equal society and a means of realizing for women the development goals. But he strongly feels that today *Panchayati Raj Institution* hardly gives any scope for women

members to participate effectively and independently in democratic and political process to influence decision-making process. In spite of the provision of reservation for women the real power equations in the village whereby women, if they know what is good for them, leave politics to those who know better – the husbands, father-in-law or sons. Often they degenerate into party spokeswoman and hardly voice their own opinion on the floor of the house. Most of them remain as silent spectators to the proceedings of the house and rarely participate in its work (Chandra, 2005: 214).

4. **Jha** (2005) connects the concept of equality to women's equal right to political participation. Equality of presence, she adds, is a rough approximation to the social groups that make up the society, is already implicit in the notion of participation. In the Indian context, it has generally been observed that despite women's mass participation in the national struggle, their representation in the formal political structure has remained marginal in the post-independence years. Though women have been visible in mass movements, group upsurges and protest struggles, their presence is not felt in structured decision-making institutional settings. Participation of women in the village based on formal and non-formal organizations has caused significant changes in their social status as well as their position within the family. It is largely because of the women's participation in these political organizations that there has been change in the traditional norms and social arrangements that had restricted the free movements of the female members of the society.

5. Ashok Kumar **Jha** (2004) in his book *Women in Panchayati Raj Institution (2004)* cites some encouraging developments in the otherwise backward State of Bihar. He, in his study, has observed that the majority of women are of the opinion that they should take part in politics and should actively take part in the election campaign in favour of the candidate and party of their choice. They wanted to extend their political activities. With this idea in their mind, perhaps, the women had taken part in political campaign as among the women who were exposed to political campaign in the elections. Seventy per cent of them had the desire that women should take part in campaigning (Jha, 2004: 88).

6. **H. C Upreti and Nandini Upreti** (2000) opine that besides educational and social backwardness, domestic responsibilities, lack of awareness, shyness and fear of violence at polls are found to be reasons of low female turnout in politics. These factors are also

responsible for lower level of political participation of women in various political activities and lower level of political consciousness. Tribal communities of India remained isolated from the regional political main stream for long. They lived in the forest and remained in the hills and inaccessible terrains. The scope for their interaction with the State Governments was very limited. The revenue officials, forest guards and police acted as linkage between tribes and the government. In their traditional social setups the tribal communities had developed their own political systems to address the problem of disorder. They were highly reluctant to be a part of the modern and coercive political order, which was largely alien to them for generations. The tribes had developed their own *panchayats* in order to resolve disputes within the communities and to preserve their identities and self-reliance. The *tribal panchayats*, the traditional authority (in Weberian sense) based system of the tribes, provided them with solidity when the state-sponsored modern administrative and legal system was alien to them. However, effective analysis of the structure and functioning of the tribal *panchayats* would reveal that these were primarily the male domain and used as a mechanism to perpetuate male domination of the females. We hardly know of tribal *panchayats* which have women representation and which offer women a say in the running of the *panchayats*. Upretis opine that mere State intervention through legislative measures cannot bring about the desired social transformation. Mere legislative change, like the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, is not a guarantee to effective and meaningful participation; a numerical increase of women representatives in government bodies is a significant steps but in order to make their participation meaningful the women need to break free from their domestic confines, they have to be empowered economically and educationally and they have to be allowed ample free space to operate independently.

7. To **Sinha** (2005), political and the social lives of the tribes are no longer separate. Like all other societies among the tribes the men take important decisions in all matters. His study in Chotanagpur shows that the political system of the agriculturist-gatherer tribes traditionally excludes women. Women participate in village assemblies, *panchayats*, only when they are party to a case, or are called upon as witnesses. At the same time, in some situations, women can become village chiefs (*munda*), or a village priest (*pahan*). This opportunity may present itself when they are widows and if their husbands had been *mundas* or *pahans* (Sinha, 2005: 92). The tribals have their own traditional *panchayats* known as *Panch*. The *Panch* was not elected by any democratic

methods and the post was hereditary in nature. This *Panch* was to negotiate in case there had been a conflict among the parties. The matters reported to *Panch* were largely social and partly economic in nature. Disputes relating to marriage were the opt-referred cases to the *Panch*.

8. **Roy** (2005) observes, even after the reservation of seats for tribal women they are not seen with a voice in the local bodies of democratic institutions. Some major reasons as to why the tribal women continue to remain voiceless and absent in trade unions in tea gardens, in party organizations or in local bodies, not to speak of the state and national legislative assemblies or in administration, are strong patriarchal domination, overexploitation of women labour, early marriage and conception, and their lack of access to education (Roy, 2005: 41)

9. In her argument as to why women should have a significant place in *Panchayati Raj* and why should there be reservation for them **Zenab Banu (2005)** points out that anthropologically tribal women are different from non-tribal women. They enjoy more freedom as they can repudiate their marriage and can easily re-marry. The only problem in re-marriage is to settle the amount of bride price. However, in all tribal societies-patrilineal and matrilineal, it is the man who controls the children and family. It is this subaltern position and the hegemony of patriarchy that requires a reserved place for women in *Panchayati Raj institutions*. Banu considers the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Development to be a water-shade in the evolution of *Panchayati Raj Institutions*. *Panchayati Raj Institution* provides an opportunity for the weaker sections of the society to march on the path of the progress. She has studied the participation of tribal women in the districts of Rajasthan. Her finding shows that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment has diluted the rigor of empowerment and in the course landed the women to disempowerment. In this respect she observes:

To us the reservation given to tribal women does not carry much weight. They are dictated, as there is enough research evidence, by their men. And when we further analyze the affiliations of the men in the tribal community, they are also not educated. In fact, they have nothing except their big body or manliness. In reality they survive as the stowage of party bosses. The tragedy is that both the tribal male and female are 'sold out' to Hindu leaders. They are the 'yes men' of the Hindu lobby of the region. In the whole region of South Rajasthan there is not a

single tribal leader whose credential are acceptable by the tribals at large. In absence of any recognized leader, the PRIs are ruled neither by the women members and nor by their male. The PRIs in fact, are ruled by the high caste Hindus with their varying political affiliation (p,184).

10. **Singh, Narain and Kumar** (2006) in their studies on women of Cachar district and their political participation of tea workers opines that the tea workers, particularly the women are members of the union not due to their ideological commitment but under compulsion of the co-workers or the union office bears at the garden level. He further observes that women in tea gardens are politically immature and ignorant. Most of the office bearers of the union or the *bagan panchayat* are male workers. The women workers remain always in the rear everywhere. They are ignored and cornered in the distribution of elective posts, even at the garden level. Recently, after due and cry some women workers have been included in the *bagan panchayat* of Cachar districts. Some of the women are non-committal in the union leadership. They further elaborates that plantation workers, particularly the women workers remain busy with their daily routine works of the garden and whatever time they save is consumed by their domestic works. They start their domestic work at five in the morning and retire after 10pm. Obviously they are physically exhausted after such hard work with mal-nutritious diet.

Further, they live in the garden society which is cut off from the mainstream of national life. Their level of political perception, degree of political consciousness and political knowledge are limited and inadequate. Their lack of political awareness, low level of political consciousness and attitude towards political activities is most horrible. This is mainly due to their solitary garden life. The women workers are completely cut off from the mainstream socio-political life of the nation. According to them the social environment is responsible for their poor political awareness. The plantation life is different from other profession. The women workers are engaged in the plantation work from morning to evening and they get practically no time to ponder over political matters even at local level.

Despite efforts, participation of women workers in political or decision-making remains far from satisfactory. Following may be the reasons:

1. There is a general apathy towards political participation owing to their lower socio-economic status which leads to their devaluation.

2. Since times immemorable politics had been the bastion of males, yet to be substantially breached by women.
3. Traditionally, women are supposedly for attending to household chores. This obligation keeps them little time to expend in political activities. Social structure of India does not further the concept of women actively engaged in political activities.
4. Political parties are thus reluctant to promote women candidates as their wholesome and active participation in politics is not guaranteed.
5. Patriarchal attitude of majority of the Indian society which is inculcated in political parties is detrimental to projection of women as potential political persona, for this renders women at par with men, which is in opposition to the laid down social protocols in Indian society.
6. Politics, in recent times has have an increasing influence of use of money power and criminalization. Women entering the political sphere are supposedly easy victims for character assassination which is a big stumbling block for active and meaningful participation of women in politics.
7. Abysmal levels of education in women lead to a monumental lack of social awareness which coupled with burdens of work and family responsibility acts as a huge impediment towards participation of women in decision-making and active political process.
8. Inequality of wages based on gender bias amongst working women and the lack of suitable employment amongst the non-working women is a substantial barrier towards participation of women in active politics. Women folk in a predominantly patriarchal society like India face an uphill task to make their mark in social and political sphere. The path towards having a meaningful social and political contribution is ridden with numerous obstacles which, for majority of women is quite an arduous task.

11. **Pruthi** (1999) in her studies shows that the participation of women in trade union is far from satisfactory due to the trade union's ways of functioning and also because of the nature of women's work. Another reason according to her is that trade unions cover mainly the organised sector and much of the women's work fall under the unorganised sector. There are many who are loyal to the trade union activities and show keen interest in participating. The first trade union in India was founded by Anusyaben Sarabhai in

Ahmedabad in 1917. According to her the patriarchal attitude of the male workers is responsible for: a) poor representation of women in decision-making position, and b) the neglect of issues concerning women. Male workers in general tend to view their female counterparts as home makers. It is only in recent times that the three major trade union namely INTUC, AITUC and CITU have begun paying attention to women workers. At the same time, women workers have started struggling on their own, seeking to fulfil demands that concern them as women. This has not always been successful, but many a time this firmness as well as the support received from active women's group have paid dividends. However, even in these movements they have not been able to emerge beyond middle level leadership despite their commitment and militancy.

12. **Praharaj** (2010), in her study on the status of women opines that it is based on three pillars: such as education, employment and political participation and achieving these is in another word, "empowerment". According to her education creates consciousness for better health, and better health along with better education help in achieving higher productivity. Increase in productivity leads to economic growth. Economic growth generates resources. Accessibility towards resources improves people's health and education which again raise productivity. So education, therefore, is both seed and fruit of economic development, social awareness and on the other hand active political participation of the educated women, empower them to open the possibility of new avenues for development and to root out corruption.

Female literacy is negatively related with fertility rates, population growth rates, infant and child mortality rates and it shows a positive association with female age at marriage, life expectancy, participation in modern sector of economy and above all, the female enrolments. But it is found that urban female is well literate compare to their women are at the bottom of the heap. Though the dropout rates are not declined so appreciably in primary level, the enrolment ratio in the secondary stage is not exceeds to 50 per cent. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) took steps to eradicate women literacy in 15 to 35 age group by 1995. Steps were also taken to promote adult education for women linked with up gradation of their skills and income generation activities. The process of learning was supported by general Higher Educational Institutes, Technical Institutions like Poly Technique, Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Women Centres in Agricultural and Home Science Colleges etc.

13. **Tripathy** (2010), in his study on Orissa tribes opines that with the adoption of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution amendments and incorporation of Article 21 A in the Constitution, making Right to Education a Fundamental Right, any attempt on the part of government to absolve itself of its mandated role as the sole provider of basic education or non-functioning or poorly functioning primary schools are more likely to provide public action of profound proportions. Informed and vigilant public can wad of inefficient functioning of schools. Tremendous potentiality of public action notwithstanding, unfortunately denial of access to good quality basic education has not always led to public action due probably to relatively low visibility of educational deprivation.

14. **Rajkumar Pruthi** (1999) opines that position of women in Indian context does have a great gender bias, even despite numerous attempts backed up by Constitutional reforms. This is specifically due to the predominantly male dominated structure of our society. Though the political rights of women have constitutional backing, the reality at ground level still requires a lot to be desired. The intriguing question of women are used as mere political cases, is primarily due to dominant male, unwilling to relinquish and share political platforms with women or whether there is a wide spread lack of women of our society to meaningfully assert their political views. The ground reality bears connotation of both of these. While, extending from remote village level *panchayats* right up to the highest decision making bodies like *Lok Sabha*, Constitutional reforms have sought to address the problem of gender bias, women political representatives, in majority of cases end up just as pawns in the hands of male members of their family who wield all the control.

Our numerous interactions at ground level do substantiate it. Amongst the various elected women *panchayat* members, who got primarily elected as representatives owing to reservations aimed for women, it is quite rare to find women independent of political patronage of a pre-existing political family. Thus, a previously elected male political representative simply puts a women member of his family as a candidate if his political constituency gets notify as a reserved seat for women. This extends right across from *panchayats* to municipalities and right up to *Lok Sabha*. Majority of women of our society still shy away from politics at large, and thus involvement into a political decision-making body bears little significance for them. While these constitutionally guaranteed reservations for women have thrown up quite a few positive and enterprising

women, who have managed to have a significant and positive influence on socio-political agendas, these still remains largely an exceptions. Merely thrusting women reservations down the throat of a society, without backup of proper social reforms aimed at gender equality, will always be a cosmetic and superficial attempt.

The tendency of men of our society to cast women of their family into political positions of power when confronted with and debarred from holding public office goes up to the highest echelons of power. Many political parties, across the political spectrum bear testimony to this general trend. It is thus extremely rare to find an independent female voice in our society, devoid of patronage of her family.

15. According to **Praharaj** (2010) educational upliftment of women is of prime importance for their political empowerment. A woman, educationally empowered, can do justice to the political positions which are entrusted upon her. Education provides women with the sense of independence, so very essential for meaningful contribution towards her own family and society at large. My numerous studies at the grass root level do collaborate this. Educated women, cropped into position of power, often end up as stooges in the hands their male compatriots fellow persons. Even amongst a predominantly male dominant society like India, educated women do manage to keep themselves afloat and contribute meaningfully to the society, thereby doing justice to their positions of power. It has to be admitted that purposeful strides towards women's education have been taken during the recent past, aimed principally at providing basic education to the girl child, social constrains still remain a huge hindrance towards actual realisation of substantial women education. This is far more challenging to implement schemes aimed at girl education amongst the fringe elements of the society; tea garden population in North Bengal being a primary a part of this society. (pp. 115)

He further observes that corruption has plagued politics at all levels in our country. Various studies point out to the fact that women, when empowered with political positions of power, are much less prone to corruption, vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Women, who have their ability to assert their political agendas strongly, are much more efficient and less prone to corruption. This however does not hold proof for those women representatives who have nothing but ornamental posts, thereby leaving the political decision-making process to their male kith and kin. She further opines that strong women

in position of power at the grass root level bring forward a strong female perspective, thereby contributing to lend gender equality to the whole political process. Subjugated for the ages, a strong women perspective is necessary for getting the gender equilibrium. This is even of more paramount importance amongst the underprivileged class of society. A strong and purposeful women presents is essential to bring forth the women perspective in socio-political sphere. It has to be stressed again that women education is the basic building block toward achievement of a strong and vibrant women political force at the grass root level, especially amongst the underprivileged sections of the society. (pp. 170-173).

16. **Baviskar** (2005) while presenting a profile of women's participation mentions that the reservation of seats for women (and for SCs and STs) concerns not only members but also office-bearers. Thus not only one third of elected members but one third of *sarpanches* or chairpersons have also to be women. In the country as a whole, there are 231,630 gram *panchayats* (village councils). Over 77,210 of them now have women as sarpanches. At the intermediate level, there are 5,912 *taluka* (or block/mandal) *panchayat samitis*. More than 1,970 of them have women *sabhapatis* or heads. And of the 594 *zilla parishads* (district councils) 200 have women now occupy positions as members or heads in rural and urban local government bodies. This may be unique in the world. Baviskar also brings out the phenomenon of all-women *panchayats* which have arisen in a few progressive states, such as Maharashtra and West Bengal. Although insignificant in numbers, they deserve attention. At one time there were about a dozen all-women *panchayat* in Maharashtra. These all-women *panchayats* were partially successful as experiments, but for a variety of reasons they did not endure. Women preferred to tackle problems of water supply and toilets. They also took greater interest in schools, particularly in the attendance of girls. They were innovative in their methods for getting things done. And on the whole, women were less prone to be tempted by opportunities of corruption. But men did not like women's campaign against the consumption of alcohol or vending of liquor in the villages. Most men did not favour giving another tem to women, although the latter had managed the *panchayat* well despite various obstacles. On the whole, all-women's *panchayat* were an imaginative experiment in women's empowerment. (pp.332-334).

17. **Webster (1992)** has opined: "As with the majority of the states, West Bengal accepted the need for the form of *Panchayati Raj* without the underlying philosophy and principles presented in the Mehta report." In order to study how far the principles of democratic decentralization has been followed in the organization and functioning of the *Panchayati Raj* bodies in West Bengal- the cherished ideal behind the introduction of *Panchayati Raj* in India - it is necessary at first to discuss the legislative enactments on this score.

18. A separate perspective vis-à-vis participation of women in political scenario in Nigeria according to **Agbalajobi (2010)**, though constitutionally guarantees in Nigeria equality in politics, participation in meaningful political process by Nigerian women is far from satisfactory. The study points out towards lack of women empowerment through the years as the primary cause. A dearth of measures aimed towards women financial empowerment is a primary cause of this disparity. Predominantly patriarchal society renders women prone to male dominance whereby guaranteed constitutional provisions aimed towards women empowerment are unattainable. Religious doctrines are of paramount importance which aid and abate socio-political subjugation of women in a country like Nigeria. Predominantly downtrodden women society in a country like Nigeria bears resemblance to the Indian society. The common linking factor which needs to be addressed is lack of education amongst the womenfolk of both of these societies which lay them vulnerable to being subjugated by the menfolk. This is a classic study in case which proves the importance of women education which is of paramount importance towards realization of constitutional provisions aimed at women empowerment at grass root level.

19. According to **Subrata K. Maitra and V.B. Singh (2009)** there is an inherent force in Indian society, primarily at the grass root level which presents itself as a catalyst for social change. There is an inherent empathy towards political leaders representing a wide spectrum of political parties. Authors in their book *When Rebels Become Stakeholders: Democracy, Agency and Social Change in India* explore the agency of ordinary men and women in the making of democratic social change in India. The study is specific to India, but the issues that it examines are of wider significance. The authors join the debate on democracy and development on the basis of case studies that showcase the opinions and attitudes of the Indian voter. The force for catalysing a socio-political

change is however very much prevalent in Indian society, and that is in spite of the unproductive and corrupt force of organised political parties. Constitutionally laid down reservations aimed towards empowerment of tribal women thus find many participants who want to distant themselves from agendas of various political parties. These persons principally representation the down trodden tribal women are truly driven by an ideology which is aimed towards betterment of their fellow compatriots. This remains a driving force towards true realization of various measures aimed at decentralisation of power. Thus study therefore reflects a positive trend prevalent among majority of the down trodden society, whose ultimate aim is to work for upliftment of their society. It is heartening to note that many of the elected women representatives in the local governing bodies have managed to rise above narrow political windows, thereby channelizing their powers for furthering of their immediate social upliftments and interests. This alone should serve as a driving force towards implementation of local self-governments whose primary and sole agenda is to progress and consolidate the immediate society. Various constitutional measures would have been rendered redundant without this indigenous and strong socio-political movements arising out of primarily the tribal population aimed towards self-assertion.

The authors have used the public opinion data from three national surveys of the Indian electorate held in 1971, 1996 and 2004 to focus on the political understanding of India's voters and their leaders. While agency is a much-discussed theme in contemporary social sciences, connecting the rationality of ordinary men and women to explain electoral participation and rapid structural change in the lives of people of this country is specific to this study. This book argues that the cohabitation of democracy and social change in India is not merely incidental or coincidental; rather the two are institutionally linked in a manner that is fundamentally causal, to the extent that the weakening of the one renders the other ineffective. These positive phenomena should definitely be a driving force towards furthering of measures, constitutional and social, aimed at political empowerment of this down trodden strata of the society.

20. **Deepika Jha** (2010) in her study on men and women of Babapur and the surrounding villages in the Amreli District observes that in a patriarchal society like India women still remain subjugated. Distended to look after her family through age old

tradition she has little scope to exercise her political prowess. Even basic amenities like provision of portable water are hard to get by in quite a majority of the Indian village population. Hardships of life are many for these women. When confronted with serious challenges to manage and run their families smoothly, political empowerment remains a distant dream. Without addressal of means aimed at easing out their daily chores of activities aimed at sustenance, political empowerment remains a distant dream. The primary pillar has to be women education whereby self-sustenance and upliftment of self-esteem is of paramount importance. Meaningful contribution of women at the socio-political level can only be attained by an educated and vibrant women population, especially amongst the down trodden sections of our society. Various reservations aimed at catapulting women to positions of power will be rendered fruitless if the basic measures aimed towards gender equality at the grass root level are not addressed. Women, being equal to men or at least being an important being a supplementary force to the men has to be recognized by the Indian society. Various political measures aimed at lifting up the status of women in Indian society will definitely have no sustainable impact unless and until they are complimented by social measures. The role of administrative decentralization of the political structure over the long term is also necessary in government structure itself.

Jha further observes in her book *Women in World Politics* that without empowerment of women in proper political decision-making process democracy as a whole is bound to be rendered futile. A state cannot claim to be politically prudent if it does not address the question of equality of the lower most strata of its society and women therein. In a country like India though there have been numerous measures or upliftment of the tribal women socio-politically, concerted efforts are still lacking therefore appears as if various means aimed at political empowerment of women is just a cosmetic effort at the best. Without backing of strong political measures intended towards actual empowerment of women, political actions will be rendered futile. Lack of concrete measures for women empowerment will only lead to women in political positions at the grass root level, devoid of actual political power. The true political power will always be wielded by men men-folk of the society, thereby rendering women nothing more than stooges. In a predominantly male dominated society like India it is extremely challenging for women to carve out their own political identity. This huge crevice can only be bridged by well-meaning government efforts to actually bridge the gap between the genders. She further

observes that in a society like India the predicament of political parties is to project educated and socially conscious women as their candidates to participate in political process. The problem is thus at the grass root level where proper education of women is not of primary importance neither for the political force or of the society in general. Without addressing this inherent basic problem in Indian society proper empowerment of the women will always remain a distant dream.

21. According to **Ghosh** (2000), studies conducted in sub-urban areas of a metropolis like Kolkata, which is supposedly modern in its outlook, still has a lot of negative gender bias vis-à-vis participation of women in political process. Even established political parties are reluctant to succeed political powers to women. There is an overwhelming preference for male candidates over their female counterparts when it comes to projecting candidates for elections. Negative influences borne out of social prerogative are a huge impediment towards recognition of women as successful and positive political tools. She further argues that the acceptability of women political representatives is extremely low even among the general female respondents. This reflects the huge social gulf that exists between the male and female gender towards active socio-political involvement. It is disheartening to note that even general female respondents tend to prefer a male candidate as their political representative. This is borne out of a general lackadaisical attitude of women in general towards political process as a whole. She further notes that once elected to political position, women are far more efficient towards discharging their duties as compared to their male counterparts. The ultimate conglomeration of facts points out towards the unquestionable importance of women education. Educated women, in any strata of society, are much more assertive towards realization of their socio-political rights. Educated women do have the capacity to overturn male supremacy and carve out a niche for themselves. It thus suffices that women education has to be of primary importance if gender equality and women empowerment in Indian society has to be truly realized.

22. To **Sharda** (2010), the grassroots village level democracy that was prevalent in Indian society through ages of monarchy is the natural forerunner to the present day *panchayati raj* system. Devolution of democratic power at the grass roots level has always been a feature of Indian society, even during monarchy. The present day *panchayati raj* system, in heterogeneous and amalgams population like India can never

succeed without true devolution of power to the actual marginalized sections of the society, specially the economically down trodden and tribal population. Constitutional means to empower these sections of the society has definitely been forthcoming, but lack of proper incentives to enhance these political measures have been lacking. She further opines that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of Indian Constitution is the landmark step which placed India in the group of those societies where the people are really powerful. They have power to resolve their own destiny. She observes that the socio-economic and political weaknesses are the reason for which the process of democratic decentralization is not effective and active. The participation is still the pseudo participation. The reason for the pseudo participation of masses are the poor human capabilities and lack of responsive, accountable, efficient and effective leadership which misguides the masses who are merely informed and issues are manipulated. But she is very positive about in her thinking that these hassles can be finished by the process of modernization of the rural society. To overcome the impediments in the way of *New Panchayati Raj* Sharda has come up with many strategies for strengthening the grassroots democracy.

She opines that economic empowerment of down trodden tribal women is the only means towards furthering of their meaningful and assertive political participation. For this she advocates giving of incentives to tribal women dominated *panchayats*, if they are involved in having positive social programmes aimed towards progress of their society. a huge impediment towards contesting any elections right from the grass root level *panchayati raj* system to *Lok Sabha* is financial constraints of the aspirants candidates. A means towards overcoming this financial hurdle may be if the government reaches out to the tribal women population and helps them financially to fight the tough political battles. Thus if their financial constraints are met with, tribal women in grassroots level can forcefully contest elections, the primary agenda of which will be empowerment of women of their society. A truly democratic election can thus be had where financial muscle power will not be a deciding factor towards election of meritorious candidates. The success of tribal women in political process can only be sustained through regular and meaningful training of this section of the society so that it has a meaningful and positive impact towards endeavours of the tribal women for betterment of their society as a whole. She stresses upon the importance of sustained training programme by competent authorities towards imparting of proper guidance for these so-called down trodden

women of the society. The trainers should be competent enough to envisage the potential of grassroots political participation of women of our society.

23. According to **Desouza (2003)**, through economic empowerment of the *panchayati raj* bodies was ensured through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment which envisaged means of devolution of economic power to the *panchayati raj institutions* through demarcation of revenues between the state government and the local institutions. The ground level *panchayati raj institutions* like the *gram sabhas* have definitely to be institutionalized so that they have a legitimate constitutional bearing so as to carry out the process of democratic decentralization meaningfully. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution (1933) has further ensured reservations of seats for the tribal and backward women to participate in the decentralized political planning mechanism.

24. The view of **Sen Choudhury (1995)** reveals that any democratic process without true participation of lowest strata of society in the democratic decision-making process is bound to be unstable. Thus a mature democracy always aims to encompass the most under-privileged section of its society into the political decision-making process so that democracy as a whole is rendered stable. Without proper and meaningful participation of the lowest echelons of the society, democratic process is rendered futile. Such a democracy is always prone to explore on itself. Thus it is imperative on the State to indulge in measures aimed towards empowerment of the weakest sections of the society. The feeling of meaningful political participation within these sections of society is of paramount importance to bolster their self-esteem. The gains of democracy in a larger contest with active participation of the weaklings of a society are manifold. Not only serves to encompass society as a whole into the political process but also helps to delineate any feeling of political isolation amongst the under privileged section of the society. Thus, a stable democratic platform can only sustain itself by the process of decentralization whereby the poorest sections of society are brought into the ambit of democratic process. It also enhances the concept of nation as a whole thereby aiding in the process of nation-building. Foundations of a strong democratic nation are definitely built upon pillars of political empowerment at the grass root level whereby the whole plethora of citizens comes to identify with the concept of a nation. Alienation of masses at the grassroots level from the democratic political process will always serve as an impediment towards nation-building at large. Without the wholesome involvement of

citizens of a country, a strong national foundation can never be laid. In a predominantly patriarchal society like India this process of democratic decentralization cannot be properly addressed without measures aimed at correcting the gender bias. Women especially at the grassroots level have definitely to be pro-actively drawn into the political process. The measure impetus of Indian state thus should be directed towards involvement of downtrodden tribal women into the political process, for without their meaningful participation in the democratic process, democracy will be a futile exercise.

25. **Shobha Shankar (1992)**, in *Women issues: An Indian Perspective* in Lakshmi Misra (ed), opines that through the periods of independent struggle of India, majority of women in Indian society have always taken a back seat. They were predominantly the house keepers who rendered support to their political endeavours of men. She defined Indian women as 'soldiers unknown' for their contribution of Indian freedom movement by their sacrifice and devotion. Post- independence Indian society has witnessed an upsurge of political prowess, but this has definitely been restricted towards the educated urban women populace. Women belonging to the marginalized and socio-economically constraints parts of the society still find themselves deprived of powers to influence the political make-up of the country. A truly and wholesome socio-political empowerment of women spanning across all sections of society is the need of the hour. Women empowerment restricted to elite urban pockets of the Indian society will always be hollow. Her study shows that statistically the male-female gender ratio should definitely have a much more healthy women participation in political process. However, age old Indian system which has legitimized subjugation through ages is definitely a hard nut to crack. Though various political parties do pledge of means to empower women and thus bring clarity within the genders, the moves are always predominantly dictated by political gains during elections. Owing to years of gender discrepancy it is extremely difficult for political parties to eke out means to put forward strong and educated women candidates for elections. She further says that lack of endeavours to educate women at all levels will definitely be a hindrance towards addressing of the problem of gender equality.

26. Views of **Giri (1998)** on urban women society- urban population in the Indian context has a large proportion of migrants, slum dwellers and economically deprived communities. A true political representation in an urban political body can never claim to be truly representative without incorporations of these sections of urban population.

Women of these sections of urban society are the most vulnerable and socio-economically challenged. Though constitutional means towards empowerment of women are in place, actual empowerment of women of these sections of urban populace remains a distant dream. She observes that the true aim of any elected member should therefore be to avail of schemes which are aimed towards empowerment of women of their social class so as to uplift the whole section of their society. The author focuses primarily on these women belonging to backward sections of urban society, though being empowered with political power cannot do justice to their political agendas without proper training programmes aimed towards their enlightenment. The need of the hour is to set up organized institutions aimed towards imparting proper training and guidelines for true realization of the political powers that are bestowed upon them through various political measures. Lack of such training programmes renders the very exercise of women empowerment futile. It is therefore mandatory to setup such training institutions at the state and regional level so that larger vision of women empowerment actually percolates at the grass roots level. The situation is not different from what exists at even the most rural societies of Indian as compared with the urban population. Women, and their participation in political process, irrespective of rural or urban population has the same obstacles.

She further states that with the various measures initiated by the highest echelons of power that is the state and central governments aimed towards wholesome development of the Indian society can never claim a complete success without involvement of the lowest strata of the society. As the saying goes an army is only as powerful as its weakest link. Thus, without proper empowerment of the weakest link of our society India can never claim to be a prosperous and buoyant nation. She gives emphasis on the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease. (pp. 175-184).

27. **Andal N. (2002)** in his studies shows that through the many years of independence women belonging to the so-called higher classes of urban society have successfully waged a war for gender equality. Upper class urban society thus has put to the forefront many strong and powerful leaders. But the fact of the matter remains that India still is a predominantly rural society and women belonging to these rural setups still remain largely deprived of their socio-political rights. The powerful women leaders representing urban upper class have over the years failed to stand by their rural women

counterparts. An educational level amongst the rural women populace is abysmal. This remains a huge impediment towards realization of their socio-political aspirations. The history of the women movements in the whole world lay emphasis on women education. Rural areas are worse than urban. Accruing to her even today the importance of education is confined to middle class families. Among whom employment of women outside the home has been most restrictive. Education alone is incapable of removing disabilities. There are however enormous obstacle to women in education.

28. In 1931 itself, Gandhiji, emphasized 'that the reconstruction and development of the Indian nation would not be possible without full participation of women as equal partners.' **L.C. Jain** (2005) in his edited book 'Decentralization and Local Governance' opines that since we came into our own in 1947, we have buried Gandhiji's advice five fathoms deep. Conditions have not been created in over the past fifty years either for full participation of women or for them to be equal partners.

29. **Sisodia's** (1999), studies shows various interactions with the vast tribal population of India across the country has led him to conclude that though this indigenous tribal population can claim to be the forerunner of original inhabitant of India, they have been neglected not only during the British rule but also in the post –independence era. The traditional means of earning livelihood for tribal populations at large have been seriously compromised through the ages. Farming land being under the control of financially powerful landlord has rendered the involvement of tribal population into agricultural sector financially nonviable. They are thus forced to look upon other professional outlets which will bring financial securities for their families. Thus hitherto unchartered avenues of earning livelihood were being forced upon this tribal population. In search of new avenues to earn their livelihood they were forced to indulge in foreign territories of work, such as working as construction workers and manual labourers in fields of activities which were never under their domain.

His study on the tribal region of Jhabua districts of Madhya Pradesh further shows that though largely marginalized, in the context of modern day society no section of the society can be kept isolated. Thus, interaction of the tribal society with the various other elements of the society has over the years led to empowerment of the tribal society at

large. The question of socio-political identity has thus emerged in the tribal population. The need for their social identity has thus forayed them towards means to enhance their socio-political standing. Though, the political awareness amongst the tribal society of India still fall below the non-tribal society, numerous interactions between the various sections of society, has rendered the tribal population with newer avenues to truly enhance their socio-political position. Under the modern scenario no class of society can be taken for granted and exploited under the ages of modernization. In this vastly global world, no section of society can claim to be untouched by modernization. Thus the thitherto neglected and cocooned tribal sections of the society have managed to have their own political narratives aimed towards enhancement of their socio-economic agendas. Issues meant at furthering the empowerment of tribals can thus not be brushed under carpet. Political measures aimed towards empowerment of tribal community are thus at the forefront. The only means that remains to be addressed is endowing them with proper educational background so that they can justify their role in socio-economic development of country at large. (pp. 19, 163).

30. According to **Md. Abdur Razzaque**, (*Decentralized Governance and Empowerment: A Study of the Participation, Role and Empowerment of women of the weaker sections and the Muslims in two selected Blocks of Cooch Behar District (1978-1998)*, Ph.D Thesis submitted to the department of Political Science, North Bengal University, 2006.) the very essence of *panchayati raj* system and its implementation is based on decentralization of power to the weakest and the most marginalized sections of the society. Tribal women of course do comprise the major sections of such a society. He argues that mere reservation of seats in the present political setup is not enough towards true empowerment of these marginalized sections of society. He tries to analyze the reasons for the huge gender bias that exists amongst the tribal population which renders any means aimed towards gender equality futile. Through his studies he opines that without means to address this basic problem of gender bias at the grassroots level, various socio-political measures aimed towards upliftment of the tribal women population at large will be rendered futile. Though decentralization of any government initiative is the primary requisite for its success, without actual empowerment of the tribal women, such endeavour will always continue to have just a cosmetic value.

31. According to **Jyoti Sen, N. Saha & S.K. Mukherjee** in their study of Khasi

women of Shilong have tried to understand the nature of involvement of Khasi women in economy with special reference to the trade, in which usually men, elsewhere, dominate. Even in traditionally matriarchal societies like the Garo and Khasi tribes of North- East India political powers still continue to be under the male prerogative. Thus though the women may be at an advantage as far as the immediate social issues that are concerned, men-folk are reluctant to let go off their political prowess. Thus political measures aimed towards enhancing the women political force, are always met with a strong impediment, based on a predominantly male dominant social structure of India. Without meaningful means to educate the tribal women population, true empowerment of women of the most downtrodden sections of society can never claim to be fruitful. The primary role of any social movement has to be having gender educational parity as its sole driving force. The huge potential that democratic decentralization has through *panchayati raj system* can only be truly realized if proper measures intended towards imparting to education to the tribal women are strongly emphasized.

32. According to **H.C. Upreti and Nandini Upreti** (2000), in their book *Women and Problems of Gender Discrimination* The spectrum of political expression has transcended through ages thereby incorporating various measures like petitioning, participation in mass movements, agitations, strikes, demonstration, protests, presenting memorandums and violent acts designed to change political system. It therefore suffices that any political movement will lose its validity without involvement of masses in general. Thus, no section of society, howsoever, backward it may be, cannot insulate itself from the force of a socio-political movement. The primary role for meaningful and active political participation of the various strata of societies, specially the backward class, largely hinges upon the awareness the society towards such issues. Without a proper educational background to boost of, various sections of society would be laid astray. Thus educational empowerment of the down trodden sections of the society is the primary requisite for socio-political empowerment of any section of the society. Without proper educational empowerment of the deprived sections of the society any socio-political movement can never be successful. Thus, he stresses upon imparting proper education to the lower strata of the society to be a pre-requisite towards any successful socio-political movements. He further observes that on women participation in political system are heavily dominated by men. So far as political involvement of women is concerned, we find that women have never aspired for it. Traditionally they have allowed

the leadership in political orientation to come from men. Perhaps due to this, women have been denied access to political world prior to the start of twentieth century and the trend has been everywhere to grant them voting rights much later than men. In India female suffrage was given from 1927. Under the present Constitution of India women are equal to men in all respects, but we have not thrown out the age-old traditional barriers imposed on them. Despite the Constitutional guarantee of 'equality before the law' and 'equal protection of the laws'. There remains inequality which the legislatures actively endorse and the courts passively accept.

Broadly political participation of women is severely limited due to the nexus of traditional factors, there are Indian politics by consideration of caste, class, religion, feudal and family status, etc. all of which are parochial, essentially patriarchal forces that work in favour of men against women. Consequently, 'women are still left on the periphery of the political process' and continue to have their interests defined, debated and often ignored by their husbands and fathers.' (pp.107-109).

33. According to **Doshi**, (1997) the evolvement of *panchayati raj* system has helped the tribal population to realize their political importance at least to some extent. Prior to active involvement of tribal population through means of *panchayats* the whole tribal population was devoid of any meaningful platform to further their socio-political cause. The *panchayati raj* system has thus, managed to render political voice to this sections of the society. The involvement of grassroots population is definitely ensured through *panchayati raj* institutions. Through the *panchayati raj institutions*, predominantly tribal villages have found means to integrate with the national political cause. *Pannchayati raj* system thus provides the tribal women to leave a mark, howsoever miniscule it may be, towards realization political empowerment at the grassroots level. Without the aid of the *panchayati raj* system these politically deprived sections of the society would never find and avenue to put their political agendas at the forefront. He stresses on the participation of the tribal population into means aimed towards political empowerment never goes uncontested. This therefore indicates a strong desire amongst the tribal society to have a say in national political dialogue. This attitude of the tribal population to have a meaningful political contribution has to be thus appreciated. It is thus expected that the tribal women who come to the forefront of the political process, despite so many struggle will have a much more higher level of understanding of political struggles that they had to

undertake. Empowered with education, these women tribal representatives have the wherewithal to actively pursue measures intended towards empowerment of the tribal women population at large.

34. **Bhattacharya and Datta** (1999), in their book *Governing Rural India* opine that it is a fact that rural Indian population is much more in magnitude as compared with the urban population. It also a fact that this vast rural population has traditionally been dominated by the minority urban population. It has dawned upon the rural population over the years that, if organised, they have a much more strong voice in the political setup of the country. New realignment of the rural population thus began with an endeavour to usurp the political dominance of the urban population. During the course of years this indigenous movement for rural upliftment transgressed into a powerful political movement. This collective effort of the rural population to uplift themselves made it difficult for the relevant political parties to neglect them. Thus began the moves to exploit this resurgent rural population politically. Political manipulations were thus primarily targeted towards winning over this rural population in course of this, various means were adopted to exploit the caste related differences inherent in the Indian rural population. (pp. 177).

35. **Singh, Narain and Kumar** (2006), have done intensive field study of the socio-economic and political problems the tea plantation labourers of Assam. They observe that the union of various tea garden labours in Assam is principally constituted under the umbrella of one labour organisation that is CCSU. This serves as not only an umbrella organisation but also as the cradle of supposedly new trade union organisations of the tea gardens. It however, has to be noted that political decision-making bodies at the ground levels in form of tea garden unions and *panchayats* continue to be predominately male dominated. Though various socio-political measures aimed towards correcting this gender inequality have been recently initiated, women who have managed to get into positions of power due to these amendments, continue to adorn such positions purely for the namesake. Extremely hard working schedule for tea garden women workers coupled with domestic responsibilities make it hard for these women to indulge in any meaningful political activity. The secluded environment of tea garden further renders them immune to the external world. The women working force in the tea gardens thus continue to be marginalised and pushed to the rear in all socio-political programmes. True political

measures aimed towards empowerment of this sections of women will be rendered futile unless and until backed up by means towards betterment of their social and personalised. The trade unions working in various tea gardens will continue to remain defunct unless and until proper and meaningful participation of the women tea garden workers is ensured. Though it is a cumbersome task for the society as a whole to accomplish, well directed government measures are a must to fulfil this task. (pp.173).

36. **Rawat**, in his article on “Tribes of Terai” in Aradhana Shukla (ed.) Indian Tribes: A Psychological Perspectives opines that the tribal population in the *terai* area has been over the ages a deprived lot. His study shows that economic deprivation over the ages has led them to probe other avenues which will bring them economic stability during a short period of time. Thus develops the nexus between high ranking officials and the tribal population. Tribal leaders predominantly aimed to exploit this nexus towards short term economic gains. Thus, government programmes aimed towards upliftment of these sections of society over a period of time get jeopardise over a long period of time. Indulgence in corrupt practices between the tribal and government officials renders this whole socio-political initiative by the government vulnerable to corruption. Leor of easy many leads these tribal leaders to further lay themselves open to manipulations by fringe elements like a naxallite groups and various antinational organisations. This is primarily true in context of the tribal population of the *terai* region which is always a hot bed of socio-political activity as it not only represents an economically backward region, but also is a region representing conglomeration of international boundaries between various sovereign nations. Percolation of various benevolent government measures to the grassroots level can bloviate this sense of economic deprivation amongst the tribal population of *terai* region. This will go a long way towards breaking off this unholy nexus between unscrupulous tribal leaders and the government leaders so that true economic empowerment is reached up to the grass roots level. Once these tribal population of the *terai* region are included into government aided drives for their political empowerment, the need to rely upon unlawful activities to enhance their economic profile, will automatic subside. Tribal population in *terai* region have a unique problem, being a resident to an area which has so many international boundaries. Thus, special attention towards upliftment of the tribal population residing in this area is mandatory. (pp. 152-153).

37. According to **Chandra** (2005) those who oppose reservation of seats for women in *panchayats* brandish four main reasons in support of their stand. First, women who become members of *panchayats* and local bodies disturb the harmony of homes and of family life. Even those men who tolerate women working in offices for fixed hours do not take kindly to them when their roles change to one of community leadership. In that case, the women have to attend to people's problems as leaders. This means irregular hours of work and a twenty-four hour demand on their time. Therefore, who will look after the children and household chores, the men folk ask? Second, women will become targets of attacks by anti-social elements when they move of their homes or go outside their villages for work, meeting, and so on. Third, whenever women hold elected offices, the male officers are the ones who 'dictate' what is or is not to be done. They take control of the entire situation and women elected representatives become the helpless victims or mute spectators at the hands of men-dominated environment (Chandra, 2005, 215).

It is a revolution in the Indian history when the Constitution of India passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act in 1993, which sanctioned *Panchayati Raj* and its 33 per cent reservation for women and SC/STs in PRIs. This is to promote greater participation by expanding the democratic base. It is true that with the passing of this amendment women's participation in the *panchayat* has varied with the local conditions and personalities.

38. According to **Chandra** (2010), the great challenge encompassing women world in the modern society is whether to adhere to traditional concepts of women in Indian society or to come out and assert themselves as a path breaking force in the society. Participation of women in grass root political levels is very much governed by the dilemma of womenfolk whether to come out of their traditional social position. Chandra argues that women at grass root levels often are reluctant to come out of their traditional roles. She however, argues that women have successfully and forcefully contributed to various social movements positively. Thus, it goes without saying that women, if politically empowered at the ground level can contribute meaningfully towards upliftment of the society at large. She further argues that the theory of women's "backward consciousness" is a huge hindrance towards realization of their socio-political position. Age old patriarchal society thinking renders them incapable of doing justice to political positions that they may be in. thus they, more often than not, end up as just political faces, the real power being bestowed with the men-folk.

Another hindrance according to Chandra is that the participation in political process even at the grass root levels in a society like India requires a substantial economic mileage. It is thus extremely difficult for the down trodden tribal women to have the financial leverage to contest elections. Devoid of financial independence, they are subjugated to the male populace who are masters of economic destiny of a family and society at large. Thus, though there are many elected women political faces at the grass root level, economic and social constraints always render them as defunct, where the actual political power is wielded by the men.

39. **George Mathew (2002)**, in his article “Panchayati Raj and Food Security: Opportunities for Women’s Participation” observes that despite a massive political participation of tribal women the dream of gender equality has not been realized. This is largely due to lack of education amongst the deprived girl population of the tribal society. The predominantly male dominant society is a huge obstacle towards empowerment of women without proper means aimed towards educating a girl child. There remains an element of huge discrimination based on gender which encompasses even difference in wages between male and female sections of society. The primary issue for a poor country like India is guarantying a food security to the majority of economically deprived class of society. Through political representation of the socially compromised sections of society a move was initiated towards adressal of this basic problem, without meaningfully involvement of women of the society. The whole process will always lack a strong political platform to accomplish this. Thus involvement of the elected women of all sections of the society has to be the primary driving force towards accomplishment of any positive social movement. (pp. 26-32).

40. **Marilee Karl (1995)**, in her book on *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision-Making* suggest that new strategies must be developed for women to increase their access to decision-making positions and bodies to build a critical mass of women within political and social structures and to create links between women working in public life and NGOs. Through various governmental measures, substantial participation of women in political decision-making process has been ensured. She observes that the substantial involvement of women in the political decision-making process is a testimony to the fact that women participation in political and all other spheres of social life are at rise. Under the present scenario means to ensure continuation

of women participation and to further enhance this process is of paramount importance. Not only should the women who are actively involved in political space be encouraged, they should be amalgamated as successful examples to attract other women into this process of social and nation building. The primary breakthrough has been achieved through various constitutionalized measures to seat these women in positions of political decision-making. However, this still represent a very insignificant proportion of the women population who can aspire to have a meaningful and positive impact. The modern day challenge in a society like India is to forge these women as examples to positively nurture larger sections of women towards the process of socio-political participation. (pp.149).

41. Over the course of years, involvement of women has been constitutionally guaranteed. According to **Nirmala Buch**, (2000), in her article “Panchayat and Women” women’s participation in the political process has thus managed to alleviate women in general. Of special importance is the fact that women belonging to the downtrodden social strata have managed to find meaningful political voice. Their powerful political presence, despite being in a predominantly patriarchal society, is praiseworthy. These women have been successful in projecting a powerful social message across the society, thus resulting in more and more number of enthusiastic women who are willing to utilize political deprivation as the driving force and challenge to establish themselves amongst the echelons of power in India. For majority of women seen in a pioneering role, this was an avenue to stress upon and further their socio-political reputation. Through the course of many elections, women leaders have been thrown into positions. They are thus the beacons of hope for the future progeny. Her study shows that despite all the stacked against women, the post-73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment *panchayats* have shown emerging leadership of rural women and that they have moved ahead from the initial learning phase in the first year after the 1994 and 1995 elections when they entered *panchayats* in a critical number for the first time. (234-235).

42. Experiences of **G. Palanithurai** (2007) specifically directed towards the state of Tamil Nadu point towards the fact that various self-help groups have had a pioneering influence towards involvement of women into the broader spectrum of socio-political decision-making. It is through these self-help groups that the backward women in Tamil Nadu could find a voice towards blossoming of their potential. These self-help groups

were primarily directed towards giving credence to the voices of downtrodden women. Thus based upon the endeavours of this various self-help groups, downtrodden women in Tamil Nadu managed to find platform for their self-assertion, transgressing into socio-political field, whereby they were able to voice their opinions into the ground level political system of their state. His findings further shows that women who are politically empowered tend to manage their socio-political duties in a much more positive way. A truly empowered woman will contribute a lot towards micro-level management of her immediate neighborhood. Deprivation of women at the grassroots level, especially in state like Tamil Nadu, was fulfilled by involvement of various self-help groups which were primarily aimed towards women empowerment. Fruitful women participation in the grassroots political system is largely dependent upon the economic and educational prowess of women. Without a proper educational and economic background women who are politically endowed with power can never do full and proper justice to their political position for in a predominantly patriarchal society like India, for a woman to establish herself politically, a powerful support in form of educational and economic background is a must. Thus women who manage to scale the heights and reach positions of political decision-making, a meaningful impact is only possible if backed up by strong economic and educational background. (pp. 180-181).

43. **R.C. Agarwal** (2005) while discussing about the potential impediment towards participation of women in Indian political system on a whole in his article on “Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions”, opines that rampant criminalization of politics has laid to women being primarily reluctant to women participation to politics. He cites numerous other causes like the extremely low educational level of women, lack of proper implementation of the *panchayati raj system*, lack of social awareness of women of the backward sections of the society and predominantly lack of measures to overcome a patriarchal form of society whereby women can dream to transcend this gender equality to bring about a powerful social structure. Even if women are elected into positions of political decision-making, an overwhelming patriarchal approach makes them extremely vulnerable to pressures created by the men folk. Without a strong education background to boost of it renders women incapable of strongly fighting to overcome the hurdles of male dominance. Devoid of a strong educational background women at the grassroots level remain susceptible to manipulation by the traditionally strong men population. The economic independence is lacking within large sections of women of this society. Thus

the author suggests the measures to impart trainings aimed principally towards empowerment of women have to be initiated so that economic independence of backwards women of our society is realized. The women empowered with education and economic status will definitely be in a position to contribute meaningfully towards any political decision-making process. A politically socio-economically strong women force will definitely be in a position to contribute strongly towards nation building. The primary aim therefore should be to empower women educationally and economically so that they cannot be pulled down by educational constrains, thereby being in a position to have strong socio-political contributions. (pp. 68-73).

44. **Seema Sharma and Kanta Sharma (2006)**, while commenting upon the larger political scenario in Assam, dwell upon the fact that political career has never been sought after by women. This is principally due to the fact that women, in a predominantly male dominated society, still continue to harbor home-making as their principal socio-familial duty. They thus cannot take themselves out of this social prejudice and venture out into a hitherto uncommon political field. Thus it is a hugely cumbersome task for women to take the leap forward to embrace a political career. Leave aside the under privileged rural population even women of urban and semi-urban societies find it hard to establish their say in a predominantly male dominated political scenario. (pp.237-246).

45. **Balram Singh (2006)**, observes that women participation in *Panchayati raj institution* has met with strong opposition from a predominantly male dominated society, especially in the states like Uttar Pradesh. The males, who have over centuries enjoyed power over women and have dominated the social fabric of a society, are extremely reluctant to let go off their dominance. He further stresses that even if women are elected into *Panchayati raj institutions*, it is extremely difficult for them to attend various political meetings, due to in conducive socio-political environment. Thus efficacy of these elected women members is largely compromised. Even if elected to position of grassroots politics, women have virtually little to contribute, as there has been rampant bureaucratization of grass root political institutions. Various schemes such as *Indira Awas Yojana, Jivan Dhara* and IRDP, should have ensured a positive role for women involved in grass root politics. However, due to rampant bureaucratization, the political power has been garnered by state governments, thereby depriving the elected women representatives at the grassroots level of their political leadership. (pp. 53-66).

46. **According to K.C Vidya (2007)**, reservation for women of backward society does contribute towards securing political rights of women. It is much easier for women to successfully contest against male candidates at grassroots level elections. If these women candidates can establish themselves as an effective working force towards social development, they can over a course of time mount meaning full and strong challenge to the men even at elections at higher levels. Her analysis on women in politics in her article on “Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroots” reveals that women have not been given proper representation in the political parties. But with the policy of reservation of seats for women at the grassroots level by the women organizations at the State level as well as at National level if implemented it will naturally affect the political parties and they will be force to give representation to women.(pp. 141).

47. **Meenu Agrawal (2005)** opines that 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment aims to empower women at the grass root political level, ensuring them with the 33 percent reservation. The factual reality remains that majority of these reservations for women are usurped by women candidates who belong to existing powerful male candidates who already wield political power. Thus according to author these women end up as being political faces who are controlled by their powerful male counterparts. Thus, at the grass root level, women political participation remains just eyewash as reservations aimed towards upliftment of women continue to be dominated by the males. By fielding women candidates belonging to their own family, who are little conversant with their political rights, male members of the society continue to hegimonize political cloud. In majority of the cases, despite reservations, women are still governed by a male dominant society which is not ready to relinquish its hold over women at large. Poor educational standards and age long social norms make it extremely difficult for women to break free and assert their political will independently. Thus, though various constitutional measures aimed towards reservations of women so that they can uplift themselves politically is a welcome move, without radical social measures aimed at addressing gender bias, true and effective means towards women empowerment can never be realized. It is thus mandatory to initiate social measures in concordance with constitutional means so that true potential of women is brought to the fore. Lack of either of these measures will always render these women gullible to male dominance, thereby hindering their progress as an independent and strong political section of society. The author concludes that the system of

*Panchayati Raj* in the state has the necessary potential to transform the rural areas but it requires a political will which, if used can go a long way in fruitful utilization of decentralization process for development of all sections of society. (27-52).

48. According to **J. K. Chopra**, (1993), age old social traditions in India have castigated women as being apolitical. Thus, even when endowed with political power women continue to be marginalized in various elected bodies. If the issue of gender equality is not addressed at the grassroots level, meaningful participation of women in politics in Indian society can never be truly realized. This holds true from the lowest political strata to the highest platform of democracy that is the parliament, all across the political Diaspora. Despite recent Act aimed towards women reservation in political sphere, there still remains a huge gulf vis-à-vis the actual women population and their political representation. Though the parliament, through years, has enacted various legislations towards safe-guarding the interests of women and protecting them from such social evils like dowry, sexual violence and social menaces like depriving of their ancestral property, actual implementation of these legislations remains a time consuming process. Even though the legislations may be in place, it is largely dependent upon the bureaucracy at the grassroots level for proper implementation. Thus, lack of effective functionaries to enact the provisions of legislation remains a major obstacle for meaningful implementation of the various provisions of such legislations. While it has to be noted that the percentage of women elected representatives in parliament have gone up considerably, effective women representation is still a cause of worry. A truly miniscule percentage of these women representatives can boast of having made effective contribution towards the decision-making process that is bestowed with the Parliament. It is however noteworthy that women representative in Parliament has managed to rise up to positions of ministers and speakers in Parliament. These women however represent only the urban and the semi-urban population of our society. The truly backward and economically compromised sections still cannot boast of effective women representation from their society. (pp. 313).

49. **Prabha Singh**, 2005, gives suggestions for awareness of *Panchayati Raj Institutions* and participation of women's *Panchayati Raj Institutions* that it is duty of the *Panchayati* system to create awareness among women members so that they can perform their duty efficiently. The general people should be also be made aware of the various

schemes and provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act. Every women of the village should be made politically mindful and this could only be done through proper and appropriate election campaigning made by the women's organizations prior to election and the right woman candidate should be selected. The local general mass also should be made aware of the necessity of selecting a right and responsible person who will be dedicated to work for the development of the village. It the duty of the villagers to have a election in a peaceful manner. Once elected as a member, they should compulsorily attend the training programme so that they know their actual role, rights and duties. These elected women members should also know the structure and functions of the PRIs. Lastly, she suggests that the women elected members should be expressive and vocal. (294).

50. **Vandana Singhal** (2005), concludes that elected women representatives in positions of power have definitely a unique approach which may aid in positively approaching social issues such as religious and gender divide. These women representatives may serve as the uniting force across all sections of society. Local bureaucratic setups however continue to be a huge obstacle towards meaningful contribution of elected women representatives. This holds especially true for women representatives of the *panchayati raj institutions* that are challenged by not only a patriarchal society but also by the bureaucracy with whom they have to engage on a day to day basis. Oppressed women have a common background across all sections of society. Therefore, it is but natural for women in political positions to formulate policies aimed towards comprehensive development of women spanning across all sections of the society. This positive force is however, always challenged by a patriarchal social make-up and bureaucracy, thereby restricting their potential positive influence towards initiation of social movement. The author is optimistic that the caste based reservations for women have definitely helped to catapult the women of socially backward sections of society into positions of political power. However, lack of education leads them vulnerable to being manipulated. The stress therefore be on providing women with educational leverage so that they can emerge as strong and independent decision-making units. (pp.360-361).

51. **Sarita Jain**, (2005) concludes that any endeavors aimed towards women upliftment at the grassroots level can only be truly realized if a proper financial backing is available to run all such programmes. A predominantly agriculture dependent country like India can definitely claim to have financial viability based on a properly channelized rural

economy. Effective and meaningful aims towards decentralization are hence needed for making rural economy independent and sustainable. This will aid in generation of funds for economic empowerment of women at the grassroots level. She further concludes by saying that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment has been aimed towards increasing political participation of women. True political participation of women however remains a myth as majority of these political seats are represented by women whose families have boosted of a political culture through ages. The women in India largely remain apprehensive towards entering into political sphere as they are largely handicapped by traditional and age old negative prejudices towards social and familial role of women in Indian society. (pp. 384-385).

52. **Ekta Saxena** (2005), observes that lack of education is a huge hindrance towards devolution of power to women through *Pachayati Raj Institutions*. Thus, elected women representatives at the PRIs levels find themselves incapacitated, thereby having to lean upon other means for fulfillment of their socio-political obligations. Various women organizations have tried to organize these neo-women political leaders into a strong forum so that they are able to become powerful political voices at the grassroots level. She suggests that in a recent past strongly motivated women organizations have successfully laid positive role in ushering environmental and social changes. This stretches right across from movements aimed towards protection of reverse to fight against rampant alcohol abuse in the society. An educated and strongly unified women force under effective women organizations can definitely lay claim towards being forces aimed towards socio-political change. (pp. 440)

53. **Vidyadarhi and Rai** (1976), The tribal population is governed through ages by their own socio-political norms and hence it becomes extremely difficult for them to adjust in adhere to modern political processes. Predominantly the tribal society over ages has been laid to live their life under this political backdrop. Having to adjust to this modern political outlook, tribal population at large does perish because of inability to mould their social outlook in cognigence with the modern approach. All tribal political representatives who have been thrown into the forefront as the result of political reservations find themselves expose to a political scenario which was hitherto unknown to them. Being members of an organized political force is quite tedious for tribal society at large. A holistic approach has to be thus initiated so that these tribal political representatives are assimilated into the modern day political scenario. (pp. 202).

54. According to **J. Meenakshi**, (2007), without educational empowerment of women measures aimed at women empowerment will continue to be frugal means. Just putting women in positions of power based on reservations is not enough to actually empower women. Being stooges in the hands of predominantly males, in a male dominated society like India, they can never have avenues to measures that are aimed at through women empowerment. The primary emphasis has always to be on empowerment of women in health and educational fields which are of paramount importance to the development of women as a whole. Various schemes have been brought into effect under the aiges of human resource development programme and the other means to actually empower women. The actual ground reality is that without proper empowerment of women a truly vibrant and modern Indian society will always continue to be a distant dream. A nation can never progress with abject neglect of half of its population. (151-159).

55. **J. Meenakshi** (2007) opines that the fallacy of reservations for women is the fact that this provision has been largely controlled by the male patriarchal society. Women though in positions of power, have not been able to come out of this patriarchal mind set. Thus policies aimed towards development of women continue to remain a dream. As women in power fail to push themselves towards empowerment of the whole women populace at large. Just ensuring a voluminous representation for women through reservations is not the correct approach. She suggests that women, unless and until capped up by education, will continue to throw up women into political positions where they will just make up the numbers devoid of any meaningful contribution. The various policies aimed primarily towards increasing political participation of women can never realize its true potential unless backed up by measures to put educated women into positions of power. Unless and until this is done, women will continue to be tools in the hand of men, in a predominantly patriarchal society.

56. **Poonam Vats** (2004) opines that the prerequisite for meaningful political participation in politics is women mobilization without proper enlightenment of women towards their political rights, any measures aimed at women political empowerment will be futile. It is sad to know that none of the recognized political parties in India have thus far initiated measures to build this strong women population into a vibrant political constituency. Her study shows that through various elections the undisputed fact thus that has come to the forefront is that across India, states boasting of better literacy level

amongst women have always claimed to have better women participation in electoral politics. Thus it is without contest that political awakening amongst women is predominantly dependent upon their literacy level. (pp. 144-150).

57. In case of women empowerment Seventy Third Amendments is a step to empower half of the population of the country. **Sharda** (2010) observes that at present approximately thirty seven per cent of the total representatives in PRIs are women. But Indian society is a patriarchal society. Women in India reel under the pressure of irregular employment, under-employment, dowry harassment, sati, poor nutrition, inadequate prenatal and postnatal care, rape and single parenthood. Politics is considered as the domain of the male folk of the society. Besides reservation in the PRIs the functioning is dominated by the males. She further opines that in case of female *pradhans* even if they are educated, male family members as well as male representatives of these institutions consider it to be their prerogative to take decisions on the behalf of women representatives.

58. **Damina Chawdhury**, (2000), the tribal women community, though being granted a separate socio-political status have found it difficult to make their mark in political field. Despite the fact that a few tribal communities boast of a matriarchal society, women participation in politics even in these societies have traditionally remained a taboo. Though a few fringe tribal groups like *Tharu* and *Sansi* have this traditional social concept of involving women in political decision-making, this has not translated into the process of larger political sphere in term of getting elected to constitutionalized political bodies. The tribal women, despite being granted a special status, continue to lag behind in terms of granting meaningful political leadership. Traditional social make-up of the tribes has always dissuaded women from political participation. This social hindrance still remains a potential obstacle towards political empowerment of tribal women. Coupled with lack of proper education amongst the tribal women, this constitutes an insurmountable barrier. With genuine and prolonged efforts by measures aimed primarily to educate, this barrier can of course be overcome and larger and meaningful participation of tribal women into political decision-making bodies can be achieved. (pp. 150-173).

59. **Iqbal Narain** (1963) observes that democratic decentralization implies people's right to initiate their projects for local well being and the power to execute and operate

them in an autonomous manner.

60. **Pranab Bardhan** (1996) defined decentralization in the sense of political decision-making power from mere administrative delegation of functions of central government to local agencies. To him, local accountability is essential in decision-making and its implications.

61. **B.S. Bhargava** (1979) expressed the view that political development and growth of democracy depends on the local leadership and their functioning in the *Panchayati Raj* institutions.

62. **Abdul Aziz** (1996) held the view that present-day emerging political culture is decentralized and the participation of people in it through democratic institutions of lower levels below the national level.

63. According to **Bharat Bhushan Gupta** (1968), Democratic decentralization expresses the notion of popular government at the grass-root democracy and involves people directly in administration.

64. **Prabhat Datta** (1994) opines that democratic decentralization associates people with local administration, and aggress with the right of the people to initiate and execute decisions in an autonomous way.

65. According to **S. Narawanswamy** (1998), in the eve of 21<sup>st</sup> century, grass root institutions must be strengthened and *Panchayati Raj* institutions should be guided by the poorest of the poor. The institutional expression policy of 'decentralized governance' in India is identified by '*Panchayati Raj*'. The Balwantray Mehta committee recommendations (1957) have laid down the major trust in introducing '*Panchayati Raj*' system as institutions of decentralized governance after independence in India. The Ashok Mehta committee Report (1978) provided a new look towards decentralization and development in the country.

66. **Debesh Chakraborty** (1981), **Nageshwar Prashad** (1986) and **B. N. Sahay** (1989) are of the positive view that as the instruments of decentralization of power *Panchayati Raj* institutions directly provide plans and funds to the rural people, and thus

they increase their competence to make plan and implement development schemes.

67. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act (1992) provided participation of women in local government. **Hazel D' Lima** (1993) held that before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, major participation of women in the local bodies were from dominant sections of the society.

68. While **Nirmal Buch** (2000) expressed his view that the post-73<sup>rd</sup> Amendments *Panchayat* have shown emerging leadership of rural women in the field of local self-government institutions. In the post 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment scenario, the *Panchayati Raj institutions* have taken the charge of development, and weaker sections and women have given a share to perform their role.

69. Thus **S. R. Ranga Rao** (1998) expressed his opinion that *Panchayati Raj institutions* are not only traditional local bodies, but it involves in the participation of rural people in the process of socio-economic reconstruction and development of rural India.

70. According to **Moitree Bhattacharya** (2002) the concept of representative democracy offers opportunity to the people to elect their representatives to whom they would want to vest the authority to govern. That is why the concept of participatory democracy gained prominence over the years. Its objective is to involve people directly in the process of decision making. The capacity of the people to contribute to development is immense and is also largely advantageous. Hence it seeks their participation in development and administrative programmes of which they are the beneficiaries, getting relevant information that is necessary for proper planning, mobilizing local resources and developing new strata of leadership. Thus broadening political participation is considered a virtue. The idea behind PRIs was to bring about such a participatory democracy through democratic decentralization.

71. **Walter Hauser and Wendy Singer** (2007) in their *The Democratic Rite: Celebration and participation in the Indian Elections* have done their studies in the otherwise backward state of Bihar. They consider Indian election process as ritual where Indian society throughout this process asserts its belief in its own changing political and social culture by the actual performance of the ritual itself. In the election ritual, approval

is given both individually by voter as each personally selects a candidate for office, and collectively as voters go the polls and through their ritual action bring a party into or out of power. The ceremony of election marks the final hours of India's elaborate rite of democracy. Through its performance Indians reaffirm the unity of the nation and the investment of power in the rulers by the ruled. The central importance of this rite to the political system is obvious even in a superficial view of the election that shows only the massive level of participation by candidates, party workers, voters, and the non-voting population. In this respect the election is a political festival incorporating the elements of planning, pilgrimage, procession, and other collective experiences that characterize both secular and religious rituals in the sub-continent.

72. **Subrata K. Mitra** (2007) in his article *Ballot Box and Local Power: Elections in an Indian Village* has done his studies in the village of Kashipur in Orissa and has tried to show that how the electoral process has changed the rural India. He observes that the electoral process is no longer an alien and unfamiliar institution, imposed from outside on the intimate and face-to-face society of rural India. Rather, electoral competition for power has become enmeshed with local and regional struggles for power, and elections-to a large variety of voluntary, semi-official, and political bodies at the local, regional, and national levels-have become a major instrument of political change. In India's plural society where groups and coalitions are always being formed and re-formed, elections are used as instruments by various sections of the society to convert their political resources and power into authority.