

## **Political Participation of Women in Gram Panchayat Elections in Odisha: A Case Study of Hindol Block in Dhenkanal District**

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**ABSTRACT:** Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantaged sections of the society like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women. The present study was an effort to know the extent of political participation of women in functioning as well as in the electoral process of the panchayats and the problems faced by them. In this regard, sample consisted of 125 women respondents from 5 gram panchayats of Hindol Block in Dhenkanal District of Odisha. The study was conducted in March-April immediately after the general panchayat elections in February, 2012. The findings of the study revealed that political participation of women in the functioning as well as in the electoral process of the panchayats is not satisfactory. Some of the respondents even do not know the names of political parties and they casted their votes identifying the symbols of political parties. Most of the women have great apathy towards politics. The parochial culture, patriarchal society and low level of education are greatly responsible for their backwardness.

**Keywords:** Participation, Panchayati Raj, Apathy, Electoral Process, Women

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

A developing democracy like India needs wider participation of the people irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex etc. in its political process. In order to provide this opportunity, the system of democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has long been introduced in our country. As the women constitute a very sizeable portion of the total population of India, their participation at grass root politics is so essential to make the democratic governance more successful. The question of their participation arises because of their long standing neglected social status in the male dominated Indian society. Immediately after framing of the Indian Constitution, constitutional safeguards along with the provision of reservation of seats in legislative bodies, public offices and public educational institutions, were, therefore, provided to them for their uplift.

In Odisha, women constitute a very little bit less than 50 percent of the state's total population. Despite some favorable traditional values and customs and emergence of powerful women personalities, the position of the women is not very rosy. Their socio-economic status is, however, relatively low and they are discriminated in all walks of life. For centuries, women have been confined to home and suppressed and deprived of their rights to get a fair treatment from the male dominated society. Development of women has, therefore, been one of the major issues in Odisha.<sup>1</sup>

### **II. CONCEPT OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Political participation simply refers to the way through which the citizens of a country take part in the electoral as well as in policy making process. In other words, political participation is a way or a process through which the aspirations and needs of the people can be represented. Generally, the term "political participation" refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy. These activities include casting votes, seeking information, holding discussions, attending meetings, staging strikes and demonstrations, communicating with the legislators and the like. According to Herbert Mc. Closky, "Participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and the rulers are made accountable to the ruled."<sup>2</sup> Political philosophers like J.S. Mill, Rousseau and Bentham have strongly advocated the need for participation of people in different spheres of political life. As Noorjahan Bava puts it, "direct and indirect participation of citizens in public affairs is the lifeline of a participatory democracy".<sup>3</sup>

As women constitute a crucial segment of the human resources in the society, due importance has to be accorded to the role and contribution of women in the various socio-economic, political and cultural activities. Unfortunately, despite the numerical strength, the role of women has been grossly underplayed and the developmental efforts by the government have only ensured further marginalization of women in the development process. It is an established fact that Indian women, in spite of the constitutional and legal safeguards are still in the process of struggling for equality of status and equality of participation in the development process.

Subordination of women to men in the home, in work place and in politics is a dominant socio-political reality that has its origin in the past. The relationship between men & women was “grounded on force” and the law of the strongest has been the phenomena in their relationship. The notion that men are the natural masters of women has continued to hinder the progress of an egalitarian society when women enjoy an equal status.<sup>4</sup>

### III. PAST RESEARCH

A number of literatures and so many research works have already been done in this field. *Desai and Thakkar (2001)*<sup>5</sup> tried to explain the history of women’s major issues and actions since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They tried to focus on the complex nature of work contributed by women, their educational status, their contribution in the organized and unorganized sectors, their political participation, and legal status, their position in the family and outside world. While *R. Mishra (1998)*<sup>6</sup> argues that husbands and family members influence the women representatives in taking decisions in Orissa, *R.Arun(1997)*<sup>7</sup> in a case study of Madhya Pradesh found that in most cases women representatives are housewives, first time entrants into politics and most of them are illiterate or educated up to primary level. *G.Palanithuri(1997)*<sup>8</sup> in his case study of Tamil Nadu reported that women were not reported or invited to the meetings in male headed Gram Panchayat. Husbands of the members used to accompany them (women) when they come to attend the meetings. *S.Pai (2001)*<sup>9</sup> in her field notes in Meerut District found that Pradhanis in Panchayats were illiterate and only able to put their signatures on officials papers. The women representatives contest for election due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because of their own interest. *S.Panda (1996)*<sup>10</sup> in her study of Village Panchayats in Orissa found that women entered into politics due to mandatory provision of reservation or pressure from their family members or pressure from their village community. *Manikyamba (1990)*<sup>11</sup> in her study of Andhra Pradesh found that socio-economic background in general and political background in particular are important determinants of shaping the nature and level of participation of women members in political institutions and her study concludes that the participation of poor women members is mostly found insignificant. *Dr. Sing (2004)*<sup>12</sup> presents the findings of an empirical study of the elected women representatives of the PRIs of Haryana for exploring the extent of their empowerment as a result of the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act. *Dr.Bharti(2011)*<sup>13</sup> explains that before 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment came into force, Government of Orissa had adopted some of the important provisions such as reservation of seats for women, SCs, STs in its existing Panchayati Raj Acts. *Kaul and Sahni(2009)*<sup>14</sup> tries to explore the extent of political participation of women elected representatives in Panchayats and the problems faced by them in two districts of Jammu and Kathua. *Patnaik (2005)*<sup>15</sup> finds out the participation of elected representatives belonging to weaker sections in the functioning of four gram panchayats in Orissa’s Dhenkanal district, in order to observe the extent to which numerical representation has been successful in the actual exercise of power by these sections.

However, in this regard, my study tries to highlight on the awareness, interest and involvement of women in Panchayat administration and panchayat election.

### IV. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The Chief objectives of this study are:

1. To know about how far and to what extent, the rural women participate in different spheres of activities ranging from decision-making to exercising the right to vote in the gram panchayat;
2. To explore the awareness, interest, and involvement of women in Gram Panchayat elections;
3. To know the leadership qualities of women;
4. To assess the perception of women about the panchayat system in general and their role in particular; and
5. To find out the factors which overtly or covertly tend to promote or prevent women members from performing their roles.

### V. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE COVERAGE

The present study is mostly based on empirical methods. For this study, schedules were employed to collect data from the sample respondents. I also conducted personal interviews with the women respondents of the panchayats. Stratified random sampling was applied in this study in order to select the gram panchayats. Data were also collected from the secondary sources like Census Reports, Government Documents, Gazetteers, District Handbooks and other published literatures.

As it is quite impossible to study the political participation of all the women of Orissa, so I have selected only one Block, i.e., Hindol Block in Dhenkanal District where there are 36 Gram Panchayats (GPs). Out of 36 GPs, only 5 GPs i.e. Baunshpokhari, Kantamila, Hatura, Gulehi and Karanda have been selected on random basis. Again, from these 5 GPs, I have selected 125 sample respondents, 25 sample respondents from each GP. Here, random sampling method has been adopted for the selection of sample respondents. In this block, women are very backward and far away from the so called civilized society. Though they blindly participate in the political activities of panchayats, they have a great apathy towards the political process. For the purpose of the present study, I have taken socio-economic variables like area, age, education, caste and occupation.

## **VI. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND POLICIES FOR WOMEN**

Before coming to the real picture of women's participation in the Panchayat activities, it is essential to have a focus on the constitutional provisions which have been provided them for their development. Immediately after the framing of the Indian Constitution, certain provisions have been made in the Constitution in order to make them equal with their male counterparts. The Preamble of Indian Constitution recognizes the principles of social, economic and political justice to all its citizens and also equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all.

*The Fundamental Rights* as guaranteed by the Constitution (Part III, Articles 12-35) tries to remove inequalities which Indian women had suffered a lot. In this regard, Article 14 promises equality before the law and equal protection by the laws. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race caste, sex or place of birth and also provides that the state may make special provisions for women and children. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment. Article 23 prohibits traffic in human beings as well as forced labor.

Besides these important provisions in the Fundamental Rights, some guidelines are also given in the *Directive Principles of State Policy (Part-IV, Articles. 36-51)* which are non-justiciable. *Article 51(e) (Fundamental Duties, Part IVA 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Act, 1976)* directs the state to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Besides these provisions, some seats are reserved for women in legislative bodies starting from grass root institutions to the Union Parliament. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts (1992) facilitating women participation in Panchayat Raj system are as follows.

- i) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct elections in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat [*Article 243D(3)*].
- ii) Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairperson in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women [*Article 243D (4)*].
- iii) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes of the total number seats to be filled by direct election in every municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by to different constituencies in a municipality [*Article 243(3)*].
- iv) Reservation of offices of chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes scheduled tribes and the women in such a manner as the legislature of a state may by law provide [*Article 243T(4)*].

The 84<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution will also expect one-third of the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies to be reserved for women including those from the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. All the *Five Year Plans* have given importance for the development of women, with a major objective of raising their economic and social status.

Despite all such constitutional provisions, there is no satisfactory development in their social status. Because they are not yet behaving as active citizens and now they are living in a very parochial traditional culture. In order to study the political behavior of women, an attempt has been made to study their electoral behavior which is the only indices of the political behavior of women as a whole. By studying the electoral participation of women of Hindol Block, we can know to what extent their political development has been taken place since independence.

## **VII. RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN ODISHA AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION**

Odisha is one of the pioneering states in the field of Panchayati Raj initiatives in India. Soon after the independence of our country, the Government of Odisha enacted *Orissa Gram Panchayat Act in 1948*. After that the *Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959* was enacted and executed on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1961 in

Odisha. Biju Patnaik when became Chief Minister during sixties, he had made concrete efforts to realize Panchayati Raj system. He is one of the pioneers in the field of women participation who strongly advocated for women participation in the local governance system in Odisha. In fact during his second term as Chief Minister (1990-95) and under his dynamic leadership, Odisha became the first in India to implement the sound provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 in advance to give opportunities to women by making reservations of one-third seats for them and women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes out of total seats. It also adds to the credit of Biju Babu that after a long gap he conducted panchayat elections in Odisha in the year 1992. He was an ardent advocate of devolution of funds, functions and functionaries to the PRIs and was most emphatic about participation of women in the rural local governance system. For the first time in the history of independent India, women were given 30% reservation in the three-tier PRIs in Odisha prior to the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act. Biju Babu was also emphatically emphasized on the political and administrative training and orientation of elected women representatives to acquire skill and knowledge on politics and administration. At present, Odisha has three-tier system of rural local self government system- the first tier being at the village level i.e. Gram Panchayat, the second tier at the Block level i.e. Panchayat Samiti and the third at the district level i.e. Zilla Parishad and 50% of seats for women has been reserved in all the tiers. The present Panchayati Raj structure of Odisha includes 30 Zilla Parishads with 854 elected Zilla Parishad members, 314 Panchayat Samitis with 6,235 elected Panchayat Samiti members, 6,236 Gram Panchayats including 6,236 elected Sarpanches and 87,551 elected Ward Members out of which 46,643 Women Ward Members constitute the rural local governance system. Thus, in Odisha now there is a total of 1,00,876 elected representatives in the three-tier rural local self governance system out of which 50% women elected members that underlines the importance of women participation in the three-tier rural local self governance system.<sup>16</sup>

As a mandate and according to the constitutional and legal provisions, the general panchayat elections were held in Odisha during 1992 and a total of 28,069 women representatives were elected for the first time to the three-tier rural local governance system from 5,262 gram panchayats.<sup>17</sup>

The next general elections to PRIs were held in Odisha in the year 1997. The abstracts of total elected representatives of rural local governance system along with women elected representatives of 30 districts of Odisha elected to the rural local governance system during the Panchayat General Elections 1997 are given in Table No.1.

**Table No.1 General Panchayat Elections 1997- Status of Women Participation in Odisha:**

<b>PRI Members</b>	<b>Elected</b>	<b>Total Elected Members</b>	<b>Scheduled Caste(SC) Women</b>	<b>Scheduled Tribe(ST) Women</b>	<b>Backward Class Women</b>	<b>Reserved for Women(RW)</b>	<b>Total Elected Women Members</b>
<b>Ward Member</b>		<b>81,077</b>	<b>6,348</b>	<b>8,060</b>	<b>6,858</b>	<b>7,329</b>	<b>28,595</b>
<b>Sarpanch</b>		<b>5,261</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>1,862</b>
<b>Panchayat Member</b>	<b>Samiti</b>	<b>5,260</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>1,870</b>
<b>Zilla Member</b>	<b>Parishad</b>	<b>854</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>294</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>92,452</b>	<b>7,197</b>	<b>9,287</b>	<b>7,332</b>	<b>8,805</b>	<b>32,621</b>

*(Source: Information on General Panchayat Elections to PRI in Odisha, 1997, State Election Commission, Odisha, Bhubaneswar)*

Table 1 reveals that during 1997 General Panchayat Elections, out of total 92,452 elected PRI members, women constitute only 32,621 of total elected members.

Similarly, the abstracts of total elected members of PRI structure along with women elected representatives of 30 districts of Odisha elected to the rural local self governance system during the Panchayat General Elections 2002 mentions below in the following table:

**Table No.2 General Panchayat Elections, 2002- status of women participation in Odisha:**

PRI Elected Members	Total PRI Elected Members	Scheduled Caste Women	Scheduled Tribe Women	Backward Class Women	Reserved for Women	Total Elected Women Members
Ward Member	87,547	7,056	9,164	8,665	6,529	31,414
Sarpanch	6,234	336	894	462	496	2,188
Panchayat Samiti Member	6,227	449	674	577	488	2,188
Zilla Parishad Member	854	54	85	82	75	296
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,00,862</b>	<b>7,895</b>	<b>10,817</b>	<b>9,786</b>	<b>7,588</b>	<b>36,086</b>

*(Source: Information on General Elections to PRIs, 2002, State Election Commission, Odisha, Bhubaneswar)*

From the above table, it is found that during 2002 General Panchayat Elections, out of 1, 00,862 elected PRI members; women constitute only 36,086 of the total elected members.

The next panchayat election was held in the year 2007. In this election, there were 314 Panchayat Samitis and 6,234 Gram Panchayats. The total number of Zilla Parishad constituencies was 854 and there were a total number of 6,233 Panchayat Samiti members in the state. The total number of Ward Members in the state was 87,542. Thus, there was a total of 1, 00,863 elected representatives in the three-tier rural local governance system in the state during the 2007 Panchayat Elections. The table no. 3 describes in detail about the total elected representatives along with total women members of the rural local governance system in Odisha during the 2007 general elections.

**Table No.3 General Panchayat Elections, 2007-Status of Women Participation in Odisha:**

PRI elected Representatives	Total PRI Representa tives	Scheduled Caste Women	Schedul ed Tribe Women	Backward Class Women	Reserved for Women	Total Women Representatives
Ward Member	87,542	7,172	9,665	9,148	5,719	2,188
Sarpanch	6,234	344	907	471	466	2,188
Panchayat Samiti Member	6,233	455	699	632	422	2,208
Zilla Parishad Member	854	58	85	88	70	301
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,00863</b>	<b>8,029</b>	<b>11,356</b>	<b>10,339</b>	<b>6,677</b>	<b>36,401</b>

*(Source: Information on General Elections to PRIs, 2007, State Election Commission, Odisha, Bhubaneswar)*

## **EMPIRICAL STUDY:**

### **Socio-Economic Profile of Women**

While studying socio-economic background of the respondents, age, education, caste, and occupation are taken as important factors.

**Table No.4 Age wise distribution of Respondents: (N=125)**

Age Group	Number	Percentage (%)
Young Age (21-35)	40	32%
Middle Age (36-50)	65	52%
Aged (Above 50)	20	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)*

The above table shows that majority of the women were from the middle aged category (52%) followed by young age category (32%) those who participated in panchayat elections and panchayat affairs. Only 16% were from aged category. It is quite clear from the above data that the aged women have some sort of apathy towards politics whereas young and middle aged women are more interested in politics.

**Table No.5 Educational Qualifications of the Respondents: (N=125)**

<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Illiterate</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Primary</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Middle</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>High School and Above</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>04%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)*

The data of Table no.2 depicts that majority of women were illiterate (44%), followed by primary level (36%), middle level (16%) and only 4% to High School level and none had had a graduate and/or post-graduate education. This picture proves that education is very much essential for the women of this area in order to participate themselves in politics.

**Table No.6 Caste-wise distribution of the Respondents: (N=125)**

<b>Caste</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>General</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>33.6%</b>
<b>OBC</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>41.6%</b>
<b>SC</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20.8%</b>
<b>ST</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)*

From the above table it is found that majority of the women participated in the electoral process from the OBC category (41.6%), followed by General category (33.6%), SC (20.8%), and only 4% of women from ST category. So, the women of SC and ST category are less interested in politics so far as their social, cultural, educational, and economical condition is concerned.

**Table No.7 Occupation Pattern of Women and their Husbands: (N=125)**

<b>W0men</b>			<b>Husbands</b>		
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Service Holders</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>Service Holders</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>House Wives</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>Farming</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>Daily Laborers</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>Daily Laborer</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)*

The above data show that majority of women are house wives (56%), followed by daily laborers (40%), service holders (4%). That means most of the women are dependent on their husbands. On the other hand, most of their husbands depend on faming (56%), followed by daily laborers (28%), and service holders (16%). So, it proves that women are basically from the farmers and daily laborers.

However, the socio- economic condition of women is directly linked with their participation in panchayat election because for poor women, it is better to think about their daily livelihood than taking interest in politics. This is the reality that I have found in my survey.

In order to know the electoral participation of women in Gram Panchayat elections, I have taken 125 sample respondents in total and collected the required information from the women through schedules. In this context, the first question asked to the respondents was "Did you participate in the electoral process of the last Panchayat election?" The table given below shows the response pattern.

**Table No.8 Participation of Women in Panchayat Election: (N=125)**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes%</b>	<b>No%</b>
<b>Did you participate in the electoral process of the last Panchayat election?</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>16%</b>

*(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)*

Though Gram Panchayats are created as grass root democratic institutions and election to these bodies are the first political experience for the women, still there is no cent percent electoral participation of women. From the above micro study, it is found that 84% of women participated in Panchayat election where as 16% of women remained as non participants.

To caste one's own vote in an election is the most used political right of the people which is the very index of electoral participation. From the above table, it follows that about 105 (84%) out of the total respondents answered positively. But very interestingly, when the question was asked to them to which party they voted, most of their responses show that they do not know about different political parties. Rather they know only the symbol to which they voted and they have casted their vote not according to their own judgment and conscience but being dictated by the local leaders of the area. This is the kind of democratic society wherein people are living without having any idea about the political parties.

The second question was asked about the mode of electoral participation of the respondents who participated in the last panchayat election.

**Table No.9 Mode of Electoral Participation: (N=80)**

Sl. No.	Patten of Participation	No of Saying 'yes'	Percentage (%)
1	As a Voter	80	100
2	As a Member of Political party	25	31.25
3	As a supporter of political party	30	37.5
4	As a campaigner	20	25
5	As a Candidate	10	12.5
6	Any other	-	-

*(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)*

The above table shows that though the women constitute half of the total population of the country, some of them are very ignorant about the electoral system. They are the mere instruments in the hands of the male leaders and as the survey shows, by political participation, they know only voting. Though few of them hold political posts, they are suppressed and guided by the male leaders. From the above micro study, it is found that 100% of the total women respondents are voters but very few of them are members of political parties, supporters of political parties, campaigners of a political party and as party candidates.

Political awareness is the stepping-stone of political participation. Awareness creates interests and interest creates involvements and it is therefore, the intension of the present study to investigate to what extent the women are aware about the electoral process.

**Table No.10 Awareness of Women: (N=125)**

Sl. No	Questions	Respondents saying 'yes'	Percentage (%)
1	Do you know that the voting has been reduced from 21 years to 18 years?	30	24%
2	Do you know that elections are conducted in every five years?	80	64%
3	Do you know that a citizen who is 18 years of age can vote in the election?	60	48%
4	Do you know that when you are 25 years of age you can contest in the election?	40	32%
5	Do you know about the provisions of political rights?	20	16%
6	Do you know that there is a Gram Panchayat in your locality?	125	100%
7	What is the name of your Sarpancha?	90	72%
8	Do you know that there is a Block Development Officer who looks after the Development of your Gram Panchayat?	35	28%
9	Do you know that seats are reserved for women in Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samitis, and Assemblies & Parliament?	40	32%

*(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)*

From the above table, it reveals that women have very poor awareness regarding the electoral process of the Gram Panchayats. They have very little knowledge about the voting age, the period of elections, the provisions of political rights, and the reservations of seats for women in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Assemblies and Parliament. So, from this survey, we are quite clear that long after India's independence, the women have little awareness about the electoral process of the country.

The present study also intends to investigate the interaction between the women and the Gram Panchayats. The following table shows the pattern of interaction between women and the members of Gram Panchayat.

**Table No.11 Pattern of Interaction between women and Gram Panchayat: (N=125)**

Sl.No.	Questions	Regularly (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
1.	Have you ever put forth your demands before the Gram Panchayat?	25 (20%)	35 (28%)	65 (52%)
2.	Do the Gram Panchayat members meet you?	15 (12%)	20 (16%)	90 (72%)
3.	Do you attend the meetings of Gram Sabha?	05 (4%)	10 (8%)	110 (88%)
4.	Do you attend the meetings of Palli Sabha?	20 (16%)	25 (20%)	80 (64%)
5.	Do you think that yours demands are always fulfilled by the Gram Panchayat?	20 (16%)	30 (24%)	75 (60%)

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

The above table shows that the women are less satisfied with the performance of the Gram Panchayat and so far as their participation in gram sabha or palli sabha is concerned, it is very low.

### VIII. ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

- To analyze all the data collected from the respondents in this survey it is quite evident that some of the women rarely participate in the electoral process or in the affairs of the Panchayats.
- This study shows that women have very little awareness about the electoral process and they have no idea about their rights, liberties and their own position in the society.
- During the survey a very interesting thing have been collected from the respondents that some of them don't know about the different political parties functioning in our country, but they only know the symbols which they voted. In other words, they are the mere instruments in the hands of the political parties. As their responses show, by political participation they simple understand casting votes. Though they are regarded as voters, they don't know the value of votes. Even most of them hold the political posts, but they are suppressed and guided by
- They have very little sense about the provisions like voting age, voting age of a person to contest in the election, the period of elections, the provision of fundamental rights, the reservation of seats for women in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Assemblies and Parliament etc.
- Their interaction with the gram panchayat is quite less and they never put troth their demands before the Gram Panchayat about the facilities and privileges meant for them. This is because of their lack of consciousness and low levels of education
- Finally, so far as the performance of the Gram Panchayat is concerned they are least satisfied with that.

So, in the light of the above analysis, it is quite obvious that a number of reasons are responsible for their apathy and indifference attitude towards political participation. The reasons like illiteracy, poverty, traditional pattern of society, narrow attitude of the members of the family and to some extent, the irresponsible and neglected attitude of the Gram Panchayat. As a result, the women in this block, not only politically, but also socially, economically, culturally and educationally very backward.

### IX. OBSTACLES ON THE WAY OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION

*Firstly*, PRIs operate in a complex social environment. Caste, class and gender hierarchies have a crucial bearing on institutional process and democratic practices. *Secondly*, participation in Gram Panchayat is affected by the apathy of women. This indifference has its roots in the long historical background of non-participation in governance, because of entrenched caste, class and gender hierarchies, which are quite un-



participatory. *Thirdly*, the political culture promoted since independence has also been one patronage and it has certainly not encouraged the participation of women in institutional process. *Fourthly*, low level of education of women and socio-cultural norms forbids them to enter into politics. *Fifthly*, conservative attitude of the family members and the system of patriarchy prevailed in the society also responsible for their backwardness. *Lastly*, to some extent, poverty and lack of financial control of women make them dependent on their male counterparts. So they do not have independent decision making power in the family for which they show their apathy towards politics.

Though a large number of women are backward in all respects, there is some positive sign that has come out from this survey. Some of women as we have found in our survey are very conscious and actively participate in the affairs of the Panchayat and they are also interested to contest in the election in order to exercise power. A great change has been taken place in the mindset of women as well as of their family members. This is the result of increasing development of mass media (like radio, newspaper, T.V. etc), communication system, role of political parties and perhaps 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act brought a sea change in the outlook of men towards women. So, the political participation of women in the affairs of the Panchayat is gradually developing.

## X. CONCLUSSION

As the objective of this survey is concerned, it is found that the participation of women in the affairs of the Panchayat administration is not up to the mark as compared to their male counterparts. The awareness, interest and involvement of women in Gram Panchayat election is still in the darkness of traditional culture. Mere inclusion of political reforms, constitutional provisions & rights are not enough; the issue is very critical, and, it requires introspection by women at first hand and of course by men. It is only through a new way of thinking, a broad perspective of analysis, an objective approach, a rational stream of thoughts irrespective of gender; we can think some degree of change. Political participation of women demands the values of equality and justice in daily life, the support of citizens groups in protest against oppressions, and acceptance of the feminist perspective in the public sphere. Women have to recognize, collectively and critically, the forces that limit them and to work collectively and continuously to change the unequal power structure. The family, community and state should together create a situation wherein elected women representatives act effectively in PRIs. They need to be endowed with capacities and incentives to tackle the emerging challenges after entering into PR system. More favorable environment should be created which would enable the women to play more effective role in the decentralized development.

Above all, the Gram Panchayats should act more actively and vigorously for the development of women in order to realize them the benefits of rights, equality and justice as enshrined in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

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