

Dynamics of Women's Representation in the Post-73rd Constitutional Amendment Act Period: A Review Study of PRIs in Himachal Pradesh

***Pragati Sharma. **Dr. Sanjeev Kumar**

**Research Scholar, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. Email ID- pragatisharma136@gmail.com*

***Sr. Research Officer, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. Email ID- sksanjeev52@gmail.com, Contact; 9318872656*

Abstract

India is a country where about 70 per cent of total population lives in villages. Hence, Panchayati Raj System provides a great opportunity for local governance. Presently, India is a substantial democratic country in the world where the women constitute almost half of the population. Women's political participation is one of the most important issues in Indian politics. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 mandating at least 1/3rd of the seat reservation for women is an important landmark in the history of Indian women's participation in the formation of democratic institutions at the grass root level. In this context, Himachal Pradesh Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2011 giving 50% reservation for women in PRIs has been landmark achievement. The present paper seeks to analyze the structure of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh with reference to women's participation in Gram Panchayat, their representation in the post 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act period. An attempt has been made to analyze the nature and extent of women's participation in politics in the State of Himachal Pradesh. It also tries to highlight the importance of Panchayati Raj institutions in promoting participatory decision making and social inclusion.

Keywords- Panchayati Raj, Women Participation, 73rd Amendment, Local Governance, Grassroot Democracy, Himachal Pradesh.

1. Introduction

Democracy thrives when governance is participatory, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the people. In India, the Panchayati Raj system serves as the foundation of decentralized governance, providing a platform for citizen engagement at the

grassroots level (Thakur & Ganguly, 2025). The tradition of local self-government in India is as old as the Aryan civilization. The Rigveda mentions the role of elected bodies like Sabha, which was assigned with the task of legislating as well as reimbursing justice (Bholta & Bais, 2017). In later periods, texts like 'Shanti Parva' in Mahabharat, Manu Smriti and Kautilya's Arthashastra also had references of rural units of governance. The history of rural governance in India remained strong in almost all the time periods till around 5th century AD when the Gupta dynasty fell down. Central power system weakened and so did the local system of governance. Later in dynasties like Delhi Sultanate and Mughal empire, rural governance system was reinstated to some extent. Panchayati Raj institutions found their modern form mostly in British Raj with Mayo resolution of 1870 and several other laws to strengthen the identity and authority of village panchayats (Kurukshetra, 2023). The independence of the country provided golden opportunity for the revival of these institutions. Mahatma Gandhi viewed independence of India as a whole to begin at the villages and wanted every village to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs (Kurukshetra, 2023). The idea of village self-administration found place in Part IV of the Constitution of India as the Directive Principle of state policy (Trivedi, 2008).

Article 40 of the Indian Constitution has rightly enshrined, "The state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local government." Panchayati Raj being a part of directive principles never got a standard structure on pan-India basis. But some states started implementing it under different names and concepts at local levels. Later 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments together paved the way of local self-governance in rural and urban India. The 73rd Amendment added Part IX titled "The Panchayats" Article 243 of the Constitution deals with the process and structure of the Constitution (Kurukshetra, 2023).

Panchayati Raj has been introduced in India with the aim of achieving rural development through people's participation. Political Participation is the involvement of individuals and groups in the political process of a political system at various levels. However, gender inequality all over the world continues to be extremely limited in democratic governance (Khimta, 2018).

The concept of women empowerment has predominantly become a focus on political participation (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014). Women's political participation is required to change the world with new priorities. Empowering women requires a fundamental change and dynamic change in perception of women, expectations from women in society and a scientific and rational understanding of women's problems and needs (Sharma & Sharma, 2014).

The potentials of women remain largely unrecognized and their contributions are often overlooked. Several factors are responsible for women's low participation. The most important ones are literacy, traditionalism, prejudices, economic dependency and the unfavorable political structure, with its high rate of predominantly male incumbency and slow turnover. The dire need today is to remove the disparity between women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014). They need more active participation to achieve

democracy at grass root level. It is undoubtedly, as much a challenge as it is a welcome change (Tripathi, 2023).

Since the present study is a review study therefore secondary data have been employed. The data have been collected from the office records of Himachal Pradesh's State Election Commission and Panchayati Raj Department. The books, Journals, Magazines, Newspapers, Census Reports, Statistical Outlines of Himachal Pradesh have also been consulted.

2. Himachal Pradesh: A Socio- Economic Profile

Himachal Pradesh is one of the hilly states of India. It is situated between 30°22'40 to 33°12'20 north latitude and 75°47'55 to 79°04'20 east latitudes (Kumar, 2016). The state of Himachal Pradesh came into existence on 15th April 1948 as centrally administered unit by putting together twenty-six Shimla hill states and four Punjab Hill States (Gupta, 2004). After a long struggle Himachal Pradesh gained full-fledged statehood on 25th January 1971 and became the 18th state of Indian Union.

The state statistical reports of Himachal Pradesh justifiable claims that Himachal Pradesh scores high on indices of human development. The educational achievements of the state are impressive: its health indicators are generally better than those for the country as a whole and have been successful in substantially reduced the poverty to a lower it has been able to promote gender equity to a substantial extent as well consistently high public contributing to Its success on human development font (Singh, 2016).

Table No.1
Comparative Presentation of Statistical Data of India and H.P since 1991

	1991		2001		2011		2023*	
Indicators	India	H.P.	India	H.P.	India	H.P.	India	H.P.
Birth Rate	29.5	28.7	25.4	21.2	21.8	16.5	16	11.8
Sex Ratio	926	976	933	968	943	972	1020	947
Infant Mortality Rate	80	75	66	54	44	38	25	20.5* *
Literacy Rate	52.21	63.86	64.83	76.50	74.04	82.80	77	86.6** *

Source- India's data from Office of Registrar General Sample Registration Bulletin and of Himachal from Statistical Abstract of HP 2023-24 (1991-2011)

*Data of 2023 for India is from World Bank Group and for H.P. is from Statistics of HP Annual Report 2023

**National Family Health Survey (2019-21)

*** National Survey of India Report "Household Social Consumption: Education in India" in 2021

The progress can be seen through indicators like literacy rate which has increased from 63.86 in 1991 to 86.6 in 2021 in Himachal Pradesh shows the efforts of government at state level and proper implementation of its policies. This level of awareness is clearly reflected in other indicators as well such as sex ratio, birth rate etc. The infant mortality has also decreased from 75 in 1991 to 20.5 in 2021 reflects the advancement in health facilities. The improvement in major indicators shows the rise of social awakening among people in the state especially among the males. Women are now receiving family support to pursue their goals, with growing awareness their position in society is improving. Realizing the importance of education, since 1971, the state government had accorded high priority to its development.

Empirical evidence from Indian states suggests a 'transformative potential' in gendered political participation; villages led by women often see improved service delivery in health and nutrition (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). In Himachal Pradesh, the integration of women's collectives like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with PRIs has created a participatory governance model that strengthens social safety nets and local welfare planning (IJCRT, 2025). Further, the empowerment levels, such as, welfare, access to the resources, conscientization, participation and control are to be identified and increased equally, will automatically lead to increased empowerment (Deshmukh, 2005). But even after all these improvements, women are lagging behind men in many major indicators i.e. sex ratio, literacy and participation in decision making process. Even though the state of Himachal Pradesh is in much better position that doesn't decrease the importance of empowerment of women. Although the results are visible in context of overall development in areas such as literacy rate, infant mortality ratio etc. but in comparison to men they are still lagging behind. While reservation has resolved some of the problems, the constraints which stem from traditional village institutions and familial and socio-cultural forces still remain (Mohapatra, 2016).

However, it is to be noted that the outlook of women has changed considerably due to the expansion of education during the last four decades. Young women are not dependent on their parents and husbands as were their mothers and grandmothers and they are neither afraid of moving out of their homes to be economically independent. They are prepared to fight for their rights and to assert their individuality (Sharma, 2004).

3. A Journey of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India and Himachal Pradesh

Self-governing rural local bodies are described in Indian context as institutions of democratic decentralization or Panchayati Raj. This was considered a political and administrative innovation of far-reaching importance when it was introduced after Independence (Singh, 2016). In 1952, Community Development Programs were started on national level, but they turned out unsuccessful. To understand reasons of its failure, a committee headed by Balwant Rai Mehta was constituted in 1957. This committee concluded that CDP was not able to achieve its objectives because of the lack of public participation in it (Kurukshetra, 2023). So, the committee

recommended the formation of three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions – Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. After that multiple committees were formed such as that under Ashok Mehta, GVK Rao, LM Singhvi to reform the existing state of affairs of village society, the recommendations made were regarded as a vehicle for fulfilling the demands of the people (Tripathi, 2023).

As a result of this the Panchayati Raj system was introduced for first time in Nagaur district of Rajasthan in 1959. By the mid-60s, Panchayats had been established in several states all over India in accordance with local state legislations (Singh, 2016). But finally, almost after five decades of Independence, in the year 1992-93, the Government of India took a revolutionary step by making Panchayati Raj Institutions as a part of Constitution through the 73rd Amendment. This fact cannot be denied that it is only the 73rd Amendment Act that has created a 'silent revolution' at the grassroots level. Before this Act, some baseline flaws were there at both ends; Panchayats as well as the government (Devi & Kumar, 2023)

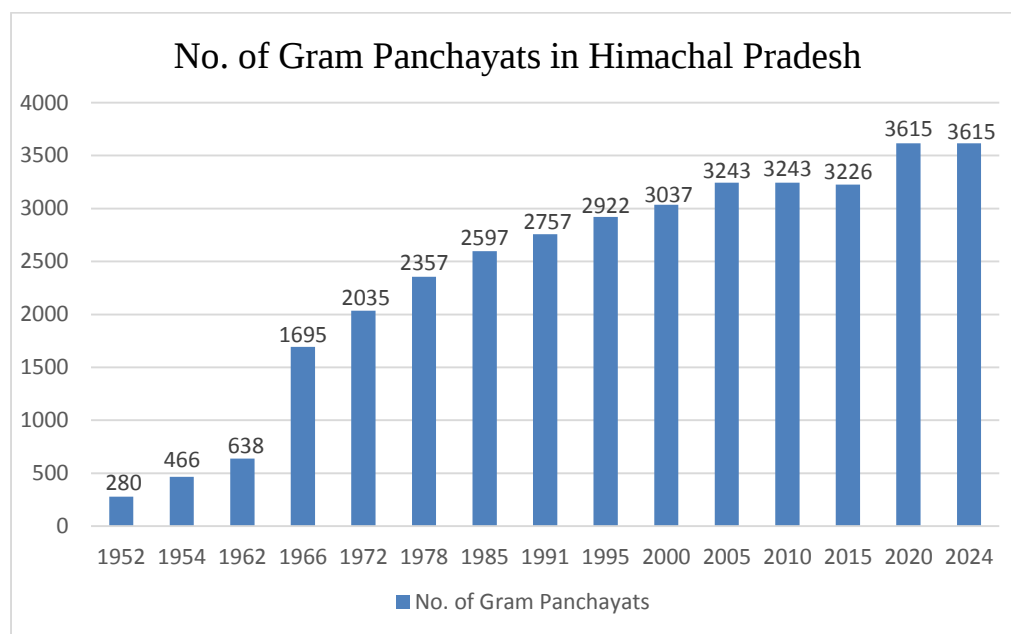
The state of Himachal Pradesh was among the first to implement the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which institutionalized local self-government and mandated the devolution of power to elected village councils. Over the years, PRIs in Himachal Pradesh, have evolved into crucial instruments of governance, bridging the gap between the state and rural communities (Thakur & Ganguly, 2025). The roots of local self-governance in Himachal Pradesh can be traced back to the early 20th century when Raja Bijai Chand of Kehlour (Bilaspur) introduced Quomi (Caste) Panchayats in 1908. These Panchayats were formed to address local disputes and maintain social harmony. In addition to these caste-based Panchayats, Bilaspur's rulers established a Health and Education Committee to begin the process of institutionalizing local governance (Thakur & Ganguly, 2025).

Himachal Pradesh adopted the Punjab village Panchayat Act 1952 and it came into operation in 1954. The Himachal Pradesh Act, 1952 was repealed in 1968, when the State Legislature passed a new Panchayati Raj Act in order to bring uniformity in the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj. This Act had three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Gram Sabha at village, Panchayat Samiti at block and Zila Parishad at the district level. According to H.P. Panchayat Raj Act of 1968, all members of Gram panchayat shall be elected directly by members of Gram Sabha amongst themselves. The 1968 Act also provides for representation of women in case there are no primary women members in the Panchayat Samiti. Only two women were to be co-opted among the Panch from the block (Kumar, 2022).

Himachal Pradesh enacted a new Panchayati Raj legislation, the Himachal Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 in conformity with provisions of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992. The Act of 1994, repealing the earlier State Panchayati Raj Act of 1968, became effective from April, 1994. This Act provided for a Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad at village, block and district levels respectively and one third seats reserved for women (Kumar, 2015). People of the state are more connected to the rural heritage, culture and traditions, which are highly apparent in their daily lives and prefer to preserve their rich life culture through traditional system of politics. Hence, they take more interest in *Gram Sabha*

elections with a belief that these elections are more personalized and connected to their culture (Nahak & Sharma, 2022)

Graph No. 1



Source- H.P Annual Administrative Report Dept of Panchayati Raj, Government of H.P., 2023-2024.

Only 280 Gram Panchayats existed prior to the enactment of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1952. However, after the enactment of said Act, 466 Gram Panchayats were established in 1954 and the number of Gram Panchayats were increased to 638 during the year 1962. On 1st November, 1966, the hilly areas of Punjab were merged in the State and consequently the number of Gram Panchayats rose to 1695. Presently the no. has reached to 3615 (H.P. Administrative Report, 2023-24). Delimitation of constituencies of Panchayati Raj Institutions had been provided under Section 8 of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. This whole process is done by the Panchayati Raj Department through respective Deputy Commissioners. The procedure for delimitation of constituencies has been prescribed under rule 3 to 11 of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj (election) Rules, 1994 (Hemlata, 2019). Throughout the years the existing Gram Sabhas were reorganized/ bifurcated from time to time and new Gram Sabha/ Gram Panchayats were established.

Thus, Gram Panchayats oversee local governance, which includes sanitation, water supply, rural infrastructure, and social welfare programs. Panchayat Samitis serve as intermediates, supervising the implementation of various government projects and ensuring that they meet the needs of rural communities. Zila Parishads play an important role in organizing district-wide developmental activities and providing financial resources (Thakur & Ganguly, 2025).

4. The Status of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

The tradition bound patriarchal structures have denied women access to resources and power. Discriminatory practices and biases prevail on women in all walks of life, whether in education, employment, at home, work place or outside. There should be no disparity with regard to their position in policy making (Balakrishna, 2021). Half of the population is constituted by women in India. In such scenario, the limited nature of female participation and representation in national decision-making bodies has important consequences for the legitimacy of the institutions (Khimta, 2018). With the advent of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, it was made possible for women, once oppressed and neglected in the society, to stand on an equal platform of decision-making and authority with men (Sharma et al, 2007). The act has mandated as 1/3rd seats to be reserved for women. Later, the Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2011, in Himachal Pradesh giving 50% reservation for women in Panchayats, became a landmark achievement. This enactment laid a strong foundation for women's participation at grass-root level decision making and their political leadership and empowerment in politics.

In 1995, elections of PRIs were conducted by the State Election Commission, set up under the 1994 Act. The Thirty-two lakh electorate in the state were required to cast five votes to elect Panch, Pradhan, Up-Pradhan, Panchayat Samiti members and Zila Parishad members. These elections gave a new identity and responsibilities of women in the rural society in Himachal Pradesh and 7632 women were elected to different offices (Kumar, 2022). After implementation of 73rd amendment second election of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh held in 2000. Comparing statistics of the two elections shows the increase in numbers i.e., 3.82 percent in Gram PRIs and overall 36.78 percent, 33.89 percent and 34.66 percent women were elected respectively as members of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishads. In 2005, Panchayat election, their share once again increased as against the statutory provision of 33 percent. This has been found more pronouncing in case chairperson of Zila Parishad (58.33) percent followed by BDC Chairperson (45.33) percent. In total, there were 3243 Gram Panchayat and 1109 Panchayats were being headed by Women Pradhans at different categories. Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed HP Panchayati raj (Amendment) bill on April 8, 2008, and enhanced the reservation for women in PRIs from 33% to 50%. After implementation of this amendment, representation of women once again was good for the terms of 2011-2016. The election was conducted for the total 3243 Gram Panchayats. In this term, 1639 (50.54%) seats occupied by women in Gram Panchayats and 54.55% in Panchayat Samitis (Kumar, 2022).

Table no.2
Comparative Analysis of Women's Performance in PRIs Elections in 2000, 2010
and 2020, after Passing of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in Himachal
Pradesh

Post	2000	2010	Increase from 2000-10 (%)	2020	Increase from 2010-20(%)	Increase from 2000 - 2020 (%)
Panchayat Pradhan	1026	1639	59.74	1828	11.53	78.16
Panchayat Members	6822	11317	65.88	12422	9.76	82.08
Panchayat Samiti Members	562	863	53.55	873	1.15	55.33
Zila Parishad Members	87	128	47.12	124	-3.12	42.52
Total no. of Women	8497	13947	64.14	15247	9.32	79.43

Source: Election Report 2000,2010 and 2020 from State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh.

Till date, six general elections have been held to the PRIs in the State in the years 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020. The experiment of 50 per cent reservation of seats for women in PRIs has been successful in the State. Modern media has also played an important role, media such as Facebook, WhatsApp have connected people and brought awareness, it is also being used during campaigns. The spread of education, increase in government schemes to improve women's social-economic position, mobilizing general public to give up gender prejudice and building confidence in women representatives through training and orientation programmes have become key factors in increase level of participation of women. Before 1995, women's representation in PRIs and Municipalities was maximum upto two women in all the bodies. After 1995, it has increased to minimum 33 percent and now 50 percent since 2010, elections to the PRIs and urban local bodies (Jharta, 2011). Since 2000, the representation of women in Panchayati Raj bodies has increased up to 79.43 %. In the last six elections to the PRIs, women have been elected even from the unreserved seats and their representation has been more than the fixed quota allotted to them.

However, the sorry state of affairs is that women are not getting adequate representation in the Parliament, State Legislature and other higher decision-making bodies. Although, the position of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions is better in Himachal. To facilitate the capacity building of women members/ functionaries of PRIs training has to be imparted on philosophy, law,

Panchayati raj governance, structure, gender and the Indian Constitution which would be relevant to the PRIs (Tiwari, 2008).

Table No. 3
Women Representation in Gram Panchayats in Himachal Pradesh (2020)

District Panchayat & Equivalent	Total No. of E. R.* Gram Panchayat	No. of M.W.R.**	No. of E.W.R.***	% of E.W.R.
Bilaspur	1254	498	756	60.28
Chamba	1906	676	1230	64.53
Hamirpur	1631	608	1023	62.72
Kangra	3603	1296	2307	64.02
Kinnaur	400	124	276	69
Kullu	1309	518	791	60.42
Lahaul and Spiti	260	85	175	67.30
Mandi	3762	1342	2420	64.32
Shimla	1835	736	1099	59.89
Sirmaur	998	411	587	58.81
Solan	1457	565	892	61.22
Una	1671	630	1041	62.29
Total	20086	7489	12597	62.71

Source: Report generated through eGramSwaraj (<http://egramswaraj.gov.in>) on Apr 01, 2025 07:28:28 AM.

* Elected Representative, ** Male Elected Representative *** Female Elected Representative

The process of empowerment is taking place at so many levels that it is quite difficult to gauge the actual nature and extent of empowerment in improving the status of women (Mandal, ed., 2012). Gram Panchayats were empowered through decentralization from the Panchayati Raj System. For women, consulting with the people of society, responding to their problems are all the ways to complement their empowerment (H. Naik, 2018).

Gram Panchayat elections of 2020 depict the increase in women representation. In context of 50% reservation, data shows women representatives at Gram Panchayat level to have almost 60% of representation which is very progressive. An average of 62.71% of female representation at Gram Panchayat level in Himachal Pradesh clearly shows the improvement in women's status. The trends through district wise analysis of women representation show more representation in tribal areas of the state i.e. Kinnaur, Lahaul & Spiti and the areas of Pangti and Bharmour of Chamba. This type of result reflects the effective implementation of 50% reservation for women policy in Himachal Pradesh as well as increasing level of awareness and literacy among people of the state. It is argued that if women in good

number enter the corridors of power, they will be able to take up women's issues within state structures and also effect changes in the party and local bodies (Mishra, 2014).

As members of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), rural women work to enhance the well-being and status of women in their communities (Joseph, 2025). The increased political participation due to reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has increased the awareness of the women at grassroots level and they have realized the significance of education in their lives. "The shift toward 50% reservation in Himachal Pradesh has moved beyond symbolic presence to influencing fiscal priorities. Research indicates that women representatives often prioritize 'need-based human development,' directing public funds toward essential services like drinking water, sanitation, and primary education (Kumar, 2022). This aligns with the broader state policy of 'Gender Responsive Budgeting,' which aims to ensure that at least 30% of the total development budget is specifically directed toward women-oriented schemes to bridge traditional gender gaps (Planning Department, HP, 2024)."

Empowerment is not a technocratic goal-it is a wholesale political commitment. Achieving it requires a long-term process in which all cultural, social, political and economic norms undergo fundamental change (Mishra, 2014). Political empowerment of women is not to be viewed in isolation. Structural changes in the formal power institutions, economic independence, increasing awareness through education and gender equality in the social and cultural ethos are important prerequisites for political empowerment of women (Sharma & Sharma, 2014). For these constitutional mandates to translate into effective public policy, the focus must shift from 'numerical representation' to 'functional autonomy.' While the Himachal Pradesh government has utilized institutes like the HP Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) for capacity building, there remains a policy gap in addressing 'bureaucratic capture' where administrative inexperience sometimes leads to proxy governance (Afridi et al., 2016). Therefore, public policy must evolve to provide sustained mentorship and digital literacy to EWRs to ensure they can navigate complex financial and legal frameworks independently (ORF, 2024).

Thus, a social transformation aimed at changing role of women and empowering them in the Himachali society can be achieved by more and more political participation of women at grassroots and higher level of decision-making bodies (Khimta, 2018). Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development (Singh, 2000).

Conclusions

Although adequate policing and administrative efforts have been taken by the Government in the form of 73rd and 74th amendments and women have been given crucial role in the management of PRIs and cohesive development of society, there is a strong need to change the mindset of society towards women. The government must bear in mind that equality in representation is not enough to ensure socio-political equity among genders, as the relatively disadvantaged position of women must be taken into account.

It is imperative to further promote women participation in PRIs, emphasis must be made for gender sensitization of male elected representatives and functionaries of PRIs. In capacity building of women representatives, governments must also invite and involve civil society organizations, women's groups, academic institutions, corporate social responsibility foundations and also international organizations like U N Women. A multi-stakeholder, collaborative, multi-pronged, systematic effort to enhance the capacities of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) are required. Women themselves should also understand their potential in terms of their personal, social, economic and political rights to wipe out gender inequalities prevailing in all spheres be it education, health, economic opportunities or political participation.

The participation of women in the politics and decision-making process is necessary for a healthier democratic society. Political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also co-decision-making and co-policy-making at all levels of governance in the State. In this regard the reform of reservation under 73rd Amendment act 1992 has been landmark initiative in the field of broadening the horizons of democracy in India. After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment the New Panchayati Raj system in India have seen women strength in terms of their political participation. Rural women have shown much interest and have statistically proved that their talent in the functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

To sum up, it may be said that woman's equal participation in politics as voters, candidates, representatives and decision-makers is essential not only for the success of a democratic political system but it can also play a vital role in their advancement as well as in the transformation of the society. The participation of women in the grassroots level is necessary for a Progressive democratic set up and the political empowerment of women is a must for their all-round development.

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