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Dalit Women and Panchyat Raj Institution: A study of Nanded District (Maharashtra State)

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PRI was established to decentralize the power and subsequently 73rd constitutional amendment provided power, space and platform to the powerless people of the nation. To fulfill these aims and objectives, PRI provided an opportunity, platform to women leaders to lead in Panchyati Raj Institution (PRI). In this research paper an attempt has been made to study the impact of 73rd amendment on Dalit women socio-political life, to assess the extent and magnitude of their participation in Panchyat Raj Institutions and to examine the factors responsible for the performances of these women. The present investigation highlights the participation and empowerment of Dalit women in PRI of Nanded district of Maharashtra by using quantitative analysis. According to census data of 2001, the ratio of male and female is found to 942:1000 in Nanded district. In Indian society caste system, conventional attitudes, beliefs, and psychology matters for each and every individual. The conditions of Dalit women are still miserable in rural areas. However, many of them are unaware about their rights, roles, and duties while working in PRI. In Finding and conclusion section, it is remarkable to note that the amendment provided a platform and opportunity to Dalit women to become as a leader in PRI. Though, the pace of leadership is still very slow, but it will be seen definitely increased in nearby future.

[Key words: Panchyat Raj Institution, Dalit Women, Participation, Empowerment]

Panchyat Raj Institutions (PRI) has created space for the representatives of SC, ST, OBC, NTs and women of such respective social groups of the country after 73rd constitutional amendment. The aim of Panchyati Raj Institutions was to decentralize power from centre to grass root levels and subsequently, 73rd constitutional amendment was to provide space to the voiceless, powerless people of the grass root levels in the three tier systems of the nation (Gram Panchyat, Panchyat Samiti and Zillha Parishad). This decision was taken after the experience of 40 years of independence of the nation.

Developmental programmes, welfare policies were failed to bring out changes in the lives of down –trodden sections of the society including women. Therefore, policy makers and developmental agencies started to implement participative approach and focused on inclusive- development approach. However, by keeping this broad perspective PRI provided space, power, opportunities and platform to women leaders to lead and participate in decision- making process. In the context of this scenario, women are coming in the public places which were historically restricted to them.

It is known that Indian society was based on caste hierarchy, conventional attitudes, beliefs etc. Further the conditions of *Dalit* women are still miserable in rural areas. However, many of them are unaware about their rights, roles and duties while working in PRI.

Various studies focus on the different aspect of the women's participation and PRI with different perspective. The scholars (Joshi, Narawani. 2002) argued that Panchyat Raj is the most viable and proper mechanism for decentralization. Another group of scholars (Behar and Kumar, 2002) also argued that the new PRIs have potential as well power to usher in a new era of change and development in accordance with people's needs and priorities and to revitalize a deeply troubled system of democracy have to add emerging debates, arguments of the academicians on this issue.

The word *Dalit* as per oxford dictionary means, a member of the lower caste, nevertheless, it is used as a term for the scheduled castes in our country. *Dalit* is a moderately new term, while scheduled caste is a statutory term used for those castes, which have been incorporated in a particular schedule in our constitution. The origin of the *Dalit* goes back to 1500 B.C. Studies about their

origin tell us that they were a people without a name and without a place in the social organization of the time. But it was the fake understanding about their status from centuries back up to present day scenario.

According to S. K. Chatterjee, the original Indians were the *Shudras* (the serving caste) and the slaves (today's *Dalit*). These were the pre-Aryan people who had lived in India for thousands of years. The Aryans came into India around 1500 BC and made the local people their servants and slaves. The *Dalit* are the earliest settlers of India, because of the long history of oppression; they have lost their self-identity as human beings. Religion plays an important role in the life and growths of people (Chatterjee, S. K. 1986). 'Adi dravida', 'Adi karnataka' and 'Adi andhra' are words used in the states of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh respectively to make out people of formerly untouchable castes in official documents. These words, mostly the prefix of 'adi' indicate the aboriginal inhabitants of land (Rajawat, M. 2005). There are many such historical evidences which states that the formerly untouchables had their own history culture i.e. known as Dravidian culture. Their history and culture had been demolished after the spread of Aryans in the region of *saptasindhu*, later it is misspelled as Hindus.

Status of *Dalit* women in India

They are one of the largest socially segregated groups everywhere in the world, and constitute 2% of the world's total population. *Dalit* women constitute half of the total *Dalit* population, and 16.3% of the total Indian female population. In India the issue of *Dalit* women is a very volatile and sensitive one. One should imagine the severe conditions of women belonging to *Dalit* groups or communities. They experience on two counts one being a *Dalit* and also a women. In rural areas *Dalit* women are intimately well-known with their caste status ensuring social disabilities. An eminent feminist historian Chakravarti, elaborates the relationship between caste, gender, feminism and politics in her recent work (Chkrawarti, U. 2003). *Dalit* women are discriminated against three times over- they are poor, they are women, and they are *Dalit*. *Dalit* women are discriminated against not only by people of upper castes, but also within their own communities. It means that they are facing the double dose of discrimination within and outside the

family. (Marilee, K. 1995) opines that empowerment process can be achieved at individual and collective levels. It is through involvement in groups, developing awareness, ability to organize, taking action and bringing change in society. Women's empowerment can be viewed as multiplicity of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. It can be focuses on three aspects which are as (i) awareness, (ii) capacity building and skill development and (iii) participation and control.

Political participation has been defined as the process of any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, periodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods, and intended to influence the choice of political leaders at any level of government, local or national (Winer, Myson and Chowdhury, D 1995)

Historical Development of PRI

The Panchyat as a unit of village government had existed in India for many centuries. The term Panchyat literally means "council of five". The principle of the *Panchyat* is '*panch parmashwar*' meaning 'god is speaking through the five'. The word Panchyat as a traditional one refers to the 'five elders' in a village who mediated conflicts and spoke on behalf of all residents of a village (Rao, S. N. 2007). The members in traditional Panchyat are from funding families or from the Brahmins and the superior cultivators (Prabhat, D. 1997). It is clearly indicates that in ancient period dalit or lower castes people had no opportunity to participate or represent in decision making process the Panchyat had powered to the upper castes peoples. It is said that there is no doubt that villages were the real centers of social life and important units in the country's economy.

Panchyati Raj Institutions and Dalit women

The 73rd Amendment Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha bill was ratified by 17 State Assemblies in 1993 and came into force as Constitution 73rd Amendment Act from the 24th April 1993. The 73rd Amendment Act has added a new Part in the constitution- Part Nine – consisting of 16 Articles and the 11th Schedule .The functions of the Panchyati Raj institutions have been clearly spelt out in Article 243G of the Constitution, read with Article 243 ZD and the 11th Schedule. The Constitution says in the 11th Schedule that this empowerment shall relate or could relate to

the 29 subjects listed in the Schedule. Any form of Panchyat Raj that falls short of this cannot be described as genuine Panchyat Raj (Iyer, M. S. Frontline, May 21-June 3, 2005).

In ancient period Indian society was based on Varna system. The various social problems arose due to rigid framework of caste system. The situation of *Dalit* in India was very inexcusable. To overcome this crucial problem our constitution has been bestowed some special kinds of reservation for SCs, STs, and OBCs through the 73rd amendment; and it has made provision of 33% seat reserved for women in PRI. By the virtue of this provision today thousands of women enter in PRI. Many of them are showing their performances very appreciable but also many are unable to take benefit of the reservation due to patriarchal values, village structure, and dominating nature of caste and class etc.

Nanded district is one of the important districts of Maharashtra state. It was the part of old Hyderabad province before the creation of Maharashtra state. When Nizam province had dissolved India it became part of Hyderabad province. In the year 1956, based on the linguistic region structure all Marathi spoken districts initially included in the Bombay province and after the creation of Maharashtra state in the year 1960 all districts included in this state. (Pawar M.C.1995) The 2001 census data reveals that total population of district is 28, 68,158 and the SCs population is 4, 22,922 and its 18.25 %. (statistical office Nanded district, 2009).

After the analysis has been made regarding status of *Dalit* women and PRI in India. It becomes but pertinent to know the level of participation of these Dalit women representatives in PRI. Whether they can play roles on their own capacities or not; it is expected that they should not be depend upon their family members to participate in the functioning, decision-making process of PRI etc.

Objectives of the study

To examine the impact of 73rd constitutional amendments on the socio-political life of these women.

To assess the extent and magnitude of their participation in Panchyat Raj Institutions.

To study the factors responsible for the performances of these women.

Methodology:

The study has been carried out in three tiers of Panchyat Raj Institutions i.e. Zilha Parishad, Panchyat Samiti, and Gram Panchyat of Nanded District. The universe of the study is *Dalit* women representatives in PRI. In Nanded district there are 1313 gram Panchyat, 16 Panchyat samiti and 3603, and 13, 05, *Dalit* women representatives in PRI respectively. For selection of the sample multi-stage cluster sampling has been used. At the first stage from district, at the second stage Panchyat samiti and lastly at the third stage from gram Panchyat representatives has been selected. Total numbers of representative have been selected from Panchyat samiti and Zilha Parishad. 10 representatives have been selected as a sample at Gram Panchyat level from each block by using purposive sample method. It means exactly 178 women representatives from PRI have been selected for the study.

Tools of the Data Collection

As the nature of study is exploratory, quantitative, both primary and secondary sources of data collection have been used. Secondary sources i.e. Govt. reports publication; articles, journals, internet etc has been used. Interview schedule has been prepared consisting closed questions. Interview schedule has been prepared in local language for the convenience of the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 Age wise distribution of the respondents.

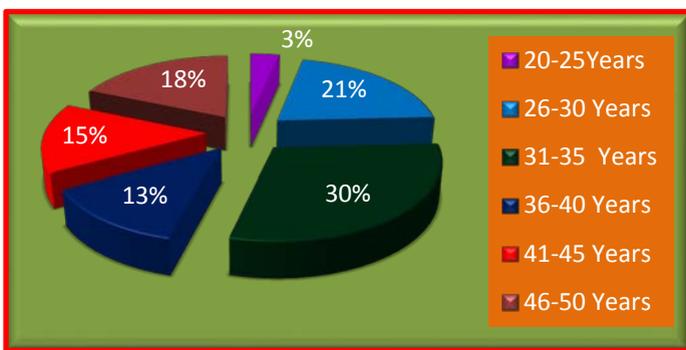


Figure 1 shows the age wise distribution of the respondents. It indicates that majority of the respondents are in the age group of 31-35 years and their percentile 29.80%. Where as 20.80% is in the age group of 26-30 years However, 18.50% are in the age group of 46-50

years. In the age group of 41-45 years there are 14.60% respondents. 12.90% are in the age group of 36-40 years lastly there are 3.40% respondents in the age group of 26- 30 years. Thus, majority of the respondents are in the in the age group of 31-35 years.

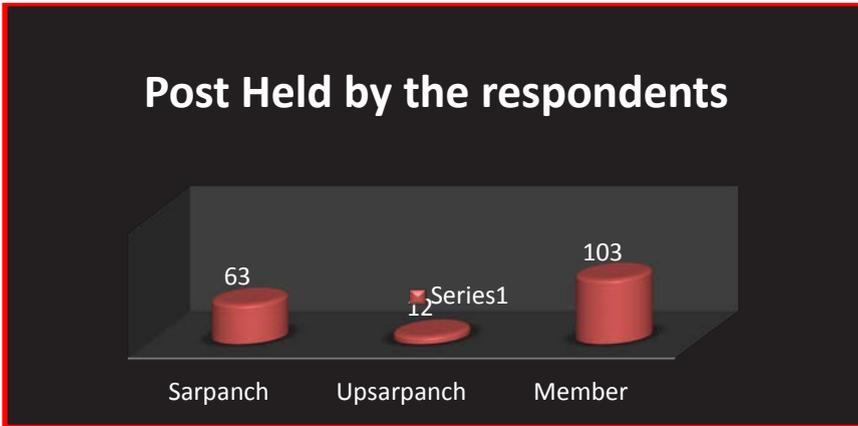
Table no. 1 indicates educational status of respondent.

Sr. No	Educational status of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage
1	Illiterate	40	22.5
2	literate	53	29.8
3	Neo-literate	12	6.7
4	Up to 4 th Standard	25	14.0
5	Up to 7 th Standard	19	10.7
6	Up to 10 th Standard	10	5.6
7	Up to 12 th Standard	17	9.6
8	Above 12 th Standard	1	0.6
9	Other	1	0.6
Total		178	100

Source- Primary Data

There is strong correlation between literacy and life expectancy (Swaminathan and Rawal, 1999: 68). An educated and skilled work force contributes to higher economic growth. Schooling has been seen to have a positive impact on agricultural output. In political and social circumstances too, schooling creates an educated population and a more constructive citizenry. Education empowers and through empowerment affects larger social process. Table shows the educational status of dalit women respondents. The data reveals that out of 178 respondents there are 53 literate respondents. It is seen that 25 respondents completed their education up to 4th standard. 19 respondents up to 7th standard. It is noteworthy here is that 17 respondents completed education up to 12th standard. However, it is seen that 40 respondents are illiterate. Thus, it is observed that most of the respondents are 53 literate it is necessary to provide functional literacy to the *Dalit* women to work efficiently in PRI.

Figure no. 2 Post held by Dalit women in Panchyat Raj Institution.



Source- Primary Data

Fig. no. 2 shows the post held by the respondents in PRI. It is seen that 103 respondents are working as a member in the PRI. However, the data further reveals that 63 respondents working as a sarpanch or president in the PRI. Whereas, remaining 12 respondents in the sample found that they are working as an upsarpanch in the PRI. Thus, it is remarkable to note that maximum respondents are working as a member in PRI.

Table no. 2 indicates willingness of respondent to contest next election in PRI.

Sr No	Willingness of the respondents in contesting election	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	123	69.1
2	No	55	30.9
Total		178	100

Source- Primary Data

Table no. 2 shows the willingness of the respondents in contesting next election. It is clear from the table that 123 (69.10%) respondents like to contest next election. However, 55 (30.90%) respondents do not shown interest in contesting election in PRI.

Table no 3 showing intervention by family members of the respondents in PRI

Sr No	Intervention of family members in PRI	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	137	77.0
2	No	41	23.0
Total		178	100

Source- Primary Data

Table no. 3 gives an analysis about intervention done by family members of the respondents. 137(77 %) respondents opined that their family members intervene in the business of PRI. The intervention is mostly found at all levels, such as while taking decisions, planning, conducting meetings, training programmes etc. However, very few of the respondents 41 (23%) said that there was no intervention found/done by the family members. Hence, it is revealed that, majority of the respondents are dependent on the family members while taking the decisions and working in PRI.

Fig. 3 showing Intervention levels of respondent’s family members in the functioning of PRI.

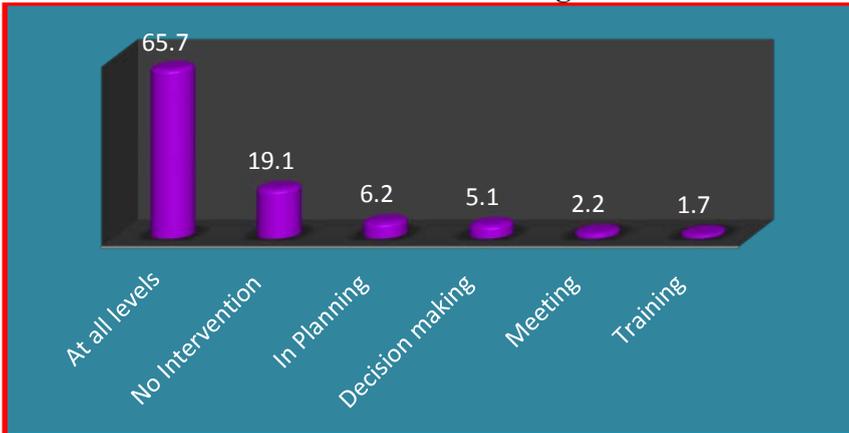


Fig. no. 3 highlights the information about the level of intervention of family members in the functioning of respondents in PRI. The data reveals that 65.70% respondents replied that their family member intervene at all the level. 6.2% respondents said that they intervene only in planning process. 5.1% respondents opined that the intervention is done only in the decision-making process by the family members especially husband or elder son. 2.2%

respondents said that the family members intervene while conducting meetings in PRI. On the other hand, 1.7% respondents said that the family members intervene during training programme. However, 19.10% respondents said that no intervention done by family members while working in PRI. Thus, it is concluded from the fig. 3.3, maximum respondents family members are intervene at all level while working in the PRI. However, very less number of respondents said that no intervention done by family members while working in PRI.

Table no. 4 shows Family members accompanied to respondent in PRI.

Sr. No	Family member accompanies the respondent in PRI	Frequency	Percentage
1	Husband	131	73.6
2	Other	30	16.9
3	Nobody	17	9.6
Total		178	100

Source- Primary Data

Table no.4 gives the information about the family member accompanies the respondents in PRI. The data reveals that 131(73.60%) respondents said that husband is always accompanies to them in the matters of PRI. The reason is that they are dependent on them and due to patriarchal nature of the society. 30 (16.90%) respondents said that mostly their elder son accompanies with them or he looked all the matters of PRI instead of respondents. Moreover, 17 (9.6%) respondents opined that nobody came with them in PRI. The respondents independently handle the working of PRI.

Thus, it is concluded that maximum respondents said that husband is always go together with them to handle the matters of PRI. However, few of the respondents opined that nobody came with them and they are independently handling the matters of PRI.

Table no. 5 indicates Participation of respondents in the training programmes.

Sr. No.	Participation In training programme	Frequ-ency	%	If not reasons of non-participation	Frequency	%
1	Yes	70	39.30 %	No	104	58.40%
2	No	08	60.67 %	Being a woman	01	0.6%
3				Due to villager's pressure	01	0.6%
4				other	02	1.1%
5				N. A.	70	39.30%
	Total	78	100	Total	178	100

Table no.5 highlight, the information about participation of respondents in the training programmes. It is seen that 104 respondents did not participated in the training programme. The data further reveals that 70 respondents are participated in the programme. However, it is observed that 04 respondents have opinion that they did not participate in the training programme due to pressure of villagers and being a dalit woman. Hence, it can be concludes that most of the respondents didn't participate in the training programme due to unawareness and pressure of family members.

Fig. 4 Issues discussed in the meetings of PRI.

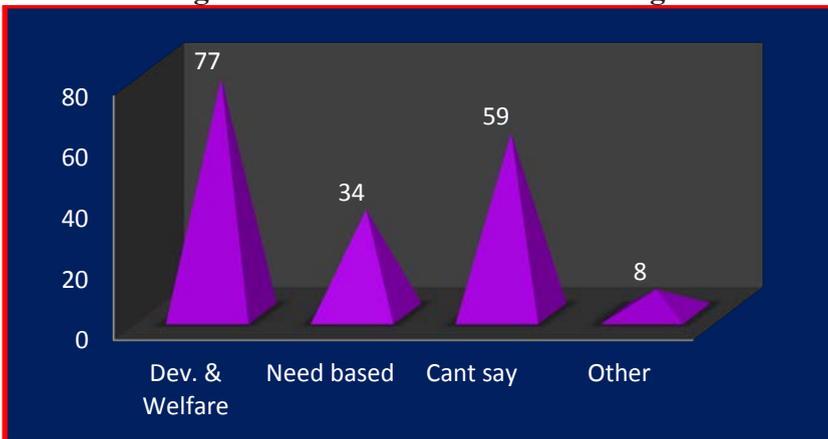


Fig. 4 depicts the information about issues discussed in the meetings. The data reveals that 77 respondents opined that developmental and welfare issues of the community have been discussed in the meeting of PRI. Since, 34 respondents said that some need based issues discussed in the meeting by the members of PRI. However, 59 respondents are unable to highlight the discussion held in the meetings due to their abstention in PRI. Whereas, 08 respondents said that other issues like domestic violence, anti-liquor campaigning has been discussed in the meetings of PRI. Hence, it is clear from the fig. 3 that maximum respondents conclude that developmental and welfare issues of the community discussed in the meeting of PRI. Though 59 respondents are unable to highlight the discussion held in the meetings and 08 respondents said that other issues like domestic violence, anti-liquor campaigning has been discussed.

Fig. no. 5 depicts the information about participation of respondents in the decision-making process of PRI. The data reveals that 90 respondents participate in the decision-making process of PRI with the support of their family members. However, 88 respondents are unable to participate due to unawareness, illiteracy and lack of capacity building etc.

In concluding remarks it is observed that maximum respondents are participating in the decision-making process of PRI with the support of family members. However, few respondents are not capable to participate due to unawareness and illiteracy.

Fig. no. 5 Information about participation of respondents in the decision-making process of PRI.



Table no. 6 Information related to work carried out in housing scheme.

Sr. No.	Work done in housing scheme	Frequency	%	If yes nature of work	Frequency	%
1	Yes	158	88.76 %	Yes	26	14.60
2	No	20	11.23 %	Selection of beneficiaries	107	60.10
3				Gave motivation to the people	25	14.00
4				N.A.	20	11.23%
5	Total	178	100	Total	178	100

Table no. 6 shows work carried out by respondents for housing scheme. The data reveals that 107 respondents have completed the process of selection of beneficiaries for distribution of houses under this scheme. Whereas, 26 respondents said that they have selected beneficiaries in the *gramsabha* for housing scheme. However, 25 respondents told that they motivate people for the scheme and 19 people did not to work in the housing scheme for their village. Thus it is concluded that maximum number of respondents has worked for housing scheme and they are quite successful in their work. However, few of the respondents are motivating people for the scheme.

Fig. 6 Graphical information about facilities made available for drinking water

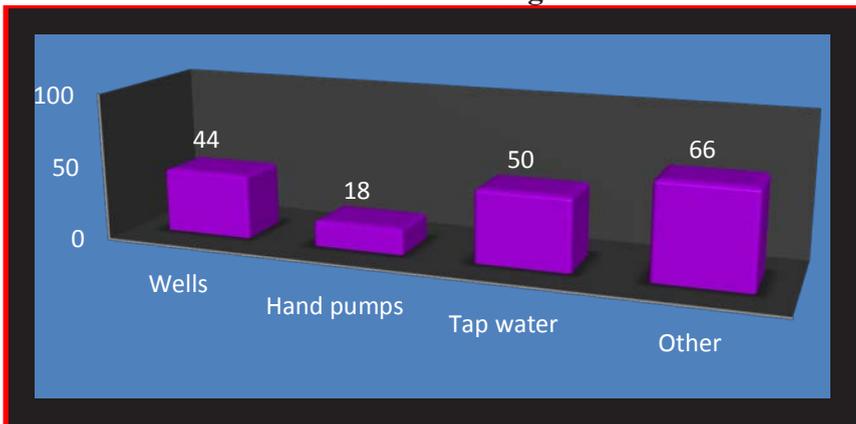


Fig. 6 shows the information about facility made available for drinking water for the community members 44 respondents are able to made available drinking water facility through wells. Whereas, 66 respondents provide facility through other sources such as generating common fund *loksahabhag* people’s participation. However, there are 50 respondents who facilitate the need of drinking water through tap water connection from gram panchyat fund. It is seen that almost entire district has facility of drinking water through wells, hand pumps, tap water and some other sources. It is found that in case of scarcity of water majority of respondents calls a tanker for their village and some respondents took the help from higher authority. Thus, it is observed that almost entire district has facility of drinking water through wells, hand pumps, tap water and some other sources. However, in case of scarcity of water, majority of respondents calls a tanker and very few of respondents leave the situation on peoples as it is.

Fig. 7 Information about use of alternative source for load shading.

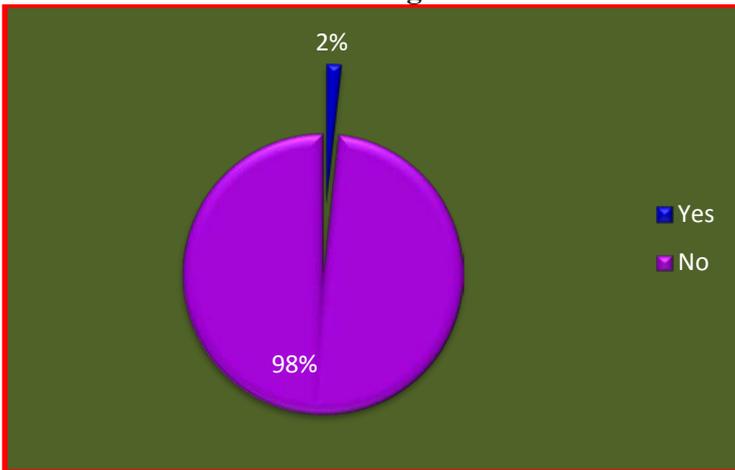


Fig. 7 gives the information about use of alternative source for electric load shading. It is seen that 98.30 respondents are unable to develop alternative source for electric load shading. Whereas 1.70 respondents opined that they use solar energy as an alternate source of load shading. Hence, it is clear from the figure 3.4.16 that majority of respondents are unable to develop alternative source for load shading.

Table no. 7 gives analysis about steps taken by the respondents for improvement of quality education of schools. The data reveals that 20.80% respondents being the president or member of school management committee (SMC), and they gave suggestion for better quality of education. However, 17.40% respondents opined that recently they are organized meetings in this regards. Since, 15.70% respondents said that they are only attending the meetings of school management committee. Though, 29.20% respondents told that they did not attend meetings of SMC and 16.90% respondents are unable to perform the work due to abstention in PRI and pressure from family member also. Thus, it is conclude that some of the respondents are being president or member of school, and some of the respondents are unable to perform work due to non-participation in PRI and pressure from family member also.

Table no. 7 Analysis about steps for improvement of quality education for schools

Sr. No.	Work done in improving quality of education	Frequency	%	If yes nature of work	Frequency	%
1	Yes	148	83.14	Yes	31	17.40
	No	30	16.90	Give suggestion	37	20.80
				Attend meeting for quality education	28	15.70
				Don't attend meeting	52	29.20
				N. A.	30	16.90
	Total	178	100	Total	178	100

Table no. 8 indicates the information about work carried out in cleanness programs conducted by the respondents in their village. The data clarify that 35 respondents have the opinion that it is necessary for rural development and 30 respondents said that it

should treat as a compulsory programme by the government. However, 20 respondents said that in their tenure they have been worked for “*Nirmal gram swachata abhiyan*” and 18 respondents does not give proper response due to fear of what will happen as they were not serious for the program when the schedule was displaced by Z.P. since, 58 respondents said that their village was not participated in such type of the program. However, 18 respondents said that due to participation in “*Nirmal gram swachata abhiyan*” program, living standard of the villagers might be enhanced. Thus, it is reveals that majority of the respondents have the opinion that it is necessary for rural development and it is beneficial for increase the living standard of the villagers.

Table no. 8 Information about work done in cleanliness programmes.

Sr. No.	Work done in cleanliness programmes	Frequency	%	If yes nature of work	Freq-ency	%
	Yes	120	67.40	Yes	23	12.90
	No	58	32.60	Necessary for development	35	19.70
				Enhanced standard of living	21	11.80
				Govt. Should make compulsory for every village	23	12.90
				Don't express opinion	18	10.10
				N. A.	58	32.60
	Total	178	100	Total	178	100

Findings and conclusions

After analysis and interpretation of data, observations made at the time of data collection discussion and interviews with the respondent's findings has been drawn as given below:

While studying an impact of 73rd amendment on the socio-political life of these representatives it is seen that the amendment created a positive picture and also provides an opportunity but these representatives unable to take the benefit of the same due to

patriarchal attitude of family member, these women enter in PRI as the seat was declared or reserved for them only and the male member of the family wants to contest election on the behalf of these women. There was no positive impact of the amendment found on the life of these women as even today, especially in rural areas of *Dalit* communities have lower/secondary status in a society like ours. Then there was no question of these women status and the changes would occur in their status in family and society as well. Amendment created a golden opportunity to emerge as a leader but majority of them unable to take the benefit of the opportunity. *Dalit* women faces double dose of discrimination within and outside the family. The impact of amendment on these women found very less or negligible due to the submissive status in the family and society as well.

While assessing the extent and magnitude about their participation in PRI it is found that these women found as a proxy candidate, they put signature where their male counter parts says due to non-participation in training programme, low level of literacy rate, lack of capacity building and mostly the patriarchal attitude of family members. These representatives did not participate in decision- making process of PRI. They are unable to put their voice in the PRI. Majority of them did not participate in meetings held in PRI. Only Panchyat samiti and Zilha Parishad member participate in the business of PRI, while at gram Panchyat level their participation is ignored or negligible by male counterpart in PRI.

While studying the factors responsible for the performances of these women it is found that the intervention of family member, lower status in the society being a woman they are facing double dose of discrimination firstly at family level due to submissive status, male dominancy and patriarchal attitude of the family members and secondly due to their low status of caste in the society, low level of literacy, lack of abilities, motivation, and inspiration non-participation in training programme. Very few representatives are able to prove their tenure in PRI without the family support while majority of them are unable to do same and found under pressure of family members, deeply rooted caste system and complex nature of Indian social structure. Besides this the level of education, motivation given by SHG to the

representatives has been developed capacities and abilities of the representatives.

Finally, it can be concluded that the hypotheses are found true and correct and they can be related with the framed objectives for the study. The amendment provided a platform and opportunity to these women to emerge as a leader or a representative in PRI but the pace leadership is very slow or relatively negligible. Kinship has played a vital role in the PRI. The intervention of family member in each and every activity of PRI shows the important role played by the kinship factor. Apart from this educational level, capacity building, inspiration from N.G.O's also played a very crucial role in this regard.

Suggestions

After analysis and interpretation of data and my personal observations we would like to give some suggestions/remedies to improve *Dalit* women participation in PRI.

Lack of reading and writing skill is an important obstacle in role performance of women members. Therefore, in order to develop reading and writing skill, a functional course should be introduced for neo-literate and primary educated *Dalit* women members.

The training programme should be based on issues and programmes relevant to their performance and covered in step by step.

It is better to give training to the women members at their locality so that they can attend the training.

Activities of women members other than the schemes should be encouraged by assessing the performance and awarding them in each year.

Family member's intervention should prohibit at each and every level so that representatives could play their roles and perform their duties effectively in PRI on their own.

Local N.G.Os would play very crucial role in creating awareness about functioning of PRI among the representatives at grass root level.

While contesting election for any post in the country eligibility criteria should be fixed for the representatives say for example at least educational qualification.

Changes will have to come at the psychological level first then automatically every social institution, system will be definitely changed.

The upper caste people should not put pressure or burden on the representatives while working in PRI. So as a result of this these women could work efficiently with enjoying the benefit of reservation.

Much needs to be done in terms of female literacy, independent voting rights, change in the status in the family and society, for women to fully participate in the public sphere.

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