

# **WOMEN ASSERTION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AT THE GRASSROOT LEVEL: ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF AN INDIAN VILLAGE PANCHAYAT**

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## **I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Political systems; whatever the ideology, form, and mobilization capacity, rest on the virtual exclusion or marginalization of women from formal politics. The irony of women's exclusion from formal politics is aptly conveyed by the situation of women in India before and ouster of the British. In the decades before independence, women constituted 10 percent of those jailed for anti-British activities. In the decades since independence, however, women have never held more than 8 percent of the seats in the *Lok Sabha*, the lower house of Parliament. It was easier to get arrested for supporting democracy than it is to get elected to the democratic institutions that Indian nationalists were fighting to obtain (Nelson & Chowdhury, 1997).

Sociological studies of politics often seem to be concerned exclusively with the problem of social class in general and with caste in particular reference to India. The village studies in the fifties marked a turning point in the empirical investigation of relationship between society and politics. Not everyone who studies the Indian village took a central interest in its political structure, but hardly anyone who was involved in the village study could altogether ignore its influence on village social life.

### **THE PRESENT STUDY**

The emphasis in the present study is not on the large number of variables relevant to the study of political change but some what narrower consideration of how shift in the composition, orientation and distribution of social groups having a bearing on what is sometimes described as political system. Due to the reservation of seats in the *panchayats* for women, new groups are emerging at the local village level politics. During the period 1992-2002 two elections have already held; the circulation in the political field has been going on with an extraordinary rapidity. The political aristocracy of the village politics in terms of *panchayats* has been recruited from the lowest classes; and the classes themselves, at least temporarily, have changed their relative position in the whole social pyramid.

The present study tries to study the changing power structure in terms of a new class structure that has been created by the reservation of women in *panchayats*. In terms of the political participation of women, the change in the power structure has already been done by the reservation in the *panchayats* by the 73rd amendment act. In the present study, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between the formal distribution of authority and power, and the actual exercise of power. The two are related but they are not the same. How much power some one is actually able to exercise in an institution depends not only on their formal position in it but also on their political skill, and what may be called as their general social capital.

The operation of any social system implies some prerequisite processes and complementary roles. Whenever an old system or institution is replaced by a new one or any new element is added, the degree of its success, stability and growth would depend upon effective and quick development of the prerequisites. Thus, the response of the existing social structure becomes a precondition for the success of an institutional innovation. The new element that is added to the *panchayati raj* system (formal rural power system) is the reservation of women in *panchayats*. The role and the performance in terms of the political participation of women in *panchayats* and other developmental activities can only be judged by understanding the structural institutions and forces into which new system was introduced.

One can formulate the following traditional structural institutions into which the reservation to women in *panchayats* was provided:

1. The presence of male dominated society characterized by the presence of traditional elite in the polity of village.
2. There is a vast gap in the status of male in comparison to female. There is an economic and cultural gap in between the women who are new climbers to the political system and those who earlier captured the power at the village level.
3. There is an absence of effective complementary changes in the social structure before implementing or igniting any change in the power structures.
4. This is true that 33% reservation for women is not because of any mass movement by the people. It was not because women demanded their due share in power or contested in large numbers to capture seats in the *panchayats*. The women were caught quite unprepared by this development.
5. There is a diffused form of disapproval on the part of some section of the village against this reservation policy.

It is very difficult to evaluate the success and failure of village *panchayats* in terms of the participation of women without taking into consideration the situation and the structural institutions in which the reservations are provided to them. The problem of effective leadership, lack of democratic mechanism for women in decision making, existence of factions, casteism etc. are in fact consequences of the interaction of indigenous non formal social structure dominated by men and the formal social structure and values of

the village *panchayats* dominated by women. In fact if all the factors are not interrelated than any analysis in terms of isolation may not present the real situation and hence the need for analysis in terms of total rural system is required with emphasis on one aspect that is the participation of women in politics.

## II

### SAMPLE AND RESEARCH METHOD

The emphasis in the present study is on the village *panchayat* which includes four villages. Therefore it tries to understand not only the dynamics of rural power with reference to women within a village but it also covers a wide range of variables in terms of caste, class and women with respect to inter village interaction. Therefore, the in-depth study of complex interactions and negotiations of village politics is required. In order to understand the realization of the potential of empowerment vested in these institutions (mainly village *panchayats* and reservation to women) require us to return to the classic sociological mode of "village studies" with new agenda of women empowerment. Under the present study a village *panchayat* *Suvansipur* of block *Bakshi ka Talab* of *Lucknow* district is taken as the area of the study. An ethnographic field work is done taking into consideration both quantitative and qualitative method of research. The basic purpose of selecting a sample is very simple and reasonable. As the village *panchayat* is the smallest unit of the political system that we have; therefore it is imperative to include the representatives working there in our sample. Not only the representatives of the village *panchayat* are important but the people who elect these representatives are also very important, therefore the sample also included them in the study. Though the women are important and emphasis has been provided to them, the men folks are also important because they are the important sections who are responsible for the promotion and impediment of the women's participation in politics. So their inclusion in the sample is also justified.

There are number of village *panchayats*, only '4' *gram-panchayats* are chosen for the pilot study. Basically the random order method used here in sampling is based on the 'principle of equal appearing interval'. Information has been collected from:

1. Women *gram-pradhans* of these representative *gram-panchayats* .
2. *Gram-Panchayat* has different committees such as '*samta samiti*', '*vikas samiti*'. There is a provision of "six" such committees in each *panchayat*. The women representatives of these committees are taken for the study.
3. Female members from the respective "*gram-sabha*" are chosen for the study.
4. Male members of the "*gram-panchayat*" and "*gram-sabha*" are also taken into consideration. Some case studies, interview and observation in addition has been used for substantiating the study.

The basic reasons for the selection of the present *gram panchayat* are as following:

1. The distance from the block office was an important reason to select *Suvansipur gram panchayat*. This was nearly 20 kms. away from block office. All other *gram panchayat* surveyed were in the radius of 5-7 kms. In all the earlier studies I have found that the researchers chose those destinations that were nearer to their place and easily accessible. Therefore, I decided to go to the remote *gram panchayat* so that I can feel the pain and suffering they are going through.
2. Only in *Suvansipur gram panchayat* we came to meet the *gram pradhan*. In others only *pradhan-pati*<sup>i</sup> was available to us.
3. The pattern of caste distribution and the *dalit* assertion as, we observed here was absent in other *gram panchayats*.
4. Except in *Suvansipur*, in all other *gram panchayats* the seat of power was traditionally associated with the family of the *pradhans*.
5. In terms of socio-economic, political and other variables like land-holding, cattle, government jobs, education, it seems that *gram pradhan* of *Suvansipur* lagged behind others.
6. In terms of infrastructure like electricity, road, water, and other amenities, this *gram panchayat* lagged behind and showed its *dalit* character.

## II

### THE FIELD SITE

District Lucknow is part of central *Ganga* plain of the state covering an area of 2528 km<sup>2</sup>. It lies between north latitudes 26<sup>0</sup>30' and 27<sup>0</sup>10'; east longitudes 80<sup>0</sup>30' and 80<sup>0</sup>13'. The total population of the district is 3681416 as per census 2001. The density of population is 1456 persons per k.m<sup>2</sup>. The block *Bakshi Ka Talab* is located in between north and east of Lucknow district touching the boundaries of *Barabanki* and *Sitapur* district respectively. This is the largest block in terms of area in U.P. It covers nearly 350 k.m<sup>2</sup>. *Gram Panchayat Suvansipur* is a part of block *Bakshi Ka Talab* and consists of four villages. The distance from the block office is nearly 22 k.ms. The distance between the villages is approximately three hundred meters to eight hundred meters. All the villages are not connected to the pitch road. All the villages are not electrified. There is only one bus in the morning for the block office; no other means of conveyance is available. Each village is dominated by different caste group. This domination is in terms of population.

Table – 1

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOUSE HOLDS**

Village	Number of house holds		
	Schedule Caste	Others	Total
<i>Puhuppur</i>	76	28	104
<i>Suvansipur</i>	2	44	46
<i>Rajapur</i>	20	22	42
<i>Shivrajpur</i>	50	5	55

The distribution of the households in terms of caste group suggests that majority of population belongs to schedule caste. In this category the three major caste groups which dominate the *panchayat* are *nat*, *chamar* and *pasi*. These three caste groups are in majority in different villages of the *panchayat*; *nats* in *Puhuppur*, *pasis* in *Rajapur* and *chamars* in *Shivrajpur* village respectively.

**THE BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE**

The process of democratic decentralization depends not only on the devolution of power to the grass root level but also on the resources, facilities and other capacity building mechanisms available at the grass root level. After observing the amenities and other facilities, the pathetic condition of the *gram panchayat* under study seems very obvious. As far as the electricity and water is concerned the village *Puhuppur* is still waiting for the electricity. Not only that the water facility though available in the village is not sufficient. There are complains from many sections regarding undue distribution of water-pump handsets. Overall, if one analyses the facilities available in the *gram panchayat*, it suggest that only the basic life sustaining facilities are available. Other facilities are altogether absent as if present they are nearly 20 kms away. Without any proper transport facility, it is difficult for the members of the village *panchayat* to get these facilities.

The villages of the *panchayat* are connected by *pucca*<sup>ii</sup> road. During my initial stage of the fieldwork village *Puhuppur* and *Shivrajpur* were not attached to *pucca* road. Presently only village *Shivrajpur* is not attached to *pucca* road. The interesting thing is that village *Shivrajpur* is a *majra*<sup>iii</sup>(part)of village *Suvansipur*. Therefore the special *Ambedkar*<sup>iv</sup> village status given to it is of no use as maximum benefit of this has been taken by the *yadavas* of the *Suvansipur*. The village *Shivrajpur* is still waiting for the *pucca* road. Not only this, *kharanja* which is joining these hamlets is in bad shape. The electricity line has still not touched that village. The houses in the village *Razapur*,

*Puhuppur* and *Suvansipur* in majority are made up of brick and cement but some houses are made of mud. While majority houses in *Shivrajpur* are made up of mud.

The housing pattern shows that same caste group persons are residing in a particular area of the village. There is no clear cut pattern of housing design. They are clusters made up of one caste group. People belonging to the same caste group live together, but not necessarily people belonging to same class. The reason may be understood as a fact that in a village a caste or group of caste constitutes a community. The changes in the independent India show that the class system and the distribution of power have acquired a more fluid system and have dissociated from the structure of the caste.

Overall, the *panchayat* represents insufficiency in terms of resources like education, health, transport and other amenities. The insufficiency is very acute in terms of women education and employment. The villagers are dependent upon outside resources and employment to generate economic gains. The villages of the *panchayat* are not self sufficient with reference to the resources, employment and amenities available to its people. Truly it visualizes the myth of self-sufficiency of Indian villages.

### III

#### **POLITICAL, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC INTERACTION**

The various social arrangements through which politics, economics, religion and kinship separate may become differentiated, but they nevertheless remain well connected. Tracing their interconnection, bringing them to light and analyzing them are major objectives of what may be considered to be the specifically sociological approach to the study of politics. Kinship, religion and economics all influence politics at various levels and in various ways, but their influence is neither always open nor always direct. The outcome of a political contest is some times determined, and determined decisively, by forces that are external to and apparently unconnected with the political system as differentiated and specialized system (Beteille: 2002). The present study concentrated on a sociological analysis of the role of women in the participation of the village affairs and power dynamics of the *panchayat* taking into consideration the interplay of politics, economics and socio-cultural factors. The approach of the study was limited in the sense that it provided attention to limited number of variables and tried to study the basic pattern of stratification of the *panchayat* and the place of women in this stratification system. The duration of the field work extended from June, 2003 to June, 2007. This provided the researcher a chance to observe the pattern of interaction and participation of women in the *panchayat* as well as the change of power structure. Therefore, the researcher was in a position to observe the pattern of power change and the dethronement of a woman who headed the *panchayat* for ten years.

The participation and interaction of women in the political system of village include both formal and informal political institution. Not only this the other factors well within which the whole drama of participation of women is played, can not be ignored. As these are the factors which motivated, set the pace and control the dynamics of power at the micro

level of the village *panchayat*. An attempt was made to place each system in isolation and to study them separately but their interaction and interrelations can not be ignored as the village political life is not at all an isolated affair; it is very much affected by the other factors and vice-versa.

## CASTE

In terms of socio cultural and economic system, the caste is one of the important variables which is dominating the scenario and dictating the dynamics of power structure. In the whole process women often have to take on the responsibility for continuing caste-based occupation and maintaining the household, when men give up their traditional occupation on account of the low ritual status or inadequate returns. This burden falls upon women. This is very true for the *nat* women as beggary is the profession of *nat* community. The men folk are no more involved in the whole process, therefore the household depends on the small lands which are not sustainable and so the women folk go for begging. This traditional occupation is still maintained by the womenfolk of the group. This is the case when a woman of *nat* community is heading the *panchayat*. Kinship structure is patrilineal and patrilocal. The inheritance is solely through the male line and after marriage the girl goes off to live with her husband's family. After marriage she is taken as a member of her husband's family. Custom of *purdah*(veil) exists not only among Hindus but also among *nats*. This prevents the womenfolk to participate and assert their desires on the political front.

In terms of caste, though the *nat* woman headed the seat of power for more than ten years, this whole process of power dynamics is determined by *yadava* caste group. The *yadava* due to their population size and economic power create a power block which dominate and determine the agenda and decision making. Though *yadava* caste group is not a cohesive group, there is stratification in the *yadava* caste group according to the resources they possess. But this cleavage in the *yadavas* is not so assertive as to break their domination in the power structure of the village.

A *nat* woman heading the seat of power for a long period of time does not suggest that she is the representative of the women but in the socio-economic and political environment within which she holds the office suggest that she represents a particular caste group *nat*. So any mobilization and change brought about by the change of power in terms of a woman heading the seat of power is very much conditioned by the fact, to which caste she belongs to.

The important factor providing impetus and priority to caste in comparison to women as a class is the fact that *nat* belongs to a cultural system which is totally different than the mainstream culture. Therefore, they are not the integral part of the caste hierarchy but an outsider. This factor went in the favour of *nats* as well as in *yadavas*. *Yadavas* in the changing power equation, when the seat was reserved for schedule caste woman do not have to find out any caste group from the traditional hierarchy present in the village. But they found *nat* to be an easy caste group whom they can support and garner the benefit and maintain the supremacy of their caste group. Whereas *nats* who were outsider, did have some saying by the support of the *yadava*, captured the seat of power. This fact that

woman *pradhan* is firstly representing *nat* caste than women folk can be ascertained by the fact that as the nature of seat changed (from schedule caste woman to schedule caste), the *nat* woman lost the election. This position may be explained in words of Gail Ombedt(2005): *The obstacles to women's equal participation in governance are deeply embedded in South-Asian socio-cultural patterns. In case of India this extreme form of patriarchy is linked to caste system; the maintenance of caste boundaries through bans on intermarriage( roti, beti, vyavahar) requires a high degree of control over sexuality and generally, over the independence of women.*

## **WOMENS PARTICIPATION**

To analyze the women's participation in politics, the area has been divided into two main categories. First, where the women are in the political process and second, what do they do when they get there? The answer to these questions was given by analysing the different variables of women as voters, women as candidates and women performance in the activities of the village. As far as the women as voters are concerned, they participated in voting and their interest and motivation was overwhelming. But this interest and motivation is generalized as it is not confined to the womenfolk. Women as a contestants say something; when the seat was reserved for woman, many women came to the political front and fought the election of *pradhan* but as this reservation was withdrawn, only one woman candidate came to contest the election. The numbers of women increased in the village *panchayat*, there are nine women out of total eleven members in the *panchayat*. The reason may be assigned to the fact that the position of member village *panchayat* is no more lucrative therefore men folk have given preference to women. The general trend at the block and district level show such type of approach.

Out side formal local politics, women are involved in community action, but this remains invisible because of its informal nature. The women's participation in socio-cultural occasions and festivals was more in comparison to political affairs. But where new participatory structure are put in place, which might enable more access for informal women's association, other political imperatives such a caste and ethnic politics of representation take precedence over gender. *In situation away from home and their locality, men tend to be more relaxed about rules of commensality; in similar context women are both chaperoned and watched over carefully and are expected to follow these rules more strictly. Men have the excuse that they have to move about with all kinds of people. Women of course are not permitted such freedom* (Dube, 2003). The *nat* woman *pradhan* was unable to mobilize the women of *panchayats* because the adjective of an outsider (different than the culture of mainstream) isolated her from the broader socio-cultural system.

Social honour in the caste system is very closely tied to ritual values. Styles of life which are highly esteemed are generally associated with a large number of ritual restrictions. *The place of women as active agents and instructors in the areas of food and rituals also imply that women who command its repertoire of rules gain special respect that gives them a certain self identity and self esteem. Thus, the nurture of self esteem and self assertion on the part of individual women is inextricably tied to maintenance of family prestige. Responsibility for the preservation of traditions, maintenance of the sanctity of*



*bounded space, control over rituals and the task of socialization give women a sense of power over people and situations. The processes within which women carve out a living space also reinforce caste and its boundaries* (Dube, 2003). These restrictions are followed by all the castes with reference to *nat* castes in terms of commensality, food and other cultural interactions. In the case of inter caste sexual relation a man incurs external pollution which can be washed off easily but a women incurs internal pollution which pollutes her permanently. It should be clear that upper caste women are much more vulnerable to permanent pollution than lower caste. With reference to this the participation of lower caste women was better in comparison to higher caste.

The important factor is that in rural areas the indicator of showing the status is the withdrawal of women from external affairs. The more the women are working outside, the less status assigned to it. The study shows that the more the economic and social status the less is the participation. During the elections and other festive occasions the higher economic status led to the withdrawal of women from such occasions. This withdrawal was more obvious in terms of higher caste group. This phenomena has been observed by Daniel Thorner(1992). According to him, *the primary aim of all classes in the agrarian structure has been not to increase their income by adopting more efficient methods, but to rise in social prestige by abstaining in so far as possible from physical labour*. The higher caste groups who are no more important in the power structure of the village do show such withdrawal symptoms and remain aloof from the affairs of the village instead of participating in the affairs to generate more avenues for development

## **THE CASTE-CLASS RELATIONSHIP**

In traditional society, there was much greater consistency between the class system and caste structure. The class system was largely subsumed under the caste structure. The *gram panchayat Suvansipur* mainly constitutes of agriculture as its main occupation. Much of the land is owned by the *yadavas*. The *nat*, *chamar* and *pasi* caste owned very little of the land. The relationship between the caste structure and class system has been a dynamic one .There is an overlap between the two systems. The class system has gradually been dissociating itself from the caste structure though this dissociation is relative. But with reference to women, caste still plays an important role. Any attempt in the formation of women as a class is restricted by the caste and other socio-cultural restrictions.

The distinction between caste and class may be understood in terms of position of two caste group *yadavas* and *thakur*. *Yadavas* are lower in caste hierarchy but higher in class system; on the other hand *thakurs* are placed higher than *yadavas* in caste hierarchy but low in terms of class. The *nats*, *chamars* and *pasi* caste group are placed low in caste as well as in class system. *Nats* in fact are considered to be an outsider.

The relations between classes are not going under fast change and this stagnant position is not corresponding to the changes in the distribution of power. The ownership of land is still with *yadavas* but power has shifted from the traditional elite of the village that is

*thakurs* and *yadavs* to new caste groups in the form of *nats* and *pasis*. This power shifting occurred due to a compulsion of reservation of seats in the local political institutions but this reservation could not bring about any economic change. As a result of this the actual power assertion is limited by the restraint of economic power on the part of lower caste group. The involvement of women in the whole affair is restricted by the socio-cultural factor in form of caste and religion on the one hand and economic factors on the other hand. Therefore the variable of women participation is subservient to the basic force of caste which is also determining the class to some extent. Earlier there was greater congruence between caste and class in terms of power structure than today. The powerful families in the past were the big land owning families, these included the *thakurs* and later the *yadavas* emerged as the second important group with more than average land holding in the *panchayat*. But now political power is not directly related to ownership of land, so the seat of power which was attached to the higher or elite caste group in terms of economic resources is no more their personal choice. New bases of power independent of caste and class are appearing and most important variable is the numerical strength. The *nats* represents this very clearly in terms of power dynamics of the *panchayats*. Now power is no more monopoly of any single caste in the *panchayat* but it is the balance of power between different castes. This balance is no doubt maintained and controlled by the economically resourceful *yadava* caste group who are numerically more also. But this maintenance of balance by *yadava* is not absolute in terms of caste as this caste group is divided into different class, so any act of balancing is not unanimous but it has certain cleavages with it.

Overall, the popular leaders of the *panchayat* are not from big land owner class and caste. The *pradhan* of the *panchayat*, who is heading the seat of power, owns some land but this is not the principle source of power. The reservation to the women and schedule caste has changed the power configuration of the *panchayat* cutting across all the factors of caste and class.

There is certain divergence between economic and political power in the village *panchayat*. This is because those in whom political power is vested in the village today are those who have a very small; unsustainable land holding. The ones who have acquired political power, though gained some economic power but this is not sustainable as the *nat* women who enjoyed power for ten years after losing the seat of power, lost the economic status associated with it. Not only this, the long association with the power created a situation of economic stability. This economic stability was lost as the *nat* woman lost the election. The economic advantages that was gained by becoming the *pradhan* consists mainly the funds for the development of villages. There is no honorarium for any representative at the local level political institutions that is *panchayati raj* system.

The numerical strength is an important variable which affects power dynamics but it is not all important. With it the organization, the socio-political standing play an important role. The *nat* woman came to power because of the numerical strength as well as the *pradhanpati's* earlier experience in the politics of *panchayat*. This is the reason why *pradhanpati* is considered to be the leader of the *nat* caste group.

The important difference between caste and class, at least at the level of village, constitute communities, whereas class does not. For example in village *Puhuppur nats* live in one place and same way *yadavas* live in one place in village *Suvansipur*, but all the landowners and all the women if perceived as a class does not live together. The *nats* and *yadavas* are going to interact very frequently with one another and try to develop common political ideology than are the members of any agrarian class and women as class. The last two elections of the panchayat have made it clear that local politics is controlled by one of the dominant caste group *yadava*.

Political change, social mobility and economic advancement lead to the creation of not only new relations but also of new values, new attitudes and new aspirations. This process of political mobilization provides scope to the individual to enter new networks of interpersonal relations in which village, caste and other traditional bonds though are decisive but not absolute. With the system of reservation the disadvantaged section particularly women are coming to the forefront.

The class positions have acquired a relative autonomy but still they are not free from the caste position. The political and legislative changes, the numerical strength and rise of women as a category for political competition led to the loosening of caste but this is not absolute as all the variables have to interplay within the premises of caste.

#### IV

#### SUGGESTION

On the basis of the results that have been derived the researcher suggests the following points which shall be helpful for the policy making and promotion of women participation:

1. There should be a scheme of remuneration for the women *pradhans* and women members of the *panchayat*. This remuneration will solve three purposes:
  - i. This will attract the women and motivate the male members to promote the women to participate in the affairs of the village.
  - ii. The women who are coming to the local politics are compromising with their traditional socio-cultural roles. Therefore any compensation in the form of pecuniary benefit will compensate the loss they are making.
  - iii. The women are participating in the affairs of the village, for this they have to travel to block office and sometimes district headquarters. The block office is nearly 22K.M from the *panchayat* under study. So it is very difficult for the female *pradhan* to travel to these places on her personal expanse. The pecuniary benefit will solve this problem also.

2. This scheme of pecuniary benefit should be there not only for the women members who are in office but those who have served the *panchayat* and now they are no more in office. The *panchayat* under study provides an insight into it. The *nat* woman *Amarkali* was professionally a beggar (the *nat* community of this area prefer beggary as an important instrument of livelihood and employment). After getting elected to the office of *pradhan*, she could not continue with her profession. In the election of 2005, she lost the seat of power. Once again she reached to a position from where she has started her political journey. There is no system to sustain her instead of the fact that she spends ten years of her life to public good.

## V

### THE ISSUES RAISED BY THE STUDY

The issue of representation in formal political structure and decision making is important for the women. But there are some important issues which the study raised. These are:

1. Whether the changes that are brought by the ascendancy of women into power structure are sustainable or not. The study suggests that it is not at all sustainable. The reason can be ascertained to the fact that only political empowerment is not useful, if the broader system is not empowering them economically, legally and socio-culturally.
2. To ensure that formal representation actually translates into meaningful participation it is needed that the prerequisites and variables within which the whole drama of women's empowerment with reference to reservation in local politics is played must be in consonance to one another. Any variable whether it is socio-cultural or economic is going to affect the whole process of political participation and assertion.
3. The compulsory representation of women in the *panchayat* is not the effort of women. They never initiated any movement for this right. It is imposed upon them. Therefore any interaction and understanding may be very cautiously observed as how the policy makers are determining the choices and alternatives of the women's development and empowerment. Before political empowerment there remains many variables with reference to economy and socio-cultural system where women is deprived and discriminated.

Therefore in order to produce some natural mobilization and change the artificial and superficial effort of only providing reservation will not work, the economic rights of these women representatives must be ensured. *Women need a more favorable background to attain the same power positions men do* (Mino Vionello, 2004). Thus in order to bring sustainability to the process of participation and empowerment the women must get some privileges.

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<sup>i</sup> Pradhanpati is the husband of the pradhan (pradhan is the head of the village panchayat).

<sup>ii</sup> Pucca road is the road made of coal tar and stones.

<sup>iii</sup> Majra is the hamlet associated with a particular village.

<sup>iv</sup> Ambedkar village is the special villages chosen on the basis of certain criteria for overall development of the village.