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CHAPTER - II  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present chapter focuses on earlier researches made on Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) and empowerment of Dalit women. The review of literature enables the researcher to shape the research study and comprehend better the research gap. The review has been presented under the following four sections. Section I presented the welfare measures for women. In Section II, concept of empowerment was discussed. In Section III, different dimensions of empowerment have been presented. In Section IV, programmes for women empowerment was described. In Section V, Panchayat Raj Institutions in India was described.

SECTION I  
DIMENSIONS OF EMPOWERMENT

The various concept of empowerment and different dimensions of empowerment such as social, economic, political and psychological aspects are discussed in this section.

Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the source of power. Empowerment cannot occur as a revolution but only as an evolution. The dictionary meaning of the word empower is “to give somebody the power or authority to do something or to give somebody more control over their life or the situation they are in”. Power is a key term in word, ‘empowerment’. Rowland (1997) suggested four forms of power i.e. ‘power within’, ‘power with’, ‘power over’ and ‘power
to’. Whereas ‘power within’ refers to self esteem and awareness, ‘power to ‘ refers to capacity building, ‘power with’ refers to collective consciousness, and ‘power over’ refers to conflict between powerful and powerless. Another point of view expresses empowerment as an ability to make choices i.e. choices about marriage, number of children, mobility, job, entertainment and improvement in quality of life.

In the views of Shrilatha (1994), empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, behave, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one’s destiny and the circumstances of one’s lives. Empowerment includes control over the resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideologies (beliefs, values and attributes).

Batliwala (1995) lists the goals of empowerment as to challenge and transform the ideology of patriarchy, which women and men have internalized, which the whole society operates on, to enable women or any of the disadvantaged powerless groups to gain access and control over material and knowledge resources, the longest task is to transform the very institution and structures of greater subordination which perpetuate gender subordination and inequality based on ethnicity, race, caste, class and religion. Latha (1996) observes that the process of challenging existing power relations and gaining greater control over sources of power may be termed as empowerment. It refers to the range of activity from individual self-assertion to collective mobilization that challenges the basic power relations.

In the views of Sahay (1998) empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is both a process and the result of process. It is transformation of structures and institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. Devadas (1999) observed “Empowerment is an active process of enabling women to realize their full identity and
power in all spheres of life. Empowerment of women at the grass roots has emerged as the most recent approach to women development.” Empowerment is the initial phase of women’s liberation freedom, and equity as well as a long-range goal of women’s political participation. It is the first step in a long journey toward the formulation and realization of human rights and responsibilities that transcend gender role stereotypes and the objectification of women and the men (Charlton, 2000).

Vijayanthi (2000) stated that empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self reliance, to assert their independent right to make their choices and control their resources, which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination. Empowerment is also a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, a greater decision making power and control. Ibrahim & alkire (2007) stated that empowerment is an increase in certain kind of agency that is deemed particularly instrumental to the situation at hand.

Kabeer (2001) more precisely defined empowerment as an expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choice in the context where this ability was previously denied. He suggested that three interrelated dimensions, such as resources, agency and achievement. The first dimension of ‘resources’ refers to the condition under which choices are made. There are two types of resources. First, material resources like land and property. Second non-material resources such as relationship, network, rules, norms and practices. The second dimension of empowerment is ‘agency’ that refers to process. It is the skill to set goals, motivation and efforts. Combination of resource and agency makes choices achievable. The third dimension is ‘achievement’ which refers to the potential created by previous dimensions. Failure to realize the potential leads to incompetence and disempowerment.
Oakley (2001), cited in Ibrahim & Alkire (2007), Empowerment is an increase in power. He argues that power can be either ‘variable sum’ zero ‘zero sum’. The former refers to a process through which the powerless can be empowered without altering the nature and the levels of the power. While the later refers to ‘any gain in power by one group inevitably results in a reduction of the power exercised by others. According to Kabeer (2005) empowerment refers to the process by which those who has been denied the ability to make choices acquire such as ability, that means people who exercises a great deal of choices in their lives may be very powerful but they are not empowered in the sense they have never empowered at first place.

According to Kishor (2008) empowerment has come to denote women’s increased control over their own lives, bodies, and environments. In discussions of women’s empowerment, emphasis is often placed on women’s decision-making roles, their economic self-reliance, and their legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance and protection against all forms of discrimination.

Roy and Niranjan (2004), cited in Ibrahim & Alkire (2007), empowerment is associated with indirect indicators like education and work participation of women and direct indicators of female autonomy (empowerment) such as decision-making, mobility and access to economic resources that can be viewed both as an outcomes and a process.

Concept of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is the most used and discussed term. The empowerment of women is becoming an increasingly popular term in human rights and developmental discourses. Women play a significant role in all walks of life. Empowerment of women is a necessary basic condition for socio-economic development of any society.
The goals of women’s empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality and to enable poor women to gain access to, and control of both material and informational resources. It can change existing power relations by addressing itself to the three dimensions of material, human and intellectual resources (Batliwala, 1994). Shanthi (1998) narrated about the existing empowerment strategies and their shortcomings. She reviewed six papers dealing with case studies and social, legal and cultural empowerment of women. She brought out employment as an important tool for empowerment.

According to UNICEF (1994) women’s empowerment involves welfare, access to resources, awareness – rising and control. Here welfare deals with the material benefits without active participation of women, access to resources deals with easy availability of resources, awareness refers to consciousness rising for the acquisition of gender equality, and control refers to the ultimate level of gender equality and women’s empowerment. UNIFEM (2000) observed that women’s empowerment includes acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and ways in which these relations may be changed developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s life, gaining the ability to generate choices and exercises bargaining power, and developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationality and internationality.

According to Charmus & Wieringa (2003), women empowerment can be seen as a process in which the following elements will be considered: awareness, choice, resources, agency and participation. The dimension of women’s empowerment is linked to enhancing women’s ability to make choices over the areas in their lives that matter to them, both the strategic life choices.
Measurement of Women Empowerment

There is no universally approved standard for measuring women empowerment due to its context specific nature. Women’s empowerment can be perceived differently in different cultures and same measuring technique may not prove successful in measuring empowerment level of women from diverse cultures. Therefore, empowerment is commonly gauged by using slightly different measures in keeping in view the socio – cultural norms of the study area (Beagh, 2004).

According to Beteta (2006), gender empowerment measure is an incomplete and biased index on women’s empowerment, which measure inequality among the most educated and economically advanced. But it fails to include important non-economic dimensions of decision making power both at the household level and over women’s own bodies and sexuality.

Malhotra (2002) reported that majority of studies used quantitative methodologies. In most of these studies women empowerment was considered as the outcome of the interest. In addition to that in some studies combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques (triangulation) was applied. However, few of these studies were focused on household wellbeing. Furthermore, some of the studies were conducted by considering women’s empowerment as multi-dimensional concept. As observed above varieties of dimensions were used to measure women’s empowerment. The description of some of these dimensions is presented below; Bogusia and Steele (2004) in their study divided the multidimensional concept of women’s empowerment into four dimensions. These were women’s mobility, role in household decision making, husband’s attitude, her attitude regarding her children’s education and age at marriage.
Kishore (2000) in a study conducted in Egypt used financial autonomy, participation in the modern sector, life time exposure to employment, sharing of role in decision making, family structure, equality in marriage, devaluation of women, marital advantage, and traditional marriage for measuring empowerment. Rahman (2008) conducted a parallel study in Bangladesh and data were collected from 200 farm women. Five measures of empowerment were selected for this study. In socio – cultural setting of South Asia, women’s freedom of movement is also considered an important factor that can be used as one of the dimensions of women’s empowerment. In another qualitative study conducted in rural India, Jejeebhoy (2002) used three dimensions of empowerment (autonomy) i.e. women’s mobility (freedom to visit different places), access to economic resources and decision making authority. In the above mentioned studies, the overall meanings of the dimensions are of similar nature.

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment means as the ability to exert control over decision-making within the domestic sphere. Measures include, women’s mobility or freedom of movement, freedom from violence, negotiations and discussion around sex, control over choosing spouse, control over age at marriage, family size decision-making, and access to education. According to Palpandi, Jothiganesan and Rajendran (2013) social empowerment means, gaining access to new and useful knowledge, information and awareness about a range of issues, topics and activities of interest to women. This new information and knowledge often provided mental stimulation and broadened participants thinking.

Internationally Bolivia, Peru and Nicaragua have provided the datasets of the 2000 Bolivia Family Interaction and Children’s Wellbeing (FICW) Survey, the 2000 Peru Demographic Health Survey and 1997 – 98 Nicaraguan Demographic and Health Survey. Heaton et al (2005) indicated that educated and literate women have greater access to
information and knowledge that increase their chances for paid jobs, other benefits and resources. In their study it was found that relationship between autonomy and education was strong in Bolivia.

Prasad (2006) said that education is one of the important instruments for social mobility. But the lack of primary education centres and non-allocation of enough funds for it have retarded the growth of education among Dalits. Women’s equality (in general all women) in power sharing and active participation in decision making including in political processes at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment (Kamimmi & Dashora, 2008). Educated women can get employment in all fields. They should no longer be dependent on their brothers, father or husband. They should be in a position to manage their families with their own will (Doddamani, 2010).

Education is also an important tool for controlling the social environment. In their analysis based on 2001 National Demographic and Health Survey, Furuta and Salway (2006) found significant association between education and women’s decision making ability. This study also supports the view point, that education is a prerequisite for improving the women’s position within the household and enables them to control the environment.

**Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment means ability to access, own and control resources. It can be measured in a variety of ways, using outcome indicators such as income generation, ownership of assets and land, expenditure patterns, degree of participation in paid employment, division of domestic labour and control over financial decision-making (Broady, Dworkin, 2013).

Economically empowered women contributed to the wealth and well-being not only of their families, but also of their nations. They were empowered through an increasing control of economic resources, especially income and education. Employment programmes
must satisfy at least three conditions: they must reduce women’s total work burden; they must ensure women have access as well as have control over income and they need to increase women’s access to non-kin support, information and outside contacts (Mohammad, 1999). According to Sharma (1980) improvements in women’s economic position may not only increase their happiness, but also enhance their status.

One of the important examples of women’s economic empowerment is SEWA. Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) which began its trade union activist in Kheda District in 1986 and has since become the major trade union activities in this District. The main strength in SEWA’s organization lies in its ability to link up pure trade union activity of bargaining for higher wages with social security such as child care, health savings, and insurance with employment promotion measures. SEWA’s efforts in Kheda District is a striking example for what women can achieve through combined actions, leading to empowerment (Sharit and Meena, 1996).

**Psychological Empowerment**

Psychological empowerment signifies confidence-building, acquisition of a sense of efficacy and the ability to overcome the feeling of helplessness (Sharma, 1980). The definitions of knowledge, self-respect and other elements related to human beings may be culture-specific. However, irrespective of society, the concepts of strong determination, assertive nature, motivation, etc. revealed the psychological empowerment of the individual. Often women’s self confidence is expressed in their own courage to meet the officials without any fear and to represent their problems and difficulties. Psychological empowerment is defined as intrinsic motivation manifested in four cognitions, reflecting an individual’s orientation to his or her role. The four cognitions include meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).
Psychological empowerment seems to reflect, what Rowlands (1997) called as personal empowerment as something internal that one can develop and strengthen and not depend on others. He identifies self confidence, self-esteem, sense of agency, sense of self in a wider contest and dignity as core set of elements that lead to empowerment. A final essential element of the personal core is the ability of an individual to move out of her culture or context in specific gendered roles. The people who are empowered have self control over decisions and decision making power (Chemberlin, 1997).

Psychologically empowered, will have a change in attitude, cognition and behavior, which most assuredly will lead to a positive change in value orientation, increased patriotic actions, ability to postpone gratification of one’s desires, improved self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-consciousness as well as better psychological well-being which will culminate in a peaceful and developing society (Sanjay, 1999). Psychological empowerment consists both the ability to control the environment and the feeling one can do so (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2005).

Oladipo (2009) operationalised psychological empowerment as an individual’s cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, competence, and goal internalization. It is considered as a multi-faceted construct reflecting the different dimensions of being psychologically enabled, and is conceived of as a positive integrate of perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment, which is rooted firmly in a social action framework that includes community change, capacity building and collectivity.

**Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment means the ability to participate in decision-making around access to resources, rights and entitlements within communities. This can be measured using indicators such as awareness of rights or laws, political participation such as voting, the
ability to legally own land, the ability to legally inherit property, and gain leadership positions in government.

Empowerment of women in all spheres and in particular, the political sphere is crucial for their advancement and for the foundation of gender based equal society. It is central to the goals of equity, development and peace. The Indian democracy which is more than half a century old has entered the next century. But a large mass of women are kept out of political arena still. There can be no true democracy, or no true people’s participation in governance and development without equal participation of men and women at different levels of decision making. Participation of women in political life is integral to the advancement of women.

Pandy (2013) quotes the definition of political empowerment given by Bargava & Subha which states that political empowerment ‘as the capacity to influence decision making process, planning, implementation and evaluation by integrating them into the political system. It implies political participation which includes right to vote, contest, campaign, party membership and representation in political office at all levels and effectively influences decisions thereby leading to political empowerment’.

Women’s political participation has been the agenda of various international conferences and symposiums. Various recommendations were made to improve the participation of women in political decision making. Women’s political empowerment was at the centre stage of all discourses on women’s issues at the international level. India is in no way an exception from the rest of the countries with respect to the women representation. Corresponding to this, various initiatives were taken in India.
Beijing Platform Action (Neuwirth, 2005) women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women’s equal participation in decision making is a demand for simple justice and necessary condition for women’s interest to be taken into account. The importance of women assuming position of power and influence, not only because of their points of view and talents are needed, but also as a matter of their human rights. Moreover, increased involvement of women in decision making process with respect to social values, development direction and allocation of resources enables women as well as men to influence societal agendas and to help to set priorities.

The political empowerment of women and women leadership in PRIs is crucial not only for the development of women themselves, but also for the availability of their creative, potential that is socially important and without which the country cannot hope for any sustainable development (Dashora, 2008).

Jeyalakshmi (1997) in her study conducted in the Nalgonda district, Andhra Pradesh, found that reservation in Panchayats ensure entry for all sections and thus visualized as the harbinger of equality and social justice. Sumita (2007) quotes a micro level study in Andra Pradesh which concluded that political empowerment is not an end in itself. It is a means to achieve something, which is nothing but socio-economic empowerment. Another positive symptom of reservation is the growing political socialization of women. In the pre-reservation period, the women had on option to join or not to join the politics and as the socio-economic situations play a decisive role in the participation, a few women entered into the arena of politics, the representatives are now creating an atmosphere where female mentality is getting socialized politically. Women are gradually learning how to articulate demands, thus enabling them to act upon their visions of a better society and to make a
meaningful contribution to national and societal development. This process will create a very congenial social atmosphere with the fading away of narrow and conservative ideas on women leadership in politics in the long run.

Panda (1996) states that, in a study of Village Panchayats in Orissa, the women entered into politics due to mandatory provisions of reservation. Most of the women are from non-political background and entered into politics due to persuasion by their family members or pressure from the village community. The important aspect of her study is that the women who reluctantly entered into politics were gaining consciousness and increasing perception of their role and responsibility. Panda feels that there prevails strong caste feelings and women belonging to upper castes have not come forward to represent the Panchayat. This has provided an opportunity to women from the labour and lower castes to emerge as a potential force in village politics.

Having these ideas as basis for women empowerment in India, there have been specific programmes for women empowerment planned and executed by the Government of India. Section IV provided a very brief account of these programmes.

SECTION –II

PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997 – 2002)

The Plan was came into effect from April 1, 1997. An approach paper had been developed by the Planning Commission and accepted by the National Development Council, which had become basis for developing Ninth Five Year Plan. In this approach paper focus was laid on empowerment of women and people’s participation in planning and implementation of strategies. An important objective in the Approach paper was the
empowerment of women. In planning process, empowerment at the outset, means choices for women and opportunities to avail of these choices. The supportive environment should be provided to women at all stages by the home, school, religion, government and work place. During this ninth plan the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1993 ensure reservation of 1/3 of seats for women in all elected offices of local bodies, in rural and urban areas.

The Tenth Five Plan (2002 – 2007)

The Tenth Plan came into effect from 2002. The aims at empowering women through translating the recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001), following are the highlights of the 10th Five Year Plan approved by the National Development council (NDC): 8% average GDP growth for the period 2002-2007, creation of 50 million employment opportunities in the next 5 years and reduction of poverty ratio by 5% points by 2007 and 15% points by 2012.

The Parliamentary Committee for Empowerment of Women

The Parliament has constituted a committee on the empowerment of women consisting of 30 members and 20 members to be nominated by the speaker among Members of the Lok Sabha and 10 members to be nominated by the chairman of the Rajya Sabha from amongst Members of Raja Sabha. The functions of the Committee include, inter-alia, considering the reports submitted by the National Commission for Women, and reporting on the measures taken by the Union Government for improving the status/condition of women (Parliament of India, 2013)

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women

The Government of India has declared 2001 as Women’s Empowerment Year. The national policy of empowerment of women has set certain clear cut goals and objectives. The
policy aims at upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating in them awareness on various issues in relation to their empowerment.

The main objectives of this policy are; i. creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential. ii. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyments of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres. iii. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social political and economic life of the nation. iv. Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public life etc., v. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. vi. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women. vii. Ministering a gender perspective in the development process. viii. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child. ix. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women’s organizations.

**National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)**

It is an initiative of the Government of India for empowering women holistically. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme sanctioned in April 2011 and acts as an umbrella Mission with a mandate to strengthen inter – sectoral convergence and facilitate the process of coordination of all the women’s welfare and socio – economic development programmes across Ministries and Departments. NMEW is being implemented in all the 35 States and Union Territories.
SECTION – III

WELFARE MEASURES FOR WOMEN

The various government plans, programmes and policies on welfare measures for women at the state and national level are presented in this section.

National Perspective Plan for Women (1999-2008)

To boost up the programmes for women’s development, a National Perspective Plan for Women was brought out by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development. The plan plays special attention to the rural women who suffer from double discrimination. The plan does not seek more investment or more resources but gives a new thrust and responsiveness to developmental programmes at all levels.

Women Component Plan

Women component plan started during the 9th Five Year Plan. It was adopted by the Government of India as a major strategy of gender budgeting and women empowerment. Women Component Plan was intended towards a convergence of existing services available in both women specific and women related sectors. The plan directed both central and state government to ensure not less than 30 per cent of the funds are earmarked in all the women’s related sectors. It is also directed that a special vigil be kept on the flow of the earmarked funds through proposed strategy brings forth a holistic approach towards empowering women (Ministry of information and broadcasting, Govt. of India, 2006).

Special Component Plan for Dalits

The Special Component Plan was visualized as an effort to radically rework the whole strategy of Dalit welfare and empowerment. The objective of Special Component Plan is to ensure not only those sufficient funds are allocated for the welfare of dalits, but also make sure that the funds are properly used and that effective and practical programmes towards
clear goals and targets are initiated. The basic insight of Special Component Plan is the idea of convergence – convergence of schemes and programmes towards a unified goal. To ensure such a convergence, Special Component Plan demands the pooling together of all resources spent by various departments and agencies (Manu Alphonse, 2012).

**Protection of Civil Rights Act**

Violence against women takes various forms, including physical, economic, social and psychological. The Protection of Women Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) is a civil law which seeks to provide immediate support to women victims of domestic violence in the form of shelter, medical facility and reliefs in the nature of protection, residence, compensation, maintenance orders as well as orders for temporary custody of children. It entitles victim to support services like shelter, medical relief, legal assistance and counseling. The law also widens the meaning of the word “aggrieved women” by including women who face domestic violence in relationship other than matrimonial relationships like daughters, mothers, sisters and those involved in marriage like relationships and providing a woman’s right to reside in the shared household. The Act came into force on 26th October 2006 (Government of India, 2013).

**Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)**

The National Old Age Pension scheme has been renamed as Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme was launched in Tamilnadu on 19.11.2007, the birthday of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. As per the new scheme, the criteria of destitute have been relaxed and pension is granted to persons who are 65 years of age or above belonging to households Below Poverty Line (BPL). The Central assistance sanctioned for this scheme per month is Rs. 200/-. The Government of Tamilnadu contribute matching share of Rs.200 per month per beneficiary (Ministry of rural development, Government of India, 2011).
**Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme**

The Scheme is known as “Indira Gandhi National Pension Scheme (IGNWPS). It came into existence from February, 2009. The objective of this scheme is to give financial assistance Rs. 400/- per month to all the identified pensioners who are widows of the age group of 40 years – 64 years. The coverage is universal and there shall not be any quota at any level. She should have to be from a family which is below the poverty line. She shall get the pension till she attains the age of 65 years or till her remarriage and she will be automatically covered under IGNOAPS at the age of 65 years (Social welfare department, Govt. of India, 2013).

**Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Mahatma Gandhi NREGA) by the Ministry of Rural Development aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has become a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is the first ever law internationally that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale.

The Act came into force on February 2, 2006 and was implemented in a phased manner. In Phase I it was introduced in 200 of the most backward districts of the country. It was implemented in an additional 130 districts in Phase II 2007-2008. The Act was notified in the remaining rural districts of the country from April 1, 2008 in Phase II. All rural districts are covered under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA (www.nrega.nic.in/netnrega/forum/MGNREGA.pdf).
Land Purchase Scheme for Schedule Caste /Schedule Tribes Women

The scheme mainly for the landless poor Dalit women to purchase land for their livelihood. This is in operation since 2003-2004. Under the scheme, a sum of Rs. 1.00 lakh as maximum unit cost is paid to the individual. 50% of it is treated as subsidy and the remaining 50 % as loan. The cost of land apart from the reclamation of the land, leveling of the land, contour bounding, clearing of bushes, creating water sources, maintenance of cattle, etc. up to sum of Rs. 1 lakh amount is provided as Financial Assistance. 50 % of it is subsidy. The loan amounts are released through Banks and NSFDC, New Delhi (TAHDCO, Dindigul, 2010).

Annapurna Scheme

The "Annapurna Scheme" had been announced by the Finance Minister during the year 1999-2000 to provide food security to those indigent senior citizens who are not covered under the targeted Public Distribution System (PDS) and who have no income of their own. Through the new "Annapurna" scheme, it is intended to provide 10 kgs, of food grains per month free of cost to all such person who are though eligible for old age pension under NOAPS, are presently not receiving it. The numbers of persons benefiting from the Scheme are not to exceed for the present 20% of the old age pensioners within a State. The Gram Panchayat would be required to identify, prepare and display a list of such persons after giving wide publicity to the Scheme.

Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)

The Constitution of India places rural housing in the domain of state government and the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The Central government has been implementing IAY as part of the enabling approach to shelter for all from 1996. The IAY is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development to provide houses to the below poverty line (BPL) families in the rural areas. The objectives of IAY is primarily to help construction of dwelling unit by
members of SC/ST, freed bonded labourers and also non-SC/ST rural poor below the poverty line (Ministry of rural development, Govt. of India, 2013).

**Green House Scheme (GHS)**

It is one of the flagships Programme of Government of Tamilnadu, aims at providing solar powered green house for the poor people living below poverty line in rural areas. The construction of houses measuring about 300 square feet at a unit cost of Rs. 1.80 lakhs by meeting the entire cost by the State Government. The special feature of this scheme is that all the people in the rural areas are eligible for solar powered green house (Government of Tamilnadu, 2014).

**Marriage Assistance Scheme**

The Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiayar memorial marriage assistance scheme is being implemented by the Tamilnadu government to improve the educational status of the poor girls. The assistance is given to girls who have completed 10th standard, plus 2, Diploma or Degree. The major objective of this scheme was to help financially poor parents in getting their daughter’s married and to promote the educational status of poor girls. The assistance of this scheme was Rs. 25,000 for 10th standard or plus 2 and Rs. 50,000 for Diploma or Degree holder. The eligible condition of these schemes was the family income should not exceed Rs. 24,000 per annum.

**Financial Assistance for Individual**

This programme is for people in the age group of 18-55 years. The aim of the scheme is that they should start an economic activity of their own and thereby increase their income for their own betterment. For such income generating activity from a sum of Rs. 6000 to 7.50 lakhs is granted as loan. In this beneficiary gets 30% subsidy from Tamilnadu Housing Development Corporation (TAHDCO) or a maximum of Rs. 25,000. The beneficiary should
pay 5% of the amount as individual share. Bank loan will be 65%. Under this scheme they
can start enterprises like lime kiln industry, manufacturing of chapels, coir industry, brick
chambers, vessels trade, provisions stores, textile shops, stationary shops, agriculture and
agriculture oriented activities like rearing of milk cows, goats, etc (TAHDCO), Dindigul,
2010.

**Integrated Sanitary Complex for Women**

Tamilnadu coverage in rural sanitation is presently at 11% which is lower than
national average of 15%. To protect dignity and privacy of the women the Government has
launched a new scheme called the Integrated Sanitary Complex for women to provide toilets
and facilities for bathing and washing for women under one roof. Each sanitary complex
spread over approximately 750 sq.ft. with 10 toilets and 3 cubicles for bathing. Each complex
has an independent water connection to ensure that the users have a steady and continued
supply of water. A pump room and water tank also form part of the sanitary complex. The
operation and maintenance of these sanitary complexes are the responsibility of the village
Panchayat and self-help groups. Monitoring committees are formed for proper maintenance
of these sanitary complexes. An outlay of Rs. 284 crores was proposed under this scheme
during the Tenth Plan period (Ministry of rural development and Panchayat raj Department,
2011).

**Awareness Generation Programme**

The Programme for rural women is a programme funded by Tamilnadu Social
Welfare Board. This programme has to be organized from February 2013 to May 2013. Each
programme was conducted in one village for a period of 8 days. The awareness generation
program includes different topics like women health issues, prevention strategies of child
labour, child marriage, HIV/AIDS, Women and Environment, Anti – alcohol Movement,
Violence against women, psycho-social problems faced by women, women's welfare and development programme women in SMG, Women with disabilities, problems of women in prison, problems of widows, women rights, women's participation in Grama Sabha, Panchayat Raj, Atrocities against women, Sexual Harassment in work place, effect of globalization, Demographic perspectives, etc (Department of women and child development, Directorate of social welfare, 2013-2014).
SECTION – IV

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS

Panchayat Raj Institutions, the grass root units of local self government have been considered as instruments of socio economic transformation in rural India. Involvement of people at the grass root level is the most important means of bringing about socio-economic development. Panchayat Raj is identified as institutional expression of democratic decentralization in India. Decentralization of power to the Panchayat is seen as a means of empowering people and involving them in decision making process. Local governments being closer to the people can be more responsive to local needs and can make better use of resources. The democratic system in a country can be ensured only if there is mass participation in the governance. Therefore, the system of democratic decentralization popularly known as ‘Panchayat Raj’ is considered as an instrument to ensure democracy and socio-economic transformation (World Bank, 1988).

Gandhiji believed that India lives in her villages. Indian independence must begin at the bottom, thus making every village a republic or Panchayat, enjoying full powers. He remarked that true democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village. These dreams lead to the inclusion of Article 40 in the Directive Principles of the State Policy of Constitution of India. Almost after five decades of independence, in 1993, the Government of India took a revolutionary step by making Panchayat Raj Institutions a part of the Constitution. This institution has survived numerous political changes and upheavals in the ancient and medieval periods till the advent of the British Raj. With the coming of the colonial administration, the patterns of the working of the local bodies underwent marked changes.
Ambedkar, a steadfast constitutionalist, who worked within the state and sought solutions to social problems with the aid of the state, being aware of the pernicious caste system, argued that local elite and upper castes were so well entrenched that any local self government would only mean the continuing exploitation of the downtrodden masses of Indian society. He argued that the village was 'a cesspool, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and communalism'. Nehru with his western liberal ideologies shared this view. The total control of upper caste ruling elites in unregulated decentralized system meant reinforcement of caste system and oppression of Dalits (Vayasulu, 1999). Panchayat Raj was incorporated in Article 40 of the Constitution, and is one the Directive Principle of State Policy. Despite the contradicting perspectives between strong leaders of independent India Panchayat Raj found its place in Constitution and has developed further. In practice though, the setting up of village Panchayat stayed ineffective since there was no pressure on any state to establish such a system. Later the provision relating to the establishment of Panchayati Raj under the Constitution was relegated to advisory status leading to few states initiatives to implement Panchayat elections.

**Balwantrai Mehta Committee**

In January 1957, the Government of India appointed a committee to examine the working of the Community Development Programme (1952) and the National Extension Service (1953) and to suggest measures for their better working. The Chairman of this committee was Balwantrai G. Mehta. The committee submitted its report in November 1957 and recommended the establishment of a 3-tier Panchayat Raj system-Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. These tiers should be organically linked through a device of indirect elections (Laxmikanth, 2010).
**Ashok Mehta Committee**

In December 1977, the Janata Government appointed a committee on Panchayat Raj Institutions under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta. It submitted its report in August 1978 and made 132 recommendations to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayat Raj system in the country. Its main recommendations were: three-tier system of Panchayat should be replaced by two-tier system; District should be the first point for decentralization etc. Due to the fall of the Janata government, the Ashok Mehta Committee recommendations were not implemented. Few states including Karnataka formulated new legislation on the basis of the recommendations of this Committee. Both the Committees overlooked the importance of Panchayat as units of self government.

During 1980s, two important committees were appointed to look into local governments. The GVK Rao Committee in 1985, Dr. L.M. Singhvi Committee in 1985 and Dr. L.M. Singhvi Committee in 1986. The GVK Rao committee recommended the revival of Panchayat Raj Institutions such that greater responsibility of planning, implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes could be assigned to them (Ghosh, 1999). L.M. Singhi Committee recommended that the Panchayat Raj Institutions should be constitutionally recognized and protected. New chapter in the constitution should be provided to define their powers and functions and free and fair election to be conducted through the election commission.

**73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993**

Among these circumstances, Rajiv Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India, introduced the 64th Amendment bill on the local government on the 15th May, 1989 in the Parliament, but it failed to get the required support. A second attempt was made in September 1990 to pass the bill in the Parliament. The bill however was not even taken up for consideration. In September 1991, a bill on the Panchayat raj was introduced and was passed in 1992 as the 73rd Amendment Act 1992 with minor modifications and came into force on 24th April 1993.
Salient Features of the Act

The Act provided for the establishment of Grama Sabha in each village. It will be a body comprising of all the adult members registered as voters in the panchayat area. There shall be a three-tier system of panchayat at village, intermediate and district levels. Smaller states with population below 20 Lakhs will have option not to have intermediate level panchayat. Seats in Panchayat at all three levels shall be filled by direct election. In addition, the chairperson of the village panchayat can be made member of the panchayat at the intermediate level. MPs, MLAs, MLCs, could also be member of panchayat at the intermediate and the district level.

In all the Panchayat, seats should be reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population and 1/3 of the total number of seats will be reserved for women. Offices of the chairperson of the panchayat at all levels shall be reserved in favour of SCs and STs in proportion in the state. One-third of the offices of chairperson of Panchayat at all levels shall also be reserved for women. Legislature of the state shall be at liberty to provide reservation of seats and office of chairperson in panchayat in favour of backward class citizens. Panchayat shall have a uniform five year term and elections to constitute new bodies shall be completed before the expiry of term. In the event of dissolution, election will be compulsorily held within six months. The reconstituted panchayat will serve for remaining period of five year term. It will not be possible to dissolve the existing Panchayat by amendment of any Act before the expiry of its duration. A person who is disqualified under any law, election to the legislature of the state or under any of the state will not be entitled to become a member of a panchayat. Independent election commission will be established in the state to supervise, direct and control of the electoral process and preparation of electoral rolls. Specific responsibilities will be entrusted to the Panchayat to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of matters listed in XI Schedule. For the implementation of development schemes, main responsibility will be entrusted to the Panchayat. The Panchayat
will receive adequate funds for carrying out their plans. Grants from state government will constitute an important source of funding but state government is also expected to assign the revenue of certain taxes to the Panchayat. In some cases, panchayat will also be permitted to collect and retain revenue it raises.

**Article 243 G of the XI schedule**

Article 243 G explained the powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayat. Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the legislature of a State may by law endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority and may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats, at the appropriate level, at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein with respect to the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice, the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

The following are the areas which are listed under the powers, authority and responsibilities of the Panchayats.

- Agriculture, including agricultural extension
- Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation processing industries
- Khadi, village and cottage industries
- Rural housing
- Fuel and fodder
- Roads, culverts, bridges, waterways and other means of communication
- Rural electrification including distribution of electricity
- Non conventional energy sources
- Poverty alleviation Programme
- Education including Primary and Secondary
- Technical training and vocational education
The 73rd Amendment Act is an attempt to restructure the Panchayat Raj to reach the grassroots’ level. The bill for the first time gave constitutional status to Panchayat Raj institutions and it became mandatory on all the state government to implement it. This Amendment brought about uniformity in structure, composition, powers and functions of Panchayat. It gave impetus to Panchayat Raj to promote social and economic development and improvement in living condition of rural India. The main criticism leveled against the Act is that these institutions are viewed as implementing agencies for developmental activities and those they are not given the status of decentralized political institutions.

Criticism apart, the Act fulfilled the dream of constitutional status of Panchayat Raj Institutions and the state government brought new legislations to implement it. It has been explained as the beginning of silent revolution. This Amendment for the first time in the history of Panchayat Raj Institutions gave opportunities for women in large numbers to enter local administration.
Women Participation in Panchayat

Women participation in Panchayat pointed out that the participation to local bodies still continues to be male dominated whereas the presence of women is not considered important. The major impediments according to them were universal, social attitude which valued women’s role as principally confined to being mothers and wives (Dahiya and Gupta 1999).

Singh (2000) observed that Political participation has been defined in various ways. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, co-decision making, co-policy making at all levels of governance of the state. According to Rashmi (2000) political participation is broadly defined as being a process through which individual plays a role in political life of his society, has the opportunity to take part in deciding what the common goals of that society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Political participation refers to actual participation in these voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rules and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy.

According to Singla (2007) ‘Women’s Participation in Panchayat Raj: Nature and Effectiveness’ analysis the process of the political participation of the women in the light of 33 percent reservation for women due to the 73rd Amendment Act. The landmark 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India has definitely empowered the women in terms of numbers. From the miniscule figure of 2/4 percent in most of the Indian States, the Amendment has for the first time brought 33-40 percent rural women into the sphere of the decision making process. But, being in large numbers in not enough as reservation provides only the possibility of a voice for women, it does guarantee it. This is also because the backdrop in which the reservation has been introduced in the country is marked by such factors as illiteracy, male dominance, casteism, deep rooted cultural beliefs and values, which
do not encourage women’s assertion but retain them in their traditional roles of dependent spouse, mother and housewife amidst such social and cultural constraints, it becomes important to study the nature and effectiveness with which the women members are able to participate in the PRI’s specifically their ability to address the women’s issues at the local level.

Vijayalakshmi and Chandrasekhar (2000) have in their study ‘Gender Inequality, Differences and Identities: Women and Local Governance in Karnataka’ analysed the process of decentralization and the impact of gender inequality on the process of empowerment of women due to quota system in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The current economic and socio-political maladies along with increasing violence against women and children are attributed to the failure of male oriented polity. Representation of women in higher bodies of political authority has been considered a prerequisite for the success of democracy at the grass-root level. However the need for the accountability and sense of commitment on the part of the elected women representative is stressed. This requires higher degree of awareness among women regarding health, literacy, gender and other relevant social, economic and political issues (Shashi, 1998).

In the opinion of Nagar (2008) the body of politics is male dominant and the women have been sidelined as if this power play is not suitable to them. Within the structure for power play that politics, one group of people, however have been grossly under represented especially in proportion to their number in society: women. For the longest period of time, women have had to contend with their subordinate position with respect to men, excluded even from exercising the right to vote. Dhaka (2005) made attempts to identify the major issues of empowerment of the women, SC’s and ST’s and more so Dalit women in the light of 33 percent reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions. He found that despite the
constitutional guarantees the Dalit women continue to be discriminated by caste, gender and patriarchy leading to the marginalization of them. This has raised several questions. The problem of participatory management of welfare schemes can be solved only when the marginalized section come to play a major role in decision making.

Political process is necessary to ensure improvement for all women in all spheres of life (Bhargava, 1996). The main position of 73rd constitutional amendment involves the participation of women as voter, women as members of political parties, women as candidates, women as elected members of PRIs taking part in decision making, planning, implementation and evaluation (Narayan, 1996). It was to improve women’s representation that the policy of reservation was introduced. Reserving seats for women in the political institutions will provide them and opportunity to raise their grievances and other related social and economic problems in a formal forum. The main intention of policy makers behind this reservation is twofold one is the democratic justice and second is human resource utilization (Jain, 1994). Similarly, by providing reservation, our policy makers intended not only to improve the number of elected leaders but also to improve their economic independence, access to resources as well as to education by examining their socio-economic situation (Mohanty, 2002).

The study ‘Affirmative Action and Dalits: Political Representation in Panchayats’ by Inbanathan and Anand (2003) reveals that the political representation in terms of quota system in PRI’s is not effective in case of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular as they are weak collectivities in the rural political structure. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment provided for the increased participation of women in the political institutions at the village, taluk and district level. This has enabled several women, who had never been in power and even those illiterate to enter politics.
Palanithurai (2001) observed that women have come to positions in the local bodies as provisions have been made in the constitution. The outlook of the society towards the women has started changing. He suggested that women need orientation, sensitization, capacity building, and information and counseling continuously through organizations. The ongoing experiments and experiences suggested that periodical training orientation and sensitization can help the women leaders to perform the assigned role in a better way. He argued that the government would respond to the needs of these women leaders only when social organization’s and groups support them.

**Dalit Women leadership in Panchayat Raj Institutions**

Chaudhary (2004) in his study, ‘Dalit and Tribal Leadership in Panchayat made an attempt to understand the nature and patterns of leadership among Dalits and Tribals in Madhya Pradesh. The study revealed that both Dalit and Tribal Panchayat leaders in Sehore and Betul Districts were in the age group of 25-44 years and were mostly illiterate engaged in agricultural activities. He also found that most of them were wage workers and belonged to BPL group. The study concluded that lack of basic amenities was a serious problem among these communities. The Dalit and tribal leaders lacked social capital to manage the Panchayat affairs meaningfully. Chaudhary feels that continuous training with regular interval should be conducted exclusively for Dalits and Tribal Panchayat representatives.

Women representatives in Panchayat before the 73rd amendment noted the major presence of women from the dominant sections e.g. from Marathas and families owning more than twenty acres of land in Maharashtra and Vokkaligas in Karnataka. But the profile of the new women in post 73rd amendment Panchayat showed that majorities were illiterate and large percentages were from families in the lower socio-economic strata. They were comparatively younger than the earlier entrants and were predominantly first generation
entrants to the public political life (Buch, 2000). She further expressed that, a study of twelve all women Panchayat in Maharashtra documented male members support enabled women coming into Panchayat, but such supports were tentative and interspersed with typical anxiety expressed in such comments as who will make the chapattis.

**Problems of Dalit Women Participation in Panchayat raj Institutions**

Dalit women have also faced many problems in performing their duties due to illiteracy, lack of information and dependency on the male members of their families. An important obstacle is no-confidence motions against Dalit women Pradhans by the dominant sections who are unable to accept that power in the hands of the poor and disadvantaged women (Sabharwal, 1997).

A Study on Political Participation of Women in Panchayat Raj institutions in Haryana, Kerala and Tamilnadu suggested that the quality of performance of elected women representatives is largely dependent upon social factors like literacy, education and the tradition of social reform movement in that region. Patriarchal and feudal values were found to be a serious hurdle in the path of progress in rural areas and constraint the political participation of women. The findings of the present study suggested that reservation alone will not serve any useful purpose unless it is accompanied by an aggressive campaign for literacy. (Santha, 1999).

In the views of Sinha (2000) personality traits and the socio economic and cultural environment is to a great extent responsible for women’s marginal participation in politics. The culture which puts maximum premium on the males, the political environment of instability, criminalization and absence of political ideology are factors which influence the extent of political participation. Socio political environment determines the participation and involvement of women in politics.
In Participative democracy, it is true that empowerment of women should be fully alive at the grass root level. For ensuring rural development as well as eradication of rural poverty in a sustainable manner establishing good governance in Panchayat Raj system should be a prerequisite. In order to achieve the good governance in rural sector, the Government (both Centre and State) should attempt to delimit the bureaucratic pressure, to promote local leadership, to remove structural deficiencies, to raise more financial resources and at the same time establishing “Social Audit” in all PRIs network is also one of the best opportunity for shaping the concept of “Bharat Nirman”, “Shining India”, “Feel Good” and this is not possible without participation and empowerment of rural downtrodden women (Rana, 2012).

Steps Taken to Increase Women’s Participation in Politics

The issue of women’s political empowerment came to the forefront of the global debate for women’s right at the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in 1995. It declared “Women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women’s equal participation in decision making is a demand for simple justice and necessary condition for women’s interest to be taken into account. In this conference global community stressed the importance of women assuming position of power and influence, not only because their points of view and talents are needed, but also as a matter of their human rights. Moreover, increased involvement of women in decision making process with respect to social values, development directions and allocation of resources enables women as well as men to influence societal agendas and to help to set priorities.

The Common Wealth likewise has also been addressing the issue and has taken a number of initiatives for the purpose of enhancing women’s representation. At their 1995 meeting, Common Wealth Heads of Government endorsed the Plan of Action on gender and
development, which was utilized by the member countries to take action to increase women’s participation in political decision making at all levels. At their 1996 meeting, Common Wealth Ministries of Women’s Affairs recommended that the member countries achieve a target of no less than 30% for women in political, public sector by the year 2005. The need to increase women’s participation in political decision making and peace process in the Common Wealth was also a part of the agenda of the Common Wealth ministers responsible for women’s affairs, in their sixth meeting held in New Delhi from April 16-19, 2000. The efforts taken in India are presented in section III.

Theoretical framework is commonly developed in the light of literature review and theoretical framework. It is a logically developed network of relationship between the variables related to the research (Sekaran, 1992). The figure represents the conceptual framework for the present study which indicates the tentative relationship among the variables of the study.

The variables used in the present study were classified into three categories; background variables (socio, economic and demographic) were based on the background information of respondents and were expected to bring change in dependent variable either independently or with the help of independent variable. Independent variables are the variables which are expected to have their direct influence on dependent variables. On the other hand, dependent variable on women’s empowerment was the primary interest of the researcher.

Most of the literatures globally and including India had used few variables to measure the various dimensions of women empowerment covering either one aspect or few aspects. Interestingly micro level studies for each specific indicator’s covering all major domain level is rare. The view of women's empowerment as emerged from the above is a multidimensional
one. It involves social equality through redefinition of women's status in existing patriarchal and social power structures that can offer them freedom from impediments imposed by age old customs, beliefs and practices governing status and treatment towards them and ensuring them greater say in social and political spheres.

Based on the above literature and the theoretical postulates, the present study has taken note of such a broader view of empowerment of women, which receives little or no attention in most studies restricting themselves to mere presence in PRIs. This study laid stress on the role women played in and the resultant change occurred in their knowledge, skills and attitudes. As the main objective of the present study is to find out as to how women's are empowered through PRIs and what are the roles played by PRIs proves to be 'empowering'; the term 'participation' was conceptualized in three ways subsuming in some form the broader view of empowerment as outlined above: symbolic or physical presence in Panchayat meetings, substantive contribution, and development of women members themselves. Thus, the study represents a departure from the earlier trend. The operational definition and measuring technique of the various variables enlisted are explained in the Methodology chapter.