WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN THE DISTRICT OF RAJOURI

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
SOCIOLOGY

By

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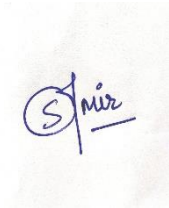
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LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY, PUNJAB
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DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that the presented work in the thesis entitled **"Women Empowerment in Rural Areas Through Panchayati Raj Institutions in District Rajouri"** in fulfilment of my degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** is an outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr. Sudha Dubey (UID: 28742)** working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with the general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgments have been made whenever the work described here has been based on the findings of another investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

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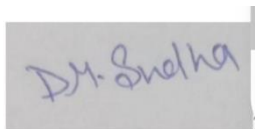
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled "**Women Empowerment in Rural Areas Through Panchayati Raj Institutions in District Rajouri**" submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the Sociology/School of liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences and Languages), is a research work carried out by Safira Kabir, 42000487, is Bonafide record of her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.

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Name of supervisor: Dr. Sudha Dubey / UID 28742

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ABSTRACT

The empowerment of women and their reservation in politics as direct political participants have long been subjects of debate and concern. Historically, politics has been a predominantly male-dominated sphere. The need for women's participation through reservation arose because the benefits of welfare policies and schemes did not effectively reach them. As a result, the voices of half the population remained unheard, and women faced inadequate representation in decision-making institutions. Their persistent marginalization and suppression necessitated measures to bring them to the forefront, granting them the power to make decisions for themselves and in their best interests. This thesis aims to explore and define the concept of "women empowerment" while examining its connection to "power" or "political authority" across all levels of governance. It seeks to analyse the impact and implications of delegating power to women at the grassroots level, assessing the opportunities created through political reservation and participation. Additionally, the study will investigate the social and economic dimensions of reservation and its broader influence on the system. Women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) represents a significant step toward realizing the true essence of independence and empowerment. While women's involvement in politics and local administration is not a new phenomenon, what sets the post-73rd Amendment era apart is the constitutional provision for their universal and reserved representation in PRIs. This move extends beyond the earlier token representation of one or two government-nominated women. The term 'empowerment' is referred to as a system of increasing spiritual, political, social and economic strength of individuals and communities. The empowerment of women has become prime issue of national and international aspects. Women empowerment means a process of creating an environment where women can think and grow independently and be treated equally in socio-economic and political field. Active political participation is a significant and influential matters of empowering women through which women can enter into the core of governmental system and take part in the decision-making process. Emphasis has been placed on the political empowerment of women from the international, national and regional levels. The issue of women's political participation is now receiving central concern of the legislatures of different nations and the international organizations. Various schemes, plans and laws have been made for bringing women in the mainstream of the society and erasing related discriminations and oppression

against women. Women's participation in local self-governance is widely regarded as a means to enhance their political empowerment at the grassroots level. However, experience suggests a different reality, as the persistence of patriarchy and male dominance within political parties and institutions often limits their actual influence. Despite being elected to positions of power, women's participation frequently remains symbolic. In many cases, elected women are controlled by their political party leaders or husbands, with some even being recognized by their husbands' names rather than their own. Overall, women's roles in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) often remain nominal, serving as proxies for their husbands or other dominant groups. To meet the objectives, a research study was designed to generate data on the subject using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches seek to observe, gather, and analyze data for exploration. The research employs both historical and comparative methodologies to provide a holistic approach. An empirical investigation using an interview schedule will augment the theoretical understanding. This research is empirical and relies on both primary and secondary data. The primary data were gathered via fieldwork. The Secondary data were sourced from official documents, specifically through the official web portals of the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India, District and Block Development Offices, and village Panchayat Offices. Additionally, pertinent information has been sourced from the Economic Survey of the Government of India, the Statistics from the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, numerous studies and reports conducted by researchers in the domain, Yearly reports from the Department of Rural Development, reports from various rural development organizations, as well as an array of books, articles, journals, government publications, newspapers, research papers, and other documents pertinent to the research topic.

Respondents must be chosen by using a multi-stage random sampling methodology. Multi-stage sampling methodology should be employed to ascertain the target population. Using a multi-stage sampling method, the researcher selected 232 elected women representatives from Rajouri district. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants using a structured interview schedule. The findings of this study include lack of information, lack of active engagement, male intervention is a key obstacle that prevents women from functionally effectively operating inside PRIs.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. PRI – PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS
2. IWHC – INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S HEALTH COALITION
3. CEDAW – CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
4. NCW – NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
5. MWCD – MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
6. SDGS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
7. SC – SCHEDULED CASTES
8. ST – SCHEDULED TRIBES
9. OBC– OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES
10. SHG – SELF HELP GROUPS
11. NFHS – NATIONAL FAMILY HEALTH SURVEY
12. OECD – ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
13. UNDP – UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
14. UNIFEM – UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN
15. DWAN – DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES WITH WOMEN FOR A NEW ERA
16. UN – UNITED NATIONS
17. MDG – MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
18. NGO – NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
19. CEDAW – CONVENTION ON ELEVATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
20. BC – BEFORE CHRIST
21. SDGS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
22. NITI – NATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR TRANSFORMING INDIA
23. BJP – BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY
24. BPL – BELOW POVERTY LINE
25. WCP – WOMEN COMPONENT PLAN

26. NCW – NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

27. A.D – ANNO DOMINI

28. CDP – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

29. IADP – INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

30. BDO – BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

31. BDC -BLOCK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

32. GER – GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIO

33. NPEGEL- NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR EDUCATION OF GIRLS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

34. SSA -SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

35. KGBV – KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYA

36. ICT – INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

37. CSDS – CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF DEVELOPING SOCIETIES.

38. EWR – ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

39. NDA – NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE

40. PESA- PANCHAYATI RAJ EXTENSION TO SCHEDULED AREAS

41. CBO- COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

42. MNCS- MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATIONS

43. MGNREGA- MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT

LISTS OF CONFERENCES AND PUBLICATIONS/BOOKS

S.No.	Title of Publication	Name of Journal/Conference	Published/ Presentation date	ISSN Number	Indexing in Scopus/Web of Science/UGC Care list
			CONFERENCES ATTENDED		
1	Presented paper on "Gender Discrimination and Inequality in Family"	International Conference on "Revitalizing Social Institutions for Peace, Justice, and Environmental Protection" organized by School of Law, LPU Punjab	16-04-2022		
2	Presented a Research Paper on the topic "Media Representation of Women: A Myth or Reality	Multidisciplinary National Conference on "Innovations and Recent Advances "organized by SKC Govt. Degree College in collaboration with Indian Science Congress, Jammu Chapter	03-03-2024	--------	--------

3	Presented a Research Paper on the topic "Socio-Environmental Risks of E-Waste"	International Conference on "Sociological Understanding of Technological Advancements in Knowledge Society" organized by Dept. of Sociology, School of Liberal and Creative Arts, LPU, Punjab	02-05-2024	---------	---------
4	Presented a Research Paper on the topic "E-governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions in Jammu and Kashmir: Issues and Challenges"	International Conference on "Public Policy, Governance and Administration in Post pandemic Era" Dept. of Government and Public Administration, School of Liberal and Creative Arts, LPU, Punjab	13-11-2024	--------	--------
RESEARCH PAPERS PUBLISHED					
1	Empowering Rural Women for Environmental Governance: The Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rajouri District	International Journal of Environmental Sciences	May 2025 Vol.11 No.1,2025	2229-7359	Scopus

2	Women Leaders in Local Governance: A Study of Rajouri's Panchayati Raj Institutions	African Journal of Biomedical Research	December 2024	1119-5096	Scopus
3	Women Empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institution: A Survey of District Rajouri	Library Progress International	Jul-Dec 2024 Vol.44 No 3	Print:0970-1052 Online: 2320-317X	Scopus
	Drug Abuse Among Youth: A Socio-Demographic Analysis of Patients at D-Dwari de-Addiction Center, Sambha District, Jammu	Frontiers in Health Informatics	2024 Vol 13: Issue 3	2676-7104	Scopus
04	A Case Study of Rural Women's Political Empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions	International Journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research	Vol-9 Issue-2 Apr-June,2025	2456-8678	UGC care
04	Participated in	Research	26-04-2021		

	Six days National Workshop	Methodology and Data Analysis using SPSS organized by HRDC LPU, Punjab	to 01-05-2021		

BOOKS PUBLISHED

S.No.	Title of the Book	Publisher	Year of Publication	ISBN Number
1	Co-authored a Book titled "Issues and Challenges in Indian Society"	Vinod Book Depot	2023	978-81-17408-07-8
2	Authored a Book titled "Tribal Society in India"	Vinod Book Depot	2024	978-81-17408-27-6
3	Co-authored a Book titled "Sociological Thought in India-1"	Vinod Book Depot	2024	978-81- 970056-7-1
4	Authored a Book titled "Introducing and Functioning of Urban Society"	Vinod Book Depot	2025	978-81-979506-5-0
5	Authored a Book Titled "Environment and Society"	Vinod Book Depot	2025	978-81- 979506-7-4

Chapter-1

Introduction: Conceptual Overview

Empowerment

Empowerment is described as a multi-dimensional social process that enables individuals to gain control over their lives. It involves building power within people, allowing them to address and act on issues they consider significant in their personal lives, communities, and society (Page and Czuba, 1999). Empowerment is more than just a technological purpose; it constitutes a comprehensive political obligation. Attaining empowerment necessitates a protracted method whereby all social, cultural, and economic, political norms, and experience radical transformation. Empowerment necessitates a fundamentally different mindset wherein the stereotyping of women and men ceases to restrict their options, instead fostering a mentality that recognizes all individuals as vital agents of change, perceiving growth as a process that expands the choices available to both genders, rather than favouring one over the other (Mishra, 2014).

The term "empowerment" is derived from the verb "to empower", which means to inspire or enable another person to do something, such as stand up against oppression, injustice, or exploitation, or to demand their rights. Empowered individuals possess the capacity to make choices for themselves or for the betterment of society as a whole. Although academics have differing opinions on the topic of empowerment, the vast majority of studies support this aspect of the phenomenon, which has several dimensions. Different levels can experience it. It is context-dependent, community-specific, and environment-dependent. The essence of empowerment is the capacity to direct one's actions and use one's own physical, human, intellectual, belief, value, and ideological resources. At various points in history, many authors have offered various descriptions and conceptualizations of empowerment. There are a lot of uses for it. It means "to grant power or authority to" when used in this context. Strengthening one's spiritual, political, social, or economic status is what we mean when we talk of empowering oneself or one's community. Developing self-confidence often involves trusting in one's abilities. In its broadest sense, empowerment is defined in The World

Bank's Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: Sourcebook as the "expansion of freedom of choice and action" (Sharma, 2015). Empowerment was defined "as a method enabling people or groups to make their own choices and convert those decisions into their aspirations". The World Bank's statistics indicate that nations that promote gender discrimination incur the costs of poverty, stunted economic growth, ineffective governance, and diminished living standards. The World Bank research identifies four essential components of empowerment: accountability, information, inclusion and participation, and the capability of local organizations, all of which must be evaluated through institutional changes. To be empowered, an individual must actively engage in politics (World Development Report, 2001).

Empowerment is a procedure by which individuals engage in defining and advancing social and political initiatives according to their own volition (Wilkinson, 1990). Empowerment is defined as freedom at both communal and individual levels (Hape, 1994). Empowerment is analysed via the lens of power (Batliwala, 1994). For him, this entails altering existing power dynamics and asserting increased dominance over power sources. Empowerment is regarded as a developmental process encompassing skill enhancement and the capacity for rural individuals to improve their management capabilities (Oakley, 1991). Empowerment serves as a mechanism for enhancing both the capacity and confidence necessary for making informed choices in personal and communal contexts, while simultaneously gaining control over productive resources (Pandey, 1993). Empowerment is a mechanism that provides autonomy and control over an individual's life. Individuals assume agency in their growth, enabling them to make decisions that alter and contest their subservient societal status concerning many social, political, and economic issues (Sorensen, 1997). Empowerment is a genuine movement for freedom includes not just economic resources but also the social and political processes (Leiten, 1992). "Empowerment entails a fundamental reallocation of power across various groups" (Banerjee, 1995). The process of enhancing equality can be accomplished by disempowering certain structures, systems, processes, and institutions. Empowerment holds varied meanings for various individuals (Conger and Kanungo, 1988).

Women Empowerment

The concept of "empowerment" is frequently associated with women, particularly in discussions on gender equality. Women's empowerment is understood as both a process and an outcome through which those who are powerless or less powerful gain increased access to and control over resources—both material and informational—and actively challenge the ideologies that perpetuate discrimination and subordination (Singla, 2007). Women are empowered when given more opportunities to take charge of their lives and become leaders in their communities. Women have been seen as an essential component of sustainable development (United Nations, 2001). Swami Vivekananda has accurately stated that "women's empowerment includes several socio-psychological, literary, and philosophical dimensions". It is a method of establishing an atmosphere that enables women to think and grow autonomously, allowing them to make independent decisions on their growth. Women's empowerment has distinct extra components since it spans multiple areas where the locus of disempowerment frequently resides within the family. Consequently, a primary objective of feminism has been to assert that 'personal is political' (Harishmann, 2007). Empowering women is a "Process by which women gain the ability to make and enact strategic life choices" (Kabeer, 1999). Similarly, women's empowerment refers to the ability of women to make strategic life choices in situations where such autonomy had previously been restricted or denied. Therefore, empowering women is crucial for sustaining their individual, household, communal, and larger benefits (Malhotra et al., 2009). Literacy, education, training, and awareness-raising are all part of the plan to elevate women's position (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). Women's empowerment can be defined as the process of empowering women to make independent decisions about their lives and well-being within the family and society (Rani et al., 2017).

Empowering women and the enhancement of their status, especially regarding health, education, and economic prospects, are critically significant objectives in their own right. It also improves their decision-making ability in several critical domains (Vijayanthi, 2002). Even in India, where women are a large majority, socio-economic barriers keep them out. Our nation still has forced prostitution, female infanticide, child marriage, polygamy, and dowry killings. Women have been excluded from democratic

politics and institutions. To be empowered, women have to be involved in all parts of life, including decision-making, and work with men to resolve family and societal problems fairly and honestly. Women should be free to make reproductive and sexual wellness choices without discrimination, abuse, or pressure. When men and women are treated equally and fairly in sexual relationships, including respecting each other's credibility, esteem, unity, and mutual responsibility for sexual behaviours consequences must follow (Mishra, 2014). During the civil rights struggles in America in the 1960s, the ideology of empowerment as a liberator developed. The women's movement started using the word "empowerment" during the 1970s. The phrase "empowerment" is best defined as individual agency, not dependence on middlemen. Additionally, it delves into a more comprehensive examination of Justice for all and respect for human rights, going beyond issues of individual identity. United Nations identifies five key elements of women's empowerment: The right to (a) feel valuable; (b) have and make one's own decisions; and (c) have access to resources and opportunities (e) The capacity to shape societal change toward a more equitable economic and social order on a global scale; and (d) the Right to autonomy in all aspects of life, both at home and away (Khakhlary, 2017).

For a society to progress, women's empowerment is crucial. The shift from a welfare state to an equality state has been dramatic. The term refers to the method by which weaker groups can influence their women's lives more positively. Freedom is the capacity to influence an individual's own life and the outcomes of his decisions. To empower women, one must first encourage their personal growth and then ensure that they have equitable access to all forms of capital, including but not limited to: human capital, information about available possibilities, ideas for empowerment, and financial assets (Mamatha, 2018). A lot of people use the phrase "empowerment" while talking about "development," especially when talking about women's development. An individual's capacity to influence her life and surroundings can be enhanced via empowerment when she learns to identify, confront, and conquer personal obstacles (Rajammal, 1999). Women or groups of women should be able to experience complete authority and essence in all areas of life as a result of empowerment, which is a multi-faceted process. It includes more freedom to learn and make their own decisions, so

they can better organize their life and are less constrained by cultural norms and traditions (Chakravarty et al., 2013). What we mean when we say "empowerment of women" is giving women the tools they need to break free of patriarchal norms and regulations and take charge of their destinies. Another way to look at it is that it's about empowering women to be just as important as males in society by providing them equal access to resources and opportunities (Sarkar, 2015).

Female empowerment was initially proclamated at the 1985 Nairobi International Women's Conference. Sustainable development, promoting gender parity, empowering women, and including them in decision-making were all defined during this inaugural worldwide gathering. Global leaders saw evolving gender parity and empowering women as powerful tools in the struggle against poverty, hunger, and illness in the Millennium Summit statement, which was issued in New York in the year 2000 (UN Women, 2012). Apart from that, the summit started doing things to make the sustainable development process stronger, which is in line with the MDGs. Subsequently, in the Johannesburg Declaration, which was adopted at the close of the 2002 World Summit, the participants vowed to continue working for emancipation and promotion of gender parity in all areas of society (NGO Committee on Education, 2002). The attainment of these privileges was not quick or simple. Women were compelled to combat and vigorously champion their rights in several settings. During the deliberations for the ratification of the UN Charter, the draft lacked both the term "the equal rights of men and women" and the clause barring "discrimination based on sex". Female participants vigorously opposed such discrimination and insisted that all individuals, regardless of gender, are entitled to certain rights. The enthusiasm and efforts of women delegates to highlight their exclusion and advocate for the addition of gender parity in the UN Charter led to the integration of the moral that men and women must be equally treated. Consequently, the Charter of the UN emerged as "the inaugural international treaty in human history to emphasize that all individuals, regardless of gender, are entitled to certain rights". 1995 marked the year when the Beijing World Conference on Women brought to a successful conclusion the fight for human rights and the "empowerment of women proclaiming that the Rights of women are human rights". This declaration is significant, its significance exceeding that of 1789 with the Declaration of Man's and

Citizen's Rights and the American Declaration of Independence, which both deal exclusively with the political and civic liberties of men in the nation (Hunt, 2007).

The United Nations notes that women represent the "largest excluded category globally". CEDAW characterizes gender-based discrimination toward women as "differential treatment compared to men and boys in political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or other domains that obstruct their full access to human rights". To surmount these hurdles, women require empowerment. Empowering women entails cultivating them into more aware citizens who are engaged in politics, productive, autonomous, as well as capable of making informed judgments regarding issues that impact them (Mokta, 2014). New Zealand was the first country to grant women the right to vote in 1893, while Finland became the first nation in 1906 to permit women to run for election. By the time the twentieth century came to a close, more than ninety-five percent of the nations in the globe had extended this most fundamental democratic right to their female population (Paxton and Hughes, 2007). Within the framework of Islamic law, women were granted the ability to inherit property for the first time. It was the Koran that brought about a complete and total upheaval in the position and condition of women. Throughout the history of Eastern legislation, the idea of equality between the sexes was acknowledged and put into practice for the very first time. Therefore, according to the Koran, "the women ought to behave towards their husbands in the same manner as their husband ought to behave towards them, and according to what is just" (Ali, 2005). At the International level, several different actions were taken to make it easier for women to participate in political processes. The four World Conferences that were held in 1975, 1980, 1985, and 1995 in Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Beijing, respectively on women were hosted by the United Nations. These conferences served crucial spark that ignited the women's revolution. Even though the first global conference, which took place in Mexico City, was a significant step that marked the beginning of international attention on issues of women, the Conference at Beijing was the biggest United Nations gathering ever, with about 50,000 participants representing 180+ nations. It was a watershed moment in the fight for gender equality (Defeis, 2011). Women in India, like in many other parts of the world, continue to struggle for equality and representation in decision-making bodies, even after decades of constitutional

progress. Historically, women have been viewed as powerless, subjected to subjugation, and denied participation in decision-making, particularly in rural areas. Their limited voice, especially due to illiteracy, has contributed to their socio-economic marginalization. Deep-seated societal prejudices against women, seen as less powerful, have perpetuated this inequality (Agarwal, 1994). The current situation of socio-economic affairs calls for the formulation of a strategy to accord women a more raised position. Since the onset of the 21st century, there has been a significant transformation in perceptions about women residing in rural regions. Women in rural areas are no longer merely regarded as recipients of aid; instead, they are recognized as hardworking professionals and productive members of society. Traditionally, women have been expected to shoulder responsibilities both at home and in agricultural work. This shift in perspective has led to growing acknowledgment that development plans cannot succeed without actively involving women on an equal footing (Narayan, 2002).

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 has made significant strides in increasing women's authority within the three levels of the Panchayati Raj system. As part of this reform, one-third of all Panchayat seats have been reserved for women. This move is expected to play a crucial role in empowering women in rural areas. Additionally, the political empowerment of rural women is likely to have wide-ranging effects, impacting other aspects of social life due to the interconnected nature of these changes (UNDP India, 2002). Gender equality is a fundamental principle outlined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India. The Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, and Fundamental Duties provide for equality, justice, and freedom of expression for all citizens. The Constitution guarantees equality for women and grants the state the authority to implement affirmative action measures to support them. India has also pledged its commitment to numerous international agreements and human rights conventions aimed at ensuring equal rights for women. A significant step in this direction was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 (United Nations, 1979).

The National Commission for Women Act was passed in 1990 to protect women's rights, and on January 31, 1992, it was enacted into law, establishing the National Commission for Women (NCW). The Commission has a comprehensive mandate that

covers nearly all aspects of women's empowerment. Its mission is to promote equality and ensure women's full participation in all areas of life by empowering them to safeguard their rights and entitlements. This is achieved through the development of appropriate policies, the creation and enforcement of laws, the implementation of programs and strategies, and addressing specific issues related to discrimination and violence against women. The Commission's vision is to ensure the safety and welfare of Indian women, both in their homes and in society. In India, democracy signifies equal treatment for all its citizens. However, contrary to this core principle, women are often excluded, disqualified, or marginalized in various situations, opportunities, privileges, and aspects of life, with politics being a particularly notable example of this disparity (The National Commission for Women Act, 1990). As per the statistical information, "India is the most advanced democracy in the globe. It has a gigantic and active voter population of 900 million people, with 48 percent of them being female and 52 percent being male. Approximately 15 million people between the ages of 18 and 19 are eligible to vote for the first time, and by the year 2020, they will constitute 34% of the nation's total population". Although the number of female voters has risen over the years and now exceeds the number of male voters in the majority of Indian states, Women remain neglected in the political arena, both at the national and state levels, as well as in the spaces where political decisions are made (Election Commission of India in 2019).

Resolution 2030, known as the "Agenda for Sustainable Development, was adopted by the United Nations in September 2015. This resolution includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with the fifth goal specifically focused on achieving gender equality. This goal aims to ensure women's participation in all levels of decision-making and provide equal opportunities for them to assume leadership roles. The percentage of women in management positions and the number of women holding seats in parliaments and local governments are considered key indicators of progress (United Nations, 2015). According to data from the social statistics division of the Indian government in 2024, the proportion of women in India's workforce has risen to about 37%, up from 27.4% in 2017. In the 18th Lok Sabha, elected in 2024, women occupy 13.63% of the seats, with 77 women Members of Parliament (MPs) out of 543, marking a slight decline from 14.3% (78 women MPs) in the 17th Lok Sabha, while their

representation in rural local governance through the Panchayats stands at 46% (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, 2024). In September 2023, the Indian government introduced the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 (Women's Reservation Bill, 2023), which requires reserving one-third of the seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, including Delhi's Legislative Assembly (106th Constitutional Amendment Act).

The United Nations Women's League is a UN group dedicated to achieving global gender equality. The United Nations Women's Organization works on an international scale to make the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women. In India, UN Women collaborates closely with the government and civil society to establish national standards for achieving gender equality. The forum aims to eliminate all forms of violence and promote the economic empowerment of women. Additionally, UN Women advocates for greater female participation in decision-making and planning bodies, such as the Indian government's National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), ensuring that national policies and budgets address the needs of women. This is not just a phenomenon observed in India but is prevalent worldwide (UNDP, 2020). The status of women serves as an indicator of a state's democratization, reflecting the degree of tolerance and respect a society shows towards its female population. Empowerment is a multifaceted process that enables individuals or groups to fully realize their identity and agency in all aspects of life. Today, it is viewed as equal status, opportunity, and freedom for personal development. Many countries, including India, are making significant steps in empowering women by improving their rights and responsibilities and expanding their access to resources. "The empowerment of women and the enhancement of their status, especially in areas like education, health, and economic opportunities, are important objectives in their own right. It also strengthens their ability to make decisions in many critical areas" (Vijayanthi, 2002).

The women empowerment in India is highly dependent on various elements, including those that are social, educational, economic, political, cultural, and religious. The effect is also exerted by geographical settings, which include both rural and urban regions, as well as cities and towns. The patriarchal family structure, caste, class, marital status, conventions, traditions, and other official and informal forms of social control that are

established by society are all examples of social forces. The national and state governments have established policies, initiatives, and objectives to empower women in areas such as health, education, economics, and the political sector (Upadhyay, 1992). Several renowned women have held major cabinet ministry positions in recent years. Although these are prominent status roles, ordinary women are seldom involved in Indian politics. Even after 78 years of independence, India still has few female political candidates. Women are almost half the population but just one-twelfth of parliamentary candidates. While women's involvement in India's political system is low, they have made significant attempts to enhance their voter and local body candidate participation. Women are elected to Local governments more often after reservations for seats were implemented. They frequently lack decision-making capacity and operate as proxy members. However, female voter participation has increased unexpectedly, even as the number of women standing in elections has increased without much effect (Milan and Jamie, 2019). Empowering rural women is crucial for addressing societal issues like population growth and the poor status of women. For sustainable development in rural India, women must be equally involved in decision-making. With over 0.25 million bodies, about one million rural women will rise to leadership positions in Panchayati Raj Institutions, with 75,000 overseeing administrative entities. Since 1993, a national training program has aimed at providing leadership training for women officials. Women's leadership in Gram Panchayats involves active participation in voting, running for office, decision-making, and development projects. Overcoming challenges rooted in early socialization is essential for recognizing and valuing women's rights in politics (Pande, 2015). India, with a population of 142.86 crore, is home to approximately 66 crore women. Both women and men play integral roles in driving the nation's economic progress. Despite women balancing dual responsibilities in reproductive and productive spheres, their contribution to societal advancement is undeniable. However, their involvement in formal political structures and decision-making processes, which govern the allocation of resources created by both genders, remains minimal (UNDP, 2020). Political empowerment is a vital step toward progress for women, as active political participation strengthens their influence and agency. Women's empowerment in India is shaped by various factors, including social, educational, economic, political, cultural, and

religious influences. Geographical distinctions, such as rural versus urban areas, cities, and towns, further impact the extent of empowerment. Social elements like patriarchal family systems, caste, class, marital status, norms, traditions, and formal and informal systems of social control also play significant roles (Upadhyay, 1992). The influence of the patriarchal system is seen in both rural and urban settings. Numerous studies indicate that women have significantly gained empowerment in metropolitan regions regarding education and socio-economic opportunities; nonetheless, they continue to fall behind in the political arena. Socio-economic position is an important predictor of women's political engagement, primarily since it assesses individual resource availability (Verba et al., 1995).

Numerous studies have identified key factors that contribute to women's empowerment, including socio-economic development, gender-egalitarian values, historical contexts, and institutional frameworks. Various research works have utilized different indicators to evaluate gender equality. For example, the Gender Development Index (GDI) has been used to measure gender equality in living conditions. The proportion of adult women participating in civic activities such as demonstrations and boycotts serves as a strong indicator of gender equality. Political representation and positional empowerment have been assessed using metrics such as the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) and the percentage of women in national parliaments. Specifically, the GEI has been instrumental in quantifying gender equality in terms of positional empowerment (Alexander and Christian, 2007). Women play a crucial role in Indian society and have a significant impact on the nation's future. As Swami Vivekananda wisely said, "The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of women" (Dhulip & Pandit, 2013). Therefore, recognizing their contributions and fostering greater participation in social, economic, and political affairs is vital. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women enacted in 2001 offers a critical foundation for tackling the issue of gender equality in India. Specifically, it highlights the fact that legal rules and regulations frequently do not completely translate into reality for women throughout the country, so acknowledging the gap between the Constitution's goals and the actual condition of women in current society. De jure equality, often known as legal equality, is not the only goal this policy seeks to achieve;

it also seeks to achieve de facto equality, which means that women can enjoy their liberties and rights in every way on an equal footing with men. This entails not only the formulation of new legislation but also the assurance of the efficient enforcement of current laws. This is especially significant in India, where conventional norms and socioeconomic obstacles frequently impede the effective implementation of legislation designed to safeguard and empower women (Government of India, 2001).

Women's Political Empowerment

Empowering women is essential for creating a gender-equal society and fostering progress in all spheres of life, including politics. The concept of women's political empowerment is grounded in three fundamental principles: (a) ensuring equality between men and women, (b) enabling women to realize their full potential, and (c) upholding women's right to self-representation and autonomy (Government of India, 2001). Political empowerment refers to the capacity to shape the development, execution, and assessment of policies by integrating women into the political framework. This includes their active participation in various political activities, such as voting, campaigning, running for office, joining political parties, and securing representation in elected roles at different levels. Furthermore, it emphasizes their ability to make impactful contributions to decision-making processes, which strengthens political empowerment (Bhargava and Subha, 2016).

Political empowerment is defined as a process that builds awareness and capacity, ultimately leading to increased participation, enhanced control over decision-making, and greater engagement in educational and developmental activities. Empowerment involves enabling individuals to act independently and without discrimination. For women, it encompasses improving their knowledge, skills, opportunities, security, participation in decision-making, power-sharing, and access to resources. Political empowerment specifically refers to women's involvement in politics, whether as voters, legislators, or policymakers, ensuring equal recognition and respect alongside men. It involves redistributing power in the political sphere and fostering comprehensive engagement, from awareness to active participation, beyond just the right to vote. These concepts are crucial for advancing women's empowerment in politics.

Political Knowledge: Gaining an understanding of political issues is essential for meaningful political participation. It reflects an active interest in politics and the ability to organize and plan effectively.

1. **Political Interest**: Interest in political matters is strongly linked to political engagement. Women often show less interest in politics than men, which can impact their level of participation.

2. **Political Involvement**: Political participation encompasses voluntary activities aimed at influencing elections or public policies. Actions such as voting and campaigning are significant indicators of women's political empowerment.

3. **Political Trust**: Trust in the political system is vital for active engagement. Political trust is often associated with personal confidence and shapes how individuals interact with political structures.

4. **Political Connections**: Women frequently face underrepresentation in political organizations. Establishing political connections enables women to enhance their skills and effectively contribute to the political domain.

5. **Political Protests**: Engaging in protests serves as an active form of political participation, enabling individuals to voice their concerns. It signifies empowerment and the capacity to challenge and seek changes within the system.

6. **Attitude toward Gender Roles**: Recognizing how women perceive their role in the political landscape is crucial. It highlights their acknowledgment as equal citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

7. **Initiatives**: Analyzing the initiatives undertaken by women in politics offers valuable insights into their contributions and the advantages they bring to communities. This reflects their ability to execute responsibilities and actively participate in governance.

8. **Confidence**: Confidence plays a vital role in empowerment. Assessing whether women in politics have gained self-assurance and enhanced their skills through their involvement is crucial for evaluating their empowerment.

Women's empowerment in politics is shaped by various factors influencing their participation and effectiveness. Despite economic, social, cultural, and political advancements, significant challenges persist. While women played leadership roles even before India's independence and were granted equality under Article 15 of the Indian Constitution post-independence, they remain underrepresented in political spaces. Their participation at federal and state levels is limited due to inadequate political influence (Siwal, 2015). Recent developments in District Rajouri, Jammu, and Kashmir, highlight the increasing involvement of educated women in local governance. Notably, an MBA graduate recently made headlines by becoming a Sarpanch, indicating that well-educated women are actively participating in this field. This trend reflects a broader societal shift where both men and women are increasingly integrated into the social, political, and economic fabric of the country. These findings underscore the ongoing efforts and challenges in enhancing women's participation and empowerment in local governance within District Rajouri.

Political Participation

The aforementioned explanations highlight the significance of women's participation in politics for their political emancipation. Without mobilization or any active participation, women tend to get fewer chances for political emancipation. Consequently, political empowerment is unattainable without political engagement. The notion of women's involvement in political affairs originated during the international discourse on women's rights during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The conference underscored the necessity for women to attain equal access to and full involvement in governance (Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995). A growing global consensus exists about the necessity of women's involvement in politics. Nonetheless, women's empowerment continues to be unattainable in numerous countries, as they are still denied equitable representation in political spheres. A comparable scenario prevails in India, where female representation in parliament has consistently remained below 15%. These reasons render it difficult to implement substantial and enduring changes in the lives of nearly fifty million women who continue to depend on men for critical decisions

impacting their needs, development, security, and welfare (Gender equality in politics: A global perspective, United Nations, 2021). The Committee on the Status of Women recommended reserving seats for women in political institutions to encourage their increased participation. In 1993, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were introduced, mandating a 33% quota for women's representation in Panchayats and District-level bodies. This landmark decision allowed women to voice their perspectives within grassroots democratic institutions, significantly enhancing their participation in India's policymaking process (Government of India, 1993). Political engagement, where individuals actively express their views on state policies, is a cornerstone of democracy. Its primary objectives include driving essential reforms in the political system to support both the nation's macro-level development and the micro-level interests of individuals and communities. Ultimately, voluntary participation in a country's political structures and processes is vital for strengthening and advancing democratic governance (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

Dimensions of Political Empowerment

People can get involved in the political process through a variety of actions and conduct that are included in the broad category of political involvement. These are some essential elements and behaviours that constitute political participation.

1. Political Participation: Electoral versus non-electoral

A variety of activities, including both non-electoral and electoral processes, are included in political engagement. Voting, joining political parties, running for office, and campaigning are all examples of electoral engagement actions that have a direct impact on political systems' decision-making. Conversely, non-electoral actions such as rallies and demonstrations are meant to raise awareness of problems and put pressure on the government to solve them.

2. Political Participation: Positive versus Negative

One can see political participation either favourably or unfavourably. Protests and violent demonstrations are examples of negative involvement that are frequently

utilized to express discontent with the ruling class and to challenge government policies. Positive engagement, on the other hand, entails constructive activities such as putting forward ideas to authorities and campaigning through groups that support democratic norms and result in more citizen-friendly legislation. Participation in decision-making is essential for a democratic society. It involves engaging individuals who will be affected by decisions, enabling them to elect representatives, debate issues, run for office, make choices, and exercise veto power. Factors such as social status, education, occupation, income, and involvement in organizations can affect an individual's level of participation. Active engagement in these activities cultivates a sense of commitment to the community, patriotism, and loyalty.

3. Manifest versus Latent Political Participation

Political participation can be viewed from two perspectives: manifest and latent. Manifest participation includes both formal and informal unconventional political activities. Examples of manifest participation are voting in elections, deliberately abstaining from voting, casting a blank ballot as a protest, joining a political party, submitting petitions to elected officials, running for office, and participating in protest marches and demonstrations.

Latent political participation refers to activities with political motivations that may not be immediately evident. These activities play an important role in supporting society's members, whether planned or unplanned. Latent participation includes pre-political actions, such as volunteering for community welfare. While these activities may not have explicit political objectives, they are still significant for society and can lead to more direct political involvement in the future.

Panchayati Raj

The term panchayat originates from the Sanskrit terms 'Panchen' and 'ayatanam'. The literal interpretation of the Sanskrit term 'panchen' denotes five members. Panchayat refers to an assembly constituted by knowledgeable individuals to adjudicate and resolve conflicts. Conversely, the term 'ayatnam' signifies office. The term panchayat signifies an "office of panchas". In Hindu mythology, these five entities are regarded as sacred. They are further depicted as the representatives of the divine, with each member

of the panchayat symbolizing one of the elements of Mother Earth. The five deities referred to as "panchayatani" in Sanskrit are Ganapati, Vishnu, Shankar, Devi, and Surya. These deities together embody ultimate authority. Consequently, the panch embodies the parameshwar, the supreme deity of justice who is infallible (Dey, 1962).

The Panchayat, or the institution of village councils, has been a long-established tradition in India's history (Desai, 1991). In ancient times, Panchayats served as the local government units responsible for managing most activities that influenced village life. Many local government terms, such as janpad, panch, and Panchayat, have been in use for over a thousand years. It is commonly believed that between the sixth and third centuries BCE, small territorial units known as Jan or village groupings existed, governed by a system where decisions were made through consensus among senior family or group leaders. These institutions largely remained unaffected by the social and political changes happening in urban India until the 18th century (Chauhan, 2009). The term Panchayat, meaning "an assembly of five," is thought to have been introduced by King Prithvi during his conquest of the Doab, the region between the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. Vedic texts provide evidence of the existence of Gram Sabhas or rural communities, with the Rigveda mentioning local self-governing bodies like Sabha, Samiti, and Vidath, underscoring their role. Over time, the Panchayat evolved into a committee of five individuals chosen from the village to resolve community disputes. In ancient times, there was a concept called Panch Parmeshwar, meaning "Panch—the God". The term Panchayatan, found in ancient Sanskrit texts, refers to a group of five people, often including some spiritual Figures. The Neeti Shastra of Shukracharya also mentions the governance of villages during this era (Joshi and Narwani, 2005). An analysis of the Ramayana shows that administration was divided into two main components: Janpad (city) and village. The concept of village self-governance is discussed in the Shanti Parva and Sabha Parva of the Mahabharata, as well as in Kautilya's Arthashastra, and Buddhist and Jain literature. Under the Mughals, there was minimal interference with villages, and they were incorporated into the broader administrative framework. However, British rule brought substantial changes, disrupting a system of governance that had endured for centuries (Sharma, 1994).

The Panchayati Raj is a longstanding and deeply rooted concept in India. The creation of Constitutional Panchayats establishes an important link between rural communities and the administration at both the local and state levels through mechanisms like Blocks, Nyaya Panchayats, or Judicial Committees. Villages have a historical legacy in terms of their establishment, resource management, and their responsibilities in maintaining law and order (Chauhan, 2009). Sir Charles Metcalfe, the Provincial Governor General of India (1835-36), described village communities as follows: "The village communities are like small republics, almost self-sufficient and largely untouched by external influences. They have endured countless changes—dynasties rising and falling, revolutions sweeping through, and rulers—whether Hindu, Pathan, Mughal, Maratha, Sikh, or English—coming and going. Yet, the village communities remain unchanged. Their collective strength, with each village acting as an independent, self-sustaining unit, has been the key to the enduring survival of India's people through all the challenges they have faced". This system has played a significant role in their well-being, granting them a high level of freedom and independence" (Reddy, 1999). He elaborated on the Jat villages surrounding Delhi. 'I admire the structure of the village communities' (Madan, 2002). In villages, different segments of society relied on each other, with mutual dependence rooted in long-standing customs. The self- sufficiency of these communities helped preserve their distinctiveness. Village organizations acted as intermediaries with higher authorities on local matters. The Panchayat system, largely unchanged from the medieval era, evolved to manage law and order and resolve conflicts. This role gained political acceptance in the 20th century, influencing the establishment and functioning of Panchayats and Panchayati Adalat (Aslam, 1996). Srinivas contends that the systematic examination of disputes in rural regions and their resolution by non-official panchayats is a significant topic of research. It is now disregarded by both sociologists and legal professionals. The latter restrict themselves to legislation passed by the state and central legislatures. Customary law, as practiced in communities, is not recognized as legal despite its regulation of the lives of millions. Convenient fallacies persist that the arrival of British law abolished the rules and practices observed by the rural panchayats. Indian villagers are effectively "illegal" in their utilization of both their traditional systems and the British-imposed legal framework enforced by the official courts located in urban areas. I have been

informed of instances withdrawn from the latter that require resolution before the unofficial panchayats. The study of the impact of the introduction of British law on the indigenous system and Indian society has to be explored by historians, anthropologists, and lawyers (Srinivas, 2002).

The Panchayati Raj system, one of the oldest forms of local governance in South Asia, continues in countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Trinidad and Tobago, with origins dating back to 250 AD as a local self-governing system at village levels. Modern Panchayati Raj in northern India is distinct from traditional caste-based khap Panchayats, which operate outside the constitutional framework The term "Panchayat" refers to an assembly, and "Raj" means rural governance. The Panchayat system is composed of respected community elders who are chosen and accepted by the local population. These assemblies traditionally handled disputes, whether between individuals, villages, or a combination of both. The leader of the Panchayat was called the "Sarpanch" or "Mukhya," a position held by an elected or widely accepted individual (Mallick, 2018). During British India, Sir Charles Metcalfe, the then Governor-General of India (1835-1836), described Indian villages as "little republics." The Mayo Resolution of 1870 further reinforced the concept of local self-governance. However, it was Lord Rippon's Resolution that made a significant contribution to the evolution of India's village self-governance system, often referred to as the "Magna Carta of Indian local democracy" (Mathew, 2013; Brahmanandam, 2018).

Mahatma Gandhi advocated for Panchayati Raj as a decentralized system of village self-governance, or "Gram Swaraj." However, India adopted a centralized governance model, later mitigated by devolving administrative responsibilities to empower elected Gram Panchayats. The current system, established through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, includes the Gram Sabha, a village parliament meeting twice a year to approve Gram Panchayat budgets and resolutions. Although all adults aged 18 and above in a village can participate in Gram Sabha meetings, its implementation has been inconsistent, with many states failing to hold meetings regularly. A survey in four South Indian states found that most Gram Panchayats had not convened a Gram Sabha in the previous year, and only 20% of households participated. The likelihood of an

illiterate person obtaining a BPL card is nine percent higher in communities where Gram Sabha sessions have been successfully organized. The Gram Sabha, as a result, plays a crucial function in ensuring that resources are allocated fairly at the local level and in supporting the engagement of a range of socioeconomic groups. Therefore, it is vital for those in charge of creating public policy to examine measures to promote and reward Panchayats to convene gram Sabha sessions on a more frequent basis (Besley et al., 2005).

However, empirical evidence indicates that participation in Gram Sabha has yielded positive outcomes. To begin, gram Sabha meetings are designed to increase the participation of regular men and women in the process of making decisions at the local level. Gram Sabha meetings are important forums that provide a venue for villagers to congregate and discuss, debate, and criticize choices made at the grassroots level. Secondly, the Gram Sabha is an essential element in the process of directing resources and benefits to the village level. According to the findings of the empirical study, attendance in Gram Sabha meetings is associated with policy implications (Rao and Sanyal, 2005). Women must attend Gram Sabha sessions so that their issues may be addressed. Women in this community typically avoid male villagers at panchayat meetings due to the strong social constraints imposed by their fictitious or real familial relationships. Conversely, men of the community congregate publicly in the Gram Sabha. A case study focused on Orissa panchayats, observed that while women typically participate in panchayat meetings, their involvement often extends little beyond mere attendance. Especially turning up at Gram Sabha meetings, when important decisions are decided, monitoring the execution of development works, or traveling out to resolve community conflicts is out of the question for the majority of the women. Going alone is typically not permitted by the local community (Hust, 2001). It is essential to implement measures that ensure women are afforded equitable representation in political decision-making processes. The underrepresentation of women in these arenas is a recognized factor contributing to the persistent disparities in power, financial resources, and opportunities between genders. There has to be a shift toward more accountability and genuine representation in the political institutions. A more need-based approach to human development should result from a political landscape that

includes women, who may reshape their form, substance, and practice by bringing the voice of the oppressed to the political arena (Buch, 2010). The engagement of women in Panchayati Raj has been deemed the most effective weapon to reduce their inequity, invisibility, and weakness (Mahi Pal, 1994). In a similar vein, T.N. Seshan, who had previously served as Chief Election Commissioner, thought that the lack of women in the political decision-making process resulted in the drafting of rules and regulations that were prejudiced against women. To summarize, the essence of the increasing need for more involvement of women in politics by women themselves is due to a growing recognition that in addition to representing the neglected portion of the population, it would allow them the authority to redefine the political agenda and express their interests. This understanding has led to the growing need for women to represent themselves in the realm of politics (Varma, 1997). Reservation has empowered women to influence the decision-making process. Through Panchayats, individuals can effectively address their issues and related social and economic concerns. This is crucial for improving the status of women in all aspects of life. The proposed study aims to investigate the empowerment of rural women inside the Panchayati Raj Institution specifically, and within the broader societal context generally. Efforts to incorporate women into development emerged in several nations throughout the mid-twentieth century. The pursuit of women's representation in government is perhaps as ancient as mankind itself. However, till the 1970s development theory and practice practically neglected women and their opinions. The role of women in fostering development was often overlooked, and their issues and gender dynamics were disregarded in these contexts (Brohman 1996; Nussbaum 2003). Such attempts were legitimized and supported until after the U.N Decade for Women (1975-85) and the events that preceded it (Hahner, 1985).

The concept and practice of development often assume that policies and programs benefit everyone equally, without distinguishing between men and women. While efforts have been focused on the welfare of women, particularly as child-bearers and the most affected by poverty and malnutrition, their contributions to agriculture and other productive sectors have been neglected. This oversight has led to their systematic exclusion from various aspects of development, with women often being seen as

obstacles to progress (Parpart, 1993). Women, once marginalized in development frameworks as obstacles or passive beneficiaries, have gradually moved toward mainstream inclusion in recent years. Since the 1950s, policies have increasingly recognized women's crucial role in development, reflecting a growing acknowledgment of their needs. This shift aligns with broader changes in macro-level social and economic policy, evolving from a focus on "Welfare" to "Equity," then to "Anti-poverty" and "Efficiency," and ultimately to "Empowerment." The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution (1992) must be viewed in this context, as they institutionalize a significant role for women in power structures. Over the last 25 years of their implementation, these amendments have brought about notable advancements in women's position and role in governance. The Acts aim to formalize village participation in rural administration and reserve one-third of Panchayat governance seats for women. This has opened up substantial opportunities for rural women's development and empowerment. Women's participation in governance through reservations is regarded as a vital step in the long-term process of achieving gender equality (Kodoth and Mishra, 2011).

Therefore, the comprehensive growth and sustained development of society rely on the active involvement of women. The decentralization movement has unequivocally afforded rural women significant opportunities via financial support and political engagement in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs). The provision and usage of financial aid through a Women Component Plan (WCP) enhance basic amenities, increase income, generate employment, and facilitate empowerment. As far as political engagement is concerned, it helps to reach women's personal, economic, social, and political empowerment. These are the final aims of the decentralization process in the field of women's empowerment. Three decades have elapsed since the introduction of the 73rd and 74th Amendments. Therefore, it is an opportune moment to assess the impact of this transformative legislation on women's empowerment and its enhancement of women's entire capabilities. India is the most populous democracy. The preamble of the constitution states that the fundamental objectives of our democracy are equality, fraternity, and justice. The predominant portion of the Indian populace inhabits rural regions; nevertheless, the degree of development in these locations is not

equivalent to that of metropolitan locales. The population of rural regions does not have enough literacy, awareness, resources, and other services (Sharma and Gupta, 2023).

The father of the country Mahatma Gandhi considered that the Indian villages were to be made self-sustaining by drawing them within the purview of administration. Gandhi ji advocated for the establishment of gram panchayats with significant autonomy in every village across the nation. The drafting committee, chaired by B.R. Ambedkar, articulates this aspiration of the nation's founder in Article 40 of the Indian constitution. Women's engagement in Indian politics is extremely limited. Indian democracy cannot thrive without providing women equal opportunity in the decision-making process. The founder of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi remarked "Woman is the companion of men, gifted with equal mental capacities. She possesses the entitlement to engage in the most intricate aspects of human activity, and she holds an equal right to freedom and liberty as he does". Rajiv Gandhi stated, "We trust the populace, we have confidence in the populace, and it is the populace that must ascertain their fates and the fate of the nation." To the citizens of India, let us guarantee optimal democracy and extensive decentralization. Let the people be empowered (Palanithurai, 2013). Like diverse nations of the world, in India, political rights have been indirectly seized by the men. Women have utilized limited political rights. This custom undermines the democratic concept in the Universal Declaration on Democracy: "The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarities, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences" (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). The government of India initiated the process of local self-governance, which was a significant development in Indian politics following the country's attainment of independence. A three-tiered Panchayati Raj System was planned to be implemented in India at the suggestion of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957). The objective of this system was to raise the percentage of women who participated in politics and to empower them. Additionally, a specific provision was suggested for women who belonged to the SC and ST communities. Unfortunately, none of these efforts have been successful in bringing about an improvement in the general involvement status of women in politics. A committee was established after that event to investigate the political, cultural, and

socio-economic problems that Indian women are now facing. In addition, the report titled "Towards Equality" did not live up to expectations. According to the Reports of the Committee on the Status of Women (RCSW), the primary cause for the low level of engagement was the political inequality that existed under the circumstances (Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974). Consequently, the inadequate involvement of women in various political spheres compelled the Indian Government to propose a Constitutional Amendment Bill to guarantee reservations for women in national politics, namely in Local Self-Government. In 1992, the Indian Parliament enacted the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act which was a cornerstone of local self-governance. This Act mandates a one-third quota for women inside the Panchayat system. This Act has resulted in the election of thousands of women to Panchayats, enabling their participation in the political process (Verba, 1978). The Act strengthened democratic decentralization and increased women's participation in local politics. In terms of political empowerment, PRIs may be transformational. This strategy lets rural women engage in politics and development. One-third of Panchayati Raj seats are for women. Thus, most states included women in Panchayati Raj institutions. Their representation was low, and most inducted members were passive. The following research examines the number of women who have succeeded in Indian political PRIs. Panchayati Raj was not easy to create. The Panchayati Raj Institution resulted after a lengthy wait and hard work. The country's Local Self-Government began under colonialism. The colonial period saw various attempts at local self-governance. After independence, India established the Panchayat system (Sachetana, 2003).

Panchayati Raj in India

India's development is rooted in its villages, which are built on the foundation of the Panchayati Raj system. In 1946, Gandhi wisely asserted that national liberation must start at the grassroots level, with each village functioning as an autonomous Republic or Panchayat. He championed Panchayati Raj as a decentralized governance model where each community manages its affairs, calling it "Gram Swaraj" (Village Self-Governance). India's first Prime Minister also recognized the importance of decentralized administration and emphasized that the Panchayati Raj was vital for local development. By enabling grassroots decision-making, Panchayats are expected to play

a crucial role in self-governance, social progress, and economic growth, exemplifying democratic decentralization on a national scale. However, government support is essential to fulfil these expectations effectively (Singh and Malik, 2020). To enhance the quality of life in rural areas, the government consistently introduced strategies focused on social welfare, employment generation, poverty alleviation, and rural development. Active participation in Panchayats was crucial for the effective implementation and success of these projects and programs. Community participation proved successful in spreading the benefits of policies and activities to the grassroots level. As the main institutions in rural areas, panchayats were seen as a link between government policymakers and the rural populace for implementation. Most of these efforts, programs, and options were implemented by panchayats. Panchayats have transformed local government by giving citizens more power and responsibility, enabling public participation in planning and implementation for efficient and successful development (Joseph, 2011). The Panchayati Raj Institution is operational in all states of India except Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram, and in all Union Territories except Delhi (Panchayat Elections, 2016). These three northeastern states are exempt from the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution related to Panchayats. Across the country, there are 251,000 Panchayats, including 239,000 Gram Panchayats, 6,405 Block Panchayats, and 589 District Panchayats or Zila Parishads. States such as Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and West Bengal have a strong tradition of Panchayats and have devolved substantial powers to them. Meanwhile, Rajasthan, Tripura, and Sikkim have recently introduced noteworthy initiatives in this area.

As of December 31, 2022 India has a total of 262,985 Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), comprising:

- ➢ 2,55,623 Gram Panchayats (Village level)
- ➢ 6,697 Block Panchayats (Intermediate level)
- ➢ 665 District Panchayats (District level)

This reflects an increase from the 2015 Figs, which reported 239,000 Gram Panchayats, 6,405 Block Panchayats, and 589 District Panchayats. Regarding the devolution of powers to PRIs, states like Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra have been recognized for their robust Panchayati Raj systems. Kerala, in particular, has been noted for its comprehensive devolution of functions, functionaries, and funds to local governments.

Similarly, Karnataka's Panchayat system has been praised as a model for other states, with initiatives in solid waste management and solar power generation. Maharashtra also ranks among the top states empowering its Panchayati Raj Institutions. Conversely, Goa has been identified as the only state where the government has not empowered its village Panchayats and gram sabhas to make decisions in 29 subjects, including health, education, and land reforms. Overall, while significant progress has been made in strengthening PRIs across India, the extent of devolution varies among states, influenced by local governance priorities and administrative frameworks (The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, January 2015). The Panchayati System is a distinctive characteristic of Indian society. It is often referred to as local self-government, grassroots democracy, or democratic decentralization. The country's first PRI was launched in Nagaur in Rajasthan by its first Prime Minister on October 2, 1959, and the Panchayati Raj Institutions were established throughout the nation with the 73rd amendment in 1992, which granted them legal status. Around the same time, PRI was founded in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, and by mid-1960 over two lakh panchayats were established across the country. The Panchayati Raj system is set at three levels:

(i)   Zilla Parishad

(ii)   Block Samiti

(iii)   Gram Panchayat at the village level.

About half of the female population in India is employed in the informal sector. The advancement of Indian society in the modern era predominantly depends on the rise of women's status in society. If their circumstances do not improve then the whole notion of progress is useless. The empowerment of women is particularly vital in this period of fast industrialization and progress. Women's empowerment includes improvements in their economic and social standing as well as their active engagement and role in the realm of politics. In India, women's political participation continues to lag behind men's. To address this gender disparity, the Indian Constitution mandates the reservation of one-third of seats for women in Panchayats. On March 8, 2021 in celebration of International Women's Day, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj instructed all States and Union Territories to organize Special Gram Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas in each Gram Panchayat. The theme for International Women's Day was "Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights." Discussions during these Gram Sabhas focused

on key issues such as "Poshan Panchayat" (nutrition), land rights, education, safety, reproductive health, and equality. Notably, at least 20 states have enacted laws increasing women's reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions to 50%. As a result, women, including those from socially disadvantaged groups, now comprise 13.74 lakh (45.25%) of the 30.41 lakh elected members in these institutions (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2021).

Rural poverty is becoming an increasingly urgent issue in modern India. Domestic abuse is more common among rural women compared to their metropolitan counterparts. Eliminating rural poverty in India is a challenging task. Offering economic possibilities to rural residents, especially women, has been highly effective in alleviating poverty in rural India. Empowering women and bolstering society as a whole, Gram Panchayats provide financial assistance and decision-making authority to women. Therefore, this study is framed within this framework to investigate how Gram Panchayats empower women and to comprehend the degree to which Gram Panchayat women are empowered socially, educationally, economically, and politically. The main information has been collected through a field survey.

Evolution and Growth of Panchayati Raj

Autonomous local organizations known as "Sabhas" are believed to have existed as early as the Rig-Vedic period (1700 BC), eventually evolving into Panchayats or "councils of five persons" (Law Times Journal, 2017). Development from the 10th century AD, particularly during the Chola dynasty was traced. Over time, custom and tradition elevated village assemblies or councils, known as "Sabhas," to significant positions of authority. These assemblies gradually transformed into Panchayats, which became the administrative centers, symbols of social cohesion, and primary platforms for justice delivery and conflict resolution at the local level. Under British rule, several measures were taken to formalize and establish local self-governments in India. Aimed mostly to increase imperial finances, Lord Mayo obtained the ratification of a resolution for the decentralization of authority aiming at improved administrative proficiency in answering the needs of the people. Concurrent with this, the Bengal Chowkidari Act, of 1870, gave the District Magistrates authority to establish a Panchayati system of designated members in the villages, therefore enabling a major first step towards restoring the original village panchayat structure in Bengal (Jetley, Sheel, and Bansal,

1996). In 1906, under Dadabhai Naoroji's leadership, the Indian National Congress declared self-government as its political goal. A year later, the British government formed a six-member Royal Commission on Decentralization, with R. C. Dutt as the sole Indian representative. The commission's 1909 report highlighted the importance of panchayats in India's governance. That same year, at the 24th Lahore session, the Congress resolved to urge the government to implement elections for all local bodies, starting with village Panchayats, ensuring elected non-official chairpersons and adequate financial support. However, during the 28th session in Karachi in December 1913, the Congress expressed disappointment over the lack of progress in grassroots democracy (Naoroji and Dutt, 1909).

The 1919 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms recommended that local self-governance be entirely representative and accountable, advocating for public control over local institutions. Initially, rural local bodies established in 1869 were small and quasi-official. However, financial constraints and resistance from provincial governments hindered their growth and effectiveness. Historically, panchayats have been an integral part of India's framework for local conflict resolution and rural administration, rooted in social consensus (Buch, 2010). Both caste-based and village panchayats played significant roles in governance in pre-British India (Joseph, 2011). Panchayats, functioning as autonomous local bodies, existed in India prior to independence but were formally institutionalized only afterward. In the post-independence era (1947–1959), state governments formulated Panchayati Raj Acts to promote rural development. Panchayats were incorporated into the Directive Principles of State Policy under Article 40, which states: "The state shall take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."

The Community Development Programme (CDP) played a pivotal role in local administration during the 1950s. Introduced on October 2, 1952, alongside the National Extension Service, as part of the First Five-Year Plan, it aimed to foster active public participation in rural areas (Bhatt, 2010).

Decentralization and Local Self-Government

Decentralization involves transferring administrative authority, public resources, and responsibilities from central or state governments to local bodies such as village

panchayats, municipalities, and NGOs. This approach fosters a governance model centred on people, enabling marginalized groups to actively implement programs and policies. By mobilizing, allocating, and distributing public resources, these groups become agents of development rather than mere beneficiaries. The core objectives of decentralization are to ensure government accountability and promote economic and social equity (Singh and Mishra, 1993)

Democratic decentralization has its roots in post-World War efforts toward development and reconstruction, reflecting changes in the relationships between states, their citizens, and society, alongside the influence of international organizations. Many nations have incorporated public participation into their development initiatives, emphasizing the necessity of active engagement from the outset. Freedom, a fundamental human attribute, cannot be imposed by external forces. Democracy thrives on freedom, and democratic decentralization serves as an extension of this principle, functioning as a strategic approach to development. Following independence, India established an extensive infrastructure to support planning as a vital tool for national progress (Dubey and Padalia, 2002). Through the Panchayati Raj system, democracy is entrenched at the grassroots level, with Panchayati Raj symbolizing the essence of democratic decentralization and fostering democracy at its foundational level (Gupta, 2002). Grassroots democracy is a political system that ensures democratic values are practiced not just at the national or regional levels, but also at the local level, making democracy more meaningful and accessible. It promotes consistent and direct involvement of citizens in the daily governance of their communities, moving beyond the infrequent role of elected representatives at higher government levels, which occurs only every few years. This form of governance encourages active participation in local affairs, whether in a village or a town. Grassroots democracy is inherently decentralized, where the management of public affairs is not solely in the hands of higher authorities but distributed across local participatory units. These units, acting as mini self-governments, become the true centres of power, embodying democracy in practice (Chaturvedi, 1981)

The decentralization of authority and the active participation of people at all levels in the organization and administration of civil and political affairs are the two fundamental components that constitute the core of democracy. A significant number of political

scholars place particular emphasis on the relevance of decentralization and local government. Vinoba Bhave pointed out that "When the responsibility for an entire country is placed in the hands of four or five individuals, the entire nation bears the consequences of their mistakes." On the other hand, this danger is reduced when authority is delegated to the communities themselves. On account of this, authority needs to be dispersed among all of the communities to guarantee decentralization (Bhave, 1954).

Local governance is an essential component of democracy. It denotes a governance system whereby local inhabitants possess distinct tasks and power in overseeing local matters, including the generation of necessary revenues to meet their expenditures. Local government, situated at the base of the governmental hierarchy, provides the basis of a system with the national government at the apex and intermediate administrations in between (International Encyclopaedia of Social Science, 1986). Local government is a division of a state's administration that mainly deals with issues affecting the inhabitants of a particular region or district. It includes duties that the central government considers suitable for local management (Everyman's Encyclopaedia, 1978).

The idea of local self-government has a long history in India. Representative institutions at the grassroots level have been essential in promoting growth and enhancing rural community's quality of life via democratic procedures ever since independence. Efforts to actively incorporate rural residents in the development process began on October 2, 1952 when community development initiatives were launched. The three-tiered system of democratic decentralization—the Village Panchayat at the local level, the Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and the Zila Parishad at the district level—was suggested by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957. The Ashok Mehta Committee was later established in 1977 to suggest ways to improve Panchayati Raj institutions. This committee promoted a two-tiered system that included the Mandal Panchayat for groupings of villages and the Zila Parishad at the district level. The G.V.K. Rao Committee recommended additional changes in 1986–1987 to improve the Panchayati Raj system's operation. The Dr. L.M. Singhvi Committee suggested in 1987 that Panchayati Raj Institutions be recognized, safeguarded, and preserved by the Constitution, along with the inclusion of a new chapter (Singh, 2000).

The 73rd Amendment signalled a dramatic shift by establishing reservation and decentralization as essential components of the Panchayati Raj system in villages. The main goal of decentralization is to provide equitable access to resources while fostering transparency in administration (Barik and Sahoo, 2008). The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee's Report (1957) underscored the significance of women's involvement in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It advised the inclusion of two female members in panchayats to supervise and execute initiatives primarily targeting women and children (Singh, 2000). The report proposed that Panchayat Samitis should co-opt or nominate two women members specifically interested in work related to women and children. The Maharashtra Zila Parishad and Panchayati Samiti Act of 1961 adopted this recommendation, allowing for the nomination of one or two women to each of the three governing bodies if no women were otherwise elected. By 1978, Maharashtra had 320 women representatives in its Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads, of which only six were elected. This highlighted that co-option or nomination was largely symbolic, serving more as an avenue for patronage than genuine empowerment. Similar patterns were observed in Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan, where such provisions were applied selectively with comparable outcomes. In contrast, the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Act of 1964 introduced an effective reservation system, allocating women 20 to 25 percent of seats (Nielsen, 2008). The Panchayati Raj experienced a period of prominence until 1964, after which it became largely inactive. Its revival began in the late 1970s with the establishment of the Ashok Mehta Committee in December 1977. This committee proposed a two-tier local self-governance system at the Mandal and Zila levels. It also recommended the inclusion of two co-opted women members at both levels (Dhaka and Dhaka, 2004). The importance of granting constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) was emphasized in several committees' recommendations on rural development and poverty alleviation, including the G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985) and the L.M. Singhvi Committee (1986). The Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations also pointed out that panchayats were ineffective due to irregular elections and frequent dissolutions for trivial reasons. The issue of women's representation and participation in local governance was highlighted again in the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988), which suggested a 30 percent reservation for women in these institutions (Nielsen, 2008). The 64th Constitutional

Amendment Bill, introduced in Parliament in 1989, proposed that "as nearly as possible," up to 30% of the seats in panchayats at all three levels be reserved for women, including those reserved for SCs/STs and women within the total seat allocation. It required reservations for two categories within the former. However, the bill did not include a reservation for the chairperson position, leaving open the possibility for such a reservation for women from the SC/ST communities in state legislatures (Mathew 2000). After the 64th Amendment failed, but before the 73rd Amendment was eventually passed, several states took proactive steps to amend their panchayat laws, introducing reservations for women to anticipate and lead these changes. For example, Odisha introduced a 30 percent reservation for the chairperson's position. While this bill was introduced in Parliament, it was not discussed when the Congress Party returned to power following the 1991 elections. Instead, a new amendment bill was introduced, ultimately becoming the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution (Buch, 2001). Since 1992, grassroots democratic institutions have been regarded as the cornerstone of Indian polity and governance (Ram, 2007). The Indian experiment in local village democracy gained momentum with the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1993, which stands as one of the most ambitious pieces of legislation in the history of parliamentary democracy (Besley et al., 2007). The 73rd Amendment, commonly known as the Panchayati Raj Act, was enacted in its current form on April 24, 1993 (Singh, 2000).

Since the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, there has been significant initiative from state governments to modify or replace their existing Panchayati Raj Acts, incorporating the mandatory provisions of the amendment. This was followed by the establishment of Panchayati Raj bodies through an electoral process. These bodies were then assigned the functions and responsibilities outlined in Article 243 (G) of the amendment. The primary role of panchayats was envisioned in the broader context of development, including the planning and implementation of programs aimed at promoting economic development and social justice (Choudhary and Jain, 2003-2004).

Panchayati Raj In UT Of Jammu and Kashmir

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is not a homogeneous region in terms of geography, culture, race, language, and ethnicity. The state is made up of two distinct

socio-cultural units: Jammu and Kashmir. Over the years, the political and emotional divide between these areas has deepened. Each region has its own unique regional and political disparities. Factors such as caste, creed, race, religion, regional sentiments, and aspirations have a significant impact on political thought and behaviour. Regionalism stands as the most prominent and significant expression of the diversity within Jammu and Kashmir. The importance of factors like caste, area, religion, and language is often considered the foundation of regionalism and shapes the political dynamics in the region (Kumar, 1986).

Women's engagement in the political process is essential to guarantee the representation of a demographic comprising at least half of the entire population. India got freedom from colonial rule in August 1947 and the subsequent establishment of a republican state in 1950 offered women the prospect of universal suffrage and equal opportunity across various domains, including socio-economic, and political domains. The stated objective of the Indian Constitution was to guarantee equality of status and opportunity, as well as socio-economic, and political justice for all. However, the fact is that there is a conspicuous lack of equality and justice in nearly every sector of society. The exclusion of women from genuine political engagement has undermined their autonomy and capacity to impact social and political dynamics, as women, particularly those in rural and borderland areas, are traditionally relegated to childbearing, child-rearing, and domestic responsibilities, with external work limited to prescribed roles. Their engagement in civic affairs is negligible. Consequently, women have an inherent sense of subjugation and reliance (Ghosh, 2007).

To attain optimal outcomes in a democracy, a collaborative agreement between women and government is essential. Significant and effective involvement of rural women in policy formation will not only ensure the successful execution of development initiatives but also foster confidence in their talents and capacities. Participation enables women to serve as catalysts for sustainable development by producing "Women-Friendly" knowledge and collaborating effectively. Women total 498.7 million, constituting 48.2 percent of the country's population of 1,027.01 million (2001 census). For the comprehensive advancement and empowerment of women specialized initiatives have been executed through welfare programs, notably in the domains of

health, education, and rural and urban development. National-level planning in India has begun several programs aimed at improvement, and their study has uncovered various strategies for the execution of programs for women. The transition from 'welfare' to 'development' and subsequently to 'empowerment'. The initial two Five-Year Plans focused on welfare, however, the third, fourth, and fifth Five-Year Plans acknowledged women as equal contributors to national development rather than mere beneficiaries of social services. During the period between 1980 to 1997, the overarching goal of all women's development initiatives was to effectuate transformation across all facets of life. The national level committee constituted on the status of women in India, "Towards Equality," established by the central government in 1971 and submitted in 1974, reported that planning and social change have adversely impacted women, highlighting that women's economic conditions have worsened in independent India compared to the colonial era. The development projects significantly increased the workload for women, while they retained diminished control over their lives and essential resources, and were excluded from decision-making processes. This may be referred to as progress devoid of empowerment. Recognizing that women's equal participation in the process of decision-making is a crucial mechanism for attaining women's development objectives (Department of Women and Child Development, 1971). The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act of 1992, enacted on April 24, 1993 aimed to empower women by facilitating their involvement in decision-making under Panchayat Raj, therefore positioning them as catalysts for development and social transformation. It signifies a pivotal moment in the emancipation of women, as it facilitated their substantial participation in Panchayats. The implementation of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act necessitates an examination to ascertain the degree to which it has empowered women by facilitating power-sharing and participation in the process of decision-making, thereby enhancing their consciousness of rights and opportunities, enabling them to contest the patriarchal structure, and effectuating change (73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993). The representation of women in the grassroots political system of Jammu and Kashmir has been negligible for the past many years. The factors encompass the subordinate position of women within the social hierarchy and the political turmoil in the Kashmir valley, among others. The 'Panchayati Raj system in Jammu and Kashmir' was non-functional for numerous years.

Nonetheless, a succinct examination of the Panchayati system indicated that the UT of Jammu and Kashmir was the first to institute the allocation of 33 percent of seats for women and other marginalized groups in PRIs' (Lone, 2014). Various groups addressed the matter of reserving one-third of seats for women at the levels of local self-government to promote the devolution of power and empowerment of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments required the allocation of thirty-three percent of seats for women in all elected bodies at all levels. This legislation has established a robust framework for the involvement of women in grassroots decision-making, and also their political leadership and empowerment across the states of India. Before the 73rd Amendment, women were mostly absent from local governance and were not prominently represented in legislative bodies at the state and federal levels. Panchayati Raj is a distinctive historic aspect of the Indian democratic framework, intrinsically linked to rural development and social justice. Panchayats have served as the foundation of Indian communities for generations and are deeply embedded in India's culture. Gandhi asserted that the attainment of Indian independence must start at the grassroots level (Chandhoke, 2005).

Maharaja Hari Singh introduced the Panchayati Raj system in the former state of Jammu and Kashmir by enacting the first Village Panchayat Regulation Act No. in 1935, which was later revised in 1941. The Naya Kashmir Plan (1944), presented by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to Maharaja Hari Singh, highlighted the importance of democratic decentralization, social justice, and economic reconstruction. In 1951, the Panchayat Act of 1935 was replaced by Act-5th of Samvat-2008, which facilitated the establishment of rural Panchayats. Over time, the state of Jammu and Kashmir gradually developed the Panchayati Raj system, with Panchayat elections held in 2001, 2011, and 2018, and elections for chairpersons of Block Development Councils (BDC) taking place in 2019. Despite these efforts, the Panchayati Raj system under the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 has not been fully developed in the Union Territory. After the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution in 2019, the Government of India passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganizations Act, 2019, which led to the dissolution of the state and its

reorganization into two Union Territories—Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh—effective from October 31, 2019.

The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989

The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 was presented in the J&K legislature in April 1988 and enacted in March 1989. In July 1989, the governor approved the law. In 1989, the inaugural legislation was designated as the "Panchayati Raj Act," instead of the "Village Panchayat Regulation Act". Before 1989, Panchayat Raj mandated that all committees facilitate its implementation within the state at the village, block, and district levels; but, thereafter, it became restricted solely to the level of village. The preamble of the Jammu and Kashmir 1989 Act asserts: "It is essential to advance and enhance Panchayati Raj in the state as a mechanism of robust local self-governance to ensure active involvement of the populace in the decision-making process and to supervise the execution of development programs" (The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989). The salient features of the Act are:

a) Reduction of age limit from 21 to 18.

b) Holding of elections within a specific time.

c) Direct election of the Sarpanch is necessary.

d) Formation of Panchayati Adalat, including five members appointed by the appropriate authority from a list provided and endorsed by the halqa Panchayat.

e) The Panchayat should be authorized to formulate and execute plans and initiatives for the mitigation of issues of poverty, employment creation, rural industrialization, health, agriculture, and related activities, and the universalization of primary education.

There should be three levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir: Halqa Panchayats, Block Development Councils (BDCs), and District Planning and Development Boards. However, as of now, only Halqa Panchayats and Block Development Councils are operational at the village and block levels, respectively. The District Planning and Development Boards, which were

intended to function at the district level, have not yet been fully implemented or operationalized in the region (Panchayati Raj Act of 1989).

Panchayat Elections 2001

In 2001 Panchayati elections were both male and female participants. The below table shows women's representation in the election.

District/ State	Total no. of Sarpanchs Elected	Women Sarpanchs Elected	Total no. of Panchs Elected	Women Panchs Elected
Srinagar	67		247	1
Kupwara	168		915	2
Baramulla	162		902	4
Leh	68		448	36
Kargil	65		453	2
Budgam	61		315	2
Anantnag	251	02	1190	24
Pulwama	202		684	24
Kashmir Division	**1044**	**02**	**5155**	**71**
Jammu	294	01	2443	42
Kathua	182	01	1389	23
Poonch	115	01	1026	13
Udhampur	212	03	1792	38
Doda	216	01	1698	26
Rajouri	160	01	1364	24
Jammu Division	**1179**	**07**	**9714**	**166**
Total(J&K)	**2223**	**9**	**14888**	**237**

Table 1 Shows Women's representation in the 2001 Panchayati Raj Elections

The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 2003 introduced a significant amendment by allocating a thirty-three percent reservation for women in Halqa Panchayats (Nisar, 2001). However, the 2001 Panchayat elections exhibited minimal female representation. Out of 20,558 Panch constituencies (10,468 in Kashmir and 10,090 in Jammu), only 237 women were elected, making up just 1.7%. In the Kashmir division, only 71 women were elected, while in Jammu, the number was 166. Additionally, only 9 out of 2,700 Sarpanches were women (0.5%), with 2 in Kashmir and 7 in Jammu. The representation of women in the Jammu division ranged from 0.5% for Sarpanches to 1.70% for Panches, while in the Kashmir division, the range was from 0.19% for Sarpanches to 1.37% for Panches (Panchayat elections, 2001). Despite several developmental projects being carried out during this period, women's active involvement was limited due to the challenging conditions, especially in Kashmir, where numerous Panches and Sarpanches resigned due to threats. On December 17, 2003, the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Raj (Second Amendment Bill) was enacted to enhance the involvement of women and marginalized groups in local governance. Following this, on June 18, 2004, notice SRO 181 was issued, establishing reservations for women and other backward classes in each Halqa Panchayat, with rotational reservations after every general election. This amendment provided a foundation for increased female participation in local self-governance in Jammu and Kashmir. However, elections scheduled for 2006 were suspended due to inadequate conditions at the time (Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Raj, Second Amendment Bill, 2003).

Panchayat Elections 2011

The 2011 Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir were conducted in 16 stages, starting on April 13 and concluding on June 18, 2011. Before these elections, the districts and Panchayats were reorganized in 2006. The number of blocks increased from 121 to 143, and the number of districts grew from 14 to 22. Additionally, the electoral rolls were updated, refreshed, and digitized. During these elections, there were

4,128 Panchayat constituencies, resulting in the election of 4,081 Sarpanches, of which 4,053 were male and 28 were female, with 47 seats left unfilled. Out of the 29,706 Panchayat constituencies, 28,248 were filled, comprising 18,824 male-elected Panchs and 9,424 female-elected Panchs, with 1,458 seats remaining vacant. According to statistics from the Rural Development Department, women have secured one-third of the Panchayat seats, but female Sarpanches are still rare, with only 28 women elected to this position (Rural Development Department, 2011).

Districts	No.of Sarpanchs elected	Women Sarpanchs elected	No of the Panchs elected	Women Panchs elected
Kupwara	355	0	2694	937
Baramulla	350	2	2352	714
Bandipora	114	0	865	288
Ganderbal	103	0	719	227
Srinagar	10	0	78	25
Budgam	282	0	2108	686
Pulwama	166	0	841	218
Shopian	103	1	620	177
Kulgam	158	0	1040	324
Anantnag	296	0	2037	673
Leh	93	0	588	199
Kargil	95	0	656	204
Kashmir Province	**2125**	**3**	**14598**	**4672**
Doda	231	1	1420	489
Ramban	124	1	831	292
Reasi	146	2	992	354
Udhampur	204	5	1543	548
Kathua	244	4	1642	562
Samba	100	1	724	260

Jammu	295	2	2153	746
Rajouri	289	3	1972	690
Poonch	189	4	1573	524
Kishtwar	134	0	836	287
Jammu Province	**1956**	**23**	**13650**	**4752**
TOTAL	**4082**	**26**	**28248**	**9424**

Source: The Rural Development Department of Jammu and Kashmir, 2011.

Table 1.1 Shows Total number of women elected as Sarpanch and Panchs in J&K, 2011.

Panchayat Elections 2018

The 2018 Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat elections were held after a seven-year gap. In these elections, the total number of female Sarpanch members was 1,131 out of 3,572, making up 31.66% of the total. Additionally, the number of female Panchayat representatives was 6,675 out of 26,139, also constituting 31.66% (Rural Development Department, 2018).

However, the participation of women in the 2018 Panchayat elections showed a decrease compared to 2011. In 2011, women's representation was 29.22%, but in 2018, it dropped to 26.72%.

Districts	Selected Sarpanchs	Women Sarpanchs	Selected Panchs	Women Panchs
Kupwara	356	125	3161	586
Baramulla	365	60	3330	323
Bandipora	108	31	514	123
Ganderbal	70	21	297	68

Srinagar	10	4	39	3
Budgam	122	32	516	138
Pulwama	24	5	73	6
Shopian	20	4	68	12
Kulgam	35	13	121	24
Anantnag	166	50	634	120
Kashmir Division	**1276**	**345**	**8753**	**1403**
Leh	93	31	687	117
Kargil	98	21	775	196
Ladakh Division	**191**	**52**	**1462**	**313**
Doda	237	91	1683	488
Ramban	140	49	901	287
Reasi	153	58	1191	375
Udhampur	236	78	1848	592
Kathua	257	92	1943	583
Samba	100	31	788	251
Jammu	306	104	2407	771
Rajouri	312	108	2394	496
Poonch	228	81	1856	596
Kishtwar	136	42	892	271
Jammu Division	**2105**	**700**	**15903**	**4710**
TOTAL(J&K)	**3572**	**1097**	**26118**	**6426**

Table 1.2 Shows Total number of women elected as Sarpanch and panchs in J&K, 2011

Article 370 and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment

The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India, enacted in 1993, granted constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions and established a uniform framework for Panchayats to be adopted by all states. However, this amendment was not applied to the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir. Due to Jammu and Kashmir's constitutional autonomy, the full provisions of the Indian Constitution did not automatically apply to the state, and the Parliament's authority to legislate for it was restricted. The state had its own Constitution, and any provision or modification of the Indian Constitution applied to Jammu and Kashmir only upon a request from the state (73rd Amendment Act, 1993).

The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir were not governed by the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution. As a result, Panchayats in Jammu and Kashmir did not enjoy the constitutional support provided to Panchayati Raj legislations in other Indian states. While other states were constitutionally required to establish PRIs as per Article 243 of the Indian Constitution, Jammu and Kashmir, with its own Constitution and distinct Directive Principles, regulated its PRIs through its own legal framework. The concepts and provisions of PRIs, as established by the 73rd Amendment, were not incorporated into the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution. Instead, Section 16 of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution, titled "Organisation of Village Panchayats," mandated that the state should take steps to establish village Panchayats and endow them with the necessary powers and authority to function as units of self-government. Article 243G of the Indian Constitution mandates the devolution of powers and responsibilities to Panchayats at the appropriate levels, empowering them to formulate plans for economic development and social justice, and to implement schemes for economic development. The Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution outlines the subjects on which Panchayats are to be

entrusted with authority. However, the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir did not include a provision for the devolution of such authority to Panchayats.

Post-2019 Changes in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Jammu & Kashmir

The governance landscape of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) has witnessed remarkable changes in recent years, particularly after the abrogation of Article 370 and the passing of the *Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019*. With this move, the Union Territory (UT) of J&K was brought directly under the Constitution of India, making it possible to implement the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in full. This shift laid the foundation for a complete three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), bringing local governance in J&K closer to the model of democratic decentralisation followed in the rest of the country (Government of Jammu & Kashmir, 1989). Before 2019, the PRI system in J&K functioned under the *J&K Panchayati Raj Act, 1989*. While village-level Halqa Panchayats existed, the intermediate and district levels lacked meaningful democratic representation. As a result, grassroots governance was often incomplete and heavily dependent on bureaucratic structures. The reforms introduced after 2019 changed this landscape significantly, strengthening the democratic fabric of rural governance in the region.

Block Development Council Elections, 2019

The first step towards strengthening PRIs after 2019 was the conduct of Block Development Council (BDC) elections in October–November 2019. These elections were historic because they were the first ever held for this tier of governance in J&K. Members of Halqa Panchayats, Sarpanchs and Panchs, came together to elect their respective BDC chairpersons, thereby operationalising the second tier of the PRI framework (Chief Electoral Officer, J&K, 2019). For decades, the absence of elected block-level leadership had left a vacuum in local planning and coordination. With the BDC elections, grassroots voices finally found representation beyond the village level. This move was not just a technical reform it was a meaningful step towards empowering rural communities to influence decision-making at the block level.

Creation of District Development Councils, 2020

The most transformative reform came in October 2020, when the Government of J&K amended the *Panchayati Raj Act, 1989* and the *Rules of 1996* through S.O. 339, creating District Development Councils (DDCs) (Government of J&K, 2020). For the first time, directly elected councils were introduced at the district level, completing the three-tier PRI system envisaged under the Indian Constitution. Under this new arrangement, each district was divided into 14 territorial constituencies, with one member elected from each. These members together formed the DDC, led by an elected chairperson and vice-chairperson. The DDCs replaced the earlier District Planning and Development Boards (DPDBs), which were dominated by bureaucrats and lacked direct public representation (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2021).

The first-ever DDC elections, held in eight phases from November 28 to December 19, 2020, were a landmark in J&K's democratic journey. The strong voter turnout reflected people's willingness to engage with grassroots institutions, despite the political and security challenges of the time (Chief Electoral Officer, J&K, 2020). With the institutionalisation of DDCs, district governance shifted away from being purely administrative and came into the hands of elected representatives accountable to the people.

Strengthening Accountability and Governance, 2020–2024

Once DDCs were established, further reforms followed to refine their functioning. Amendments to the *J&K Panchayati Raj Rules, 1996* introduced new procedures for elections, decision-making, and internal accountability. A significant reform came in February 2024, when the government added Rule 108-ZQ, which laid out a clear process for the removal of DDC chairpersons and vice-chairpersons through a no-confidence motion (Government of J&K, 1996).

This was an important safeguard. It ensured that leadership at the district level would remain accountable, preventing concentration of power and enabling council members to act if leaders failed to uphold democratic responsibilities. Such reforms not only align with broader democratic principles but also reflect a conscious effort to make these new institutions resilient and responsive.

Reservation and Inclusivity: The 2024 Amendment Act

Another major milestone was reached with the passage of the Jammu & Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Act, 2024. This Act introduced reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in addition to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) (Parliament of India, 2024). By widening the scope of representation, the Act made PRIs in J&K more socially inclusive and better aligned with the principles of social justice that underpin local governance across India. The Act also updated official terms to reflect the new institutional realities. For example, "District Planning and Development Board" was replaced with "District Development Council," and "District Panchayat Officer" was replaced with "Assistant Commissioner of Panchayat." Furthermore, the Act strengthened the authority of the State Election Commission (SEC), ensuring greater consistency and transparency in the conduct of local body elections.

Implications of the Post-2019 Reforms

Together, these reforms have redefined grassroots governance in Jammu & Kashmir. The establishment of directly elected District Development Councils has shifted the locus of power from bureaucrats to the people. The introduction of OBC reservations has broadened representation, ensuring that local bodies better reflect the diversity of rural society. Meanwhile, accountability mechanisms such as Rule 108-ZQ have ensured that elected representatives remain answerable to their peers and constituents. In essence, the post-2019 changes have transformed PRIs in J&K from being incomplete and bureaucratically driven into a robust, fully-fledged three-tier system of democratic decentralisation. Beyond structural reforms, these changes symbolise the deeper political integration of J&K into India's constitutional and democratic framework, giving rural communities a stronger voice in shaping their own development.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN RAJOURI

The state of women's political empowerment in the Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir UT reflects broader challenges faced by women across India. Despite facing barriers such as restricted mobility, limited educational opportunities, and gender discrimination, women in Rajouri have made significant strides in various areas,

including politics. The story of women's empowerment in this region is further shaped by its unique sociocultural context, influenced by its history and geographical location. To fully understand the political empowerment of women in Rajouri, it is essential to consider both the obstacles and achievements in the area.

Obstacles to Women's Political Empowerment:

In Rajouri, several obstacles persist that hinder women's political empowerment:

Social Norms: Women's responsibilities are often confined to the domestic sphere due to persistent social norms and expectations. Such assumptions may dissuade women from engaging in politics.

Security Concerns: The region has seen a perplexing security environment that may dissuade women from engaging in politics and public life.

Limited Access to Education: Despite recent progress, obstacles to high-quality education persist, particularly in the peripheral regions of Rajouri. In the absence of education, women may lack the requisite knowledge and confidence to engage in politics.

Underrepresentation: Women continue to be inadequately represented in political institutions across all tiers, despite significant progress. This underrepresentation stems from political procedures and institutional impediments.

Social Stigma: Women in Rajouri engaging in politics may face social stigma or antagonism from conservative society factions.

The objective of the present investigation is to investigate the presence of female representatives of the PRIs who have joined the political mainstream due to the provisions of the 73rd Amendment for women. The primary purpose of the provision is to confront the persistent social and political subordination of women. This is in addition to ensuring that women can contribute to the administration of local communities. After more than a decade of experience in the provision's execution of women working in these institutions, the influence that these institutions have on PRIs and the implications that the system has over women are intriguing subjects of research. PRIs and women representatives in the Rajouri district are the subjects of the current scholarly endeavor, that addresses around former. First and foremost, it is an

investigation of the empowerment of women who hold positions of authority. It also intends to investigate the connection that exists amidst the PRIs and via the participation of women, particularly in areas where women are the most numerous participants, to determine how the system might be beneficial to the liberation and empowerment of women. Therefore, democratic ideas are capable of being put into reality.

History and Evolution of Panchayati Raj in Rajouri

The Panchayati Raj system in Rajouri, a district in the Pir Panjal range of Jammu and Kashmir, has evolved through various political and administrative reforms reflecting broader regional changes. Initially introduced during Maharaja Hari Singh's rule with the 1935 Panchayat Act, these institutions were primarily aimed at resolving local disputes (Mir, 2022). The post-accession reforms under Sheikh Abdullah in 1947 further expanded these institutions, albeit with limited powers. In the 1950s, the introduction of the Village Panchayat Act of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, which was passed in 1958 created a two-tier system, which included Gram Panchayats and Block Panchayat However, this system faced challenges such as irregular elections, limited financial independence, and political interference (Sharma et al., 2020). The Panchayati Raj Act 1989 marked a turning point by creating a three-tier structure. The post-2019 constitutional changes brought new opportunities to strengthen local governance through integration with India's broader constitutional framework, specifically the 73rd Amendment. In District Rajouri, the Panchayati Raj institutions have encountered challenges such as militant threats, lack of financial autonomy, and inadequate capacity-building measures. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have played a role in increasing the participation of women in local governance. The introduction of reserved seats for women in PRIs has empowered them to take leadership roles, addressing community issues like sanitation, health, and education. However, societal resistance and lack of training for women leaders often limit their effectiveness (The Panchayati Raj Act, 1989).

The 1989 Act Compared with the Constitutional Amendment

A key difference between the 1989 Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act and the 73rd Amendment Act lies in the area of reservation for women and disadvantaged social groups. The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 included a provision where, if the prescribed authority deemed that women were not adequately represented

in the Halqa Panchayat, it could nominate a certain number of women members, with the total not exceeding 33% of the total number of Panches. This provision did not directly mandate elected representation for women, instead allowing for a discretionary nomination process. The 73rd Amendment Act (1993) of the Indian Constitution stands in stark contrast to the 1989 Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act in terms of reservation systems. The 73rd Amendment established a robust, systematic, and constitutionally enforceable framework for ensuring the representation of women and socially disadvantaged categories in Panchayats. Specifically, it mandated that 33% of all Panchayat seats be reserved for women through direct elections, which guaranteed their participation in local governance. Moreover, the 73rd Amendment extended proportional reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) based on their population in respective areas, reinforcing social justice and inclusivity. In contrast, the 1989 Jammu and Kashmir Act adopted a more flexible and discretionary approach to women's reservation. While it allowed for the nomination of women to Panchayat seats, it did not enforce direct election quotas and left the number of women nominated up to the discretion of the prescribed authority, with a cap of 33% of the total Panchayat seats. Therefore, the 73rd Amendment Act provided a more structured, inclusive, and legally binding framework for reservation, whereas the 1989 Jammu and Kashmir Act relied on a more adaptable and less enforceable system for ensuring women's participation in local governance.

The 1989 Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act did not fully align with the democratic principles outlined in the 73rd Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution, especially in terms of representation and governance structures. While the 73rd Amendment mandated direct elections at all three levels of Panchayats—village, intermediate (block), and district—the 1989 Act implemented direct elections only at the lowest level, the Halqa Panchayat. For higher levels, such as the district level, the Act adopted a more indirect system of representation. At the district level, the members of the Panchayat included chairs of town area committees, municipal councils, and block development councils. Additionally, local members of the parliament and legislative assembly were given ex-officio voting rights on the district board, providing an indirect form of popular representation. This structure meant that the district Panchayat functioned more like an executive branch agency rather than a fully democratic body, as it was heavily influenced by appointed and ex-officio members

rather than being driven by direct election. Furthermore, the 1989 Act proposed that the chairman of the district board would be appointed by the government, and the district's Development Commissioner would serve as the chief administrative official, further centralizing control. In contrast, the 73rd Amendment Act emphasized decentralized governance with greater direct electoral representation at all levels, thereby fostering a more democratic and participatory system. All Panchayats were supposed to have a chairman and sarpanches from the Halqa Panchayat at its block level. The Sarpanches and Panches of the Block were to elect its chairman indirectly. The official secretary position was to be filled by the Block Development Officer. There was a nomination provision at this level as well. If there was a lack of participation for women from any social category like SC/ST on the Block Development Council, two people might be nominated to fill the vacancies. The lack of financial autonomy of the Panchayats was one of the key shortcomings of the 1989 Act. The State Act failed to set up an independent system for fund distribution to Panchayat institutions, unlike the 73rd Amendment, which required each state to establish a finance commission to recommend guidelines for tax revenue allocation between the state and the Panchayats. Additionally, the Act failed to establish the Panchayat Election Commissioner as an independent body.

This research focuses on the women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) who have become part of the political mainstream as a result of the 73rd Amendment. The key objective of this provision is to address the ongoing socio-political exclusion of women and to enhance their participation in local governance. The study aims to explore the impact of this system on women, more than a decade after its implementation, and to examine the extent of women's involvement in these institutions. The research will specifically focus on the Rajouri district, analyzing the role of female MPs and PRI representatives. The primary emphasis is on the empowerment of women in leadership roles. Additionally, the study will compare two districts that differ significantly in terms of size, population, and development level, to assess how PRIs have performed in these diverse contexts. The upcoming chapters will examine the organization, functions, and development of PRIs as key administrative and development bodies. To better understand the continued marginalization of women, this study aims to uncover the root causes of their oppression and propose possible solutions. It will also investigate how the PRI system can contribute to the freedom and

advancement of women, particularly when women's participation is at its highest. In this way, the research will highlight the practical application of democratic principles.

Statement of the Problem

This research aims to delve into these questions by examining women's political engagement in the Rajouri District. There are around 1% of India's total population living in the mountainous Rajouri district. Concerning the rest of the country, women in this region have historically been less active in politics. Women ran for a total of four seats in the state legislature in the most recent election. The region's average percentage of female candidates is 4%, which is higher than Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, where the Fig is 3%. Only once in the 78 years since independence has a woman served as chief minister of the area. There were very few female ministers serving in the State Council at the time. Not only have that, but the region's gender-based socioeconomic indicators, such as the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of females under the age of fourteen, also been less than the country's average. Issues of gender equality and empowering women remain neglected in UT of Jammu and Kashmir due to the underrepresentation of women in decision-making authorities. Because of this, a strong patriarchal society has developed in Jammu and Kashmir, which in turn has led to the subjugation of women. There are a lot of societal barriers that women in the area must overcome before they can have a say in politics, and they must rely on males to voice their opinions. The research has relied on primary and secondary sources.

To comprehend the foundational background behind the research problem and to appropriately situate the issues related to gender and political participation within the current study, a variety of secondary sources, including books, periodicals, and pertinent articles from diverse publications, have been used. Researchers have poured a great deal of time and Vigour into studying the Jammu and Kashmir region, and they have examined many different aspects of political engagement there. Numerous books and scholarly articles have been produced on the subject of the political and socioeconomic involvement of women in the area, both inside and outside of India. Similarly, other publications covering the larger topic have been published in prestigious journals. This information is derived from several secondary sources that are crucial to the present investigation. The present research effort reviews a variety of literary materials on women's activism and political engagement, with an emphasis on

Rajouri, to achieve its aims.

Significance of Study

The inadequate representation of women in government hinders the assertion of their rights. Numerous legislations and regulations have been adopted in our nation to eliminate societal ills and injustices inflicted against women. The influence of males on women's advancement, social reform, and liberation is significant. Societal dynamics are evolving, compelling women to assume responsibility for their welfare while safeguarding their children. The perspective of the opposite gender toward women's safety and welfare has evolved from the views held by earlier social reformers, political leaders, and the courts. The participation of women in the political process is crucial to guarantee that their problems are acknowledged and included in mainstream decision-making. This would significantly advance women's ability to exercise and enjoy their constitutionally granted rights. The participation of women in Parliament, State Legislatures, and municipal authorities is minimal. The current stance must be altered, and the Women's Reservation Bill needs approval at higher levels. The political culture in India must evolve, and politicians must be held accountable to the populace, with the welfare of the population as the first objective. Achieving this necessitates equal representation of women in politics. This research aims to investigate the reasons and impediments, the level of engagement in decision-making, the roles of relatives and society, and the tasks of elected women representatives as office bearers. This study is crucial for comprehending the psyche of the residents in district Rajouri.

Objectives of Research

The present research focuses on the following objectives:

1. To identify the causes and obstacles in the participation of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions at various levels.

2. To know about the scope and extent of their involvement in the decision-making of the PRIs.

3. To know about the role of their families and the society at large in strengthening the process of their participation.

4. To know the role and functions of women representatives as office bearers in PRIs.

Research Questions

In light of the aforementioned objectives, this study aims to address the following

questions:

What is the state of awareness, interest, and participation of women in various Panchayat elections in the Rajouri district?

1. What are the barriers to women's participation in politics in the Rajouri district?

2. How is the social and economic condition of women in the Rajouri district?

3. To what degree are women involved in various fields of political activities in Rajouri District?

4. What is the effect of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 on women, and what observable changes in women's political engagement have occurred in Rajouri District following the implementation of the 73rd Amendment Act?

Procedure of Research
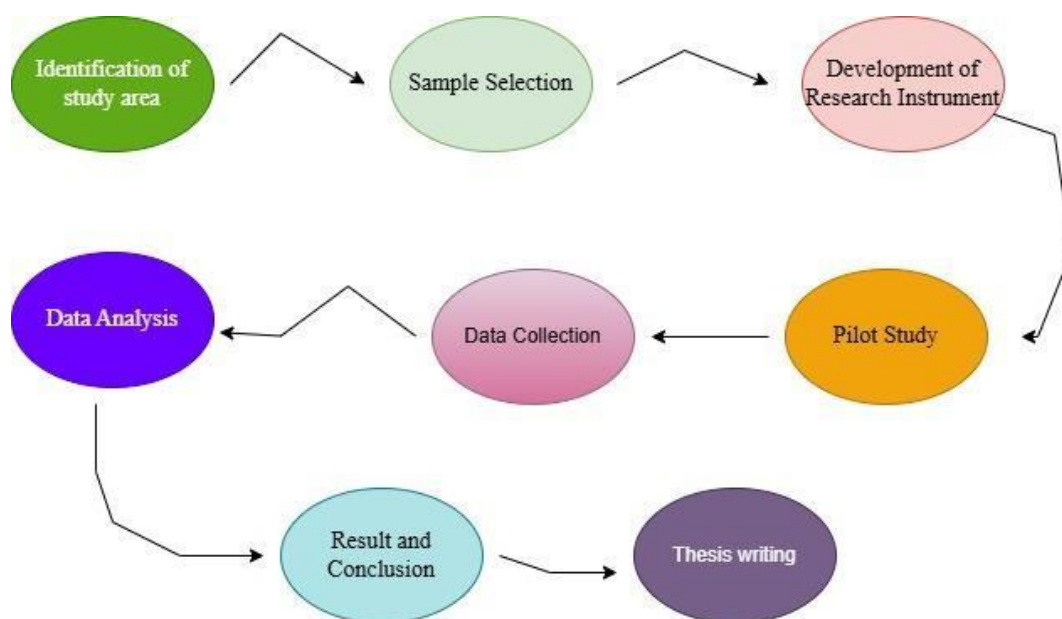
Fig-1: - Showing process of Research

Study Area Identification: The initial stage is choosing and identifying study areas. The selection of Rajouri District in Jammu & Kashmir was based on the presence of female political representatives in various Panchayati Raj bodies and their regional diversity.

Sample Selection: The study focuses on women leaders at several levels, including Zilla Parishads, Mandal Parishads, and Village Panchayats. The sample comprises sarpanches, Panches, Block Development Council members, and District Development Council members from Village Panchayats. The selection process aims to illustrate a

representative cross-section of the diverse roles and experiences that women in politics provide.

Creation of Research Instruments: A comprehensive questionnaire has been developed as the primary research tool. The survey comprises closed-ended and open-ended questions addressing critical subjects, including participants' political knowledge, role performance, encountered challenges, causes and obstacles, involvement in decision-making, the influence of family and society on participation, and the roles and functions of women representatives in Panchayats, along with socioeconomic backgrounds. It enquires about the impact of political empowerment on them.

Pilot Testing: The research instruments undergo pilot testing before full-scale adoption. Identifying ambiguities, enhancing the questions, and ensuring the accuracy and effectiveness of the data collection instruments, requires administering the questionnaire to a limited group of participants.

Data Collection: The major way of acquiring data is by distributing the completed questionnaire to the specified sample of female elected representatives. Interviews enhance the quantitative data by incorporating a qualitative dimension into the investigation. Contextual information can also be obtained through observations. The acquired data is rigorously cleansed to remove inaccuracies, contradictions, and missing information.

Analysis and Conclusions: The context of the study's aims and hypotheses informs the data interpretation. Conclusions are drawn from the data, and the implications of the results are assessed within the broader political and socioeconomic context.

Thesis Writing: The last stage involves synthesizing the findings into a comprehensive research report. The report systematically delineates the study process and findings by incorporating an introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and recommendations. This systematic research aims to elucidate the socioeconomic and political aspects influencing women's representation in village Panchayats.

Limitations of the Study

This research is founded on original data acquired via surveys/ interview schedule and from relevant individuals, hence the conclusions are wholly contingent upon the correctness of this data.

1. Some of the interviewees might have given the wrong answer to the question because of fear.

2. The location factor has played an important role in getting a different answer.

3. There is poor availability of secondary sources of data.

4. The interviewees exhibited fear. They did not disclose their membership status. They declined to respond to any inquiries in the absence of their spouses. Several respondents perceived us as fraudulent and were reluctant to leave their homes. They did not offer us to sit and we had to stand all the time while we were interviewing. They interviewed with trepidation. There is uncertainty over the accuracy of the given data's legitimacy.

5. The interviewees were quite challenging to locate. Due to their absence from the residence for many errands. Even Gram Panchayats have failed to furnish us with precise information on them.

6. Additionally, gathering all the requisite information was challenging due to time constraints.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for the thesis by introducing the central themes and outlining the scope of the study. It provides a comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), defining key terms and emphasizing their importance in rural governance and welfare. The chapter explores the significance of empowering women in rural areas, detailing the sociological and economic benefits of women's empowerment and its broader impact on governance and development. It highlights the role of Panchayats in rural development, focusing on their objective to involve local populations, especially women, in governance and decision-making processes.

The chapter identifies the core issue of the thesis: examining the extent of women's empowerment through PRIs in Rajouri and assessing the influence of PRIs on the political, socioeconomic, and economic progress of women. It emphasizes the importance of this research by demonstrating how the study of women's empowerment through PRIs in Rajouri contributes to the larger conversation on gender equality, rural governance, and development.

The chapter outlines the main objectives of the thesis, which include exploring the role of PRIs in promoting women's empowerment, assessing women's participation in PRIs in Rajouri, and identifying the challenges hindering women's empowerment within PRIs. It also lists the key questions guiding the research, such as the barriers to women's participation in PRIs in Rajouri, women's perceptions of their empowerment through PRIs, and the role of PRIs in improving the socio-economic status of women in Rajouri. Finally, the methodology used in the study is described, including the approach and techniques for data collection and analysis

Design of Research: Qualitative, Quantitative.

Data Collection Methods: Surveys, Interviews, and Fieldwork.

Sampling: Sample Size, Population, and Sampling Techniques.

Data Analysis: How the collected data will be analyzed to address research questions.

Gives a brief description of the thesis structure, detailing the content of each chapter.

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature, positioning the current research within the context of existing studies. It begins by exploring global trends in women's empowerment, drawing on examples from various countries and international organizations. The chapter delves into international policies, frameworks, and initiatives aimed at empowering women, offering insights into global efforts and strategies to enhance gender equality. The chapter then shifts focus to the Indian context, analyzing the policies, legislation, and movements that have worked toward the empowerment of women in India. Special attention is given to landmark measures such as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which mandated women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and the impact of these policies on rural women.

Furthermore, the chapter explores existing research on women's empowerment through local governance structures, particularly Panchayati Raj Institutions. It examines women's participation in these governance structures, the challenges they face, and the outcomes of empowerment initiatives across different Indian states, with a particular focus on rural areas. By synthesizing the literature on these topics, the chapter establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for the research, highlighting the importance of PRIs as a tool for promoting gender equality and rural development.

Chapter 3 offers contextual information on Rajouri, including its geographical position and the socio-political landscape pertinent to your research. Details Rajouri's geographical location, climate, demographics, and cultural diversity. This provides background for the study, aiding readers in comprehending the region's rural characteristics and their significance for women's empowerment. An examination of the local government framework in Rajouri, encompassing the Panchayati Raj system, its historical development, and its present operations. This also includes the degree of women's representation and involvement at the local level. Offers a comprehensive examination of the social and economic circumstances of women in Rajouri, including the prevalence of literacy, health metrics, work conditions, and political engagement. This section establishes the framework for assessing the influence of PRIs on key performance indicators.

Chapter 4 examines the operational mechanisms of PRIs and their role in facilitating women's empowerment, particularly in Rajouri. An exhaustive description of the establishment of the Panchayati Raj in Rajouri, its historical progression, and its evolution throughout time. Examines the present position of women in Rajouri, utilizing statistics on health, educational status, employment, and social circumstances as measures of empowerment. Analyzes the extent of women's active involvement in local governance via Panchayati Raj Institutions, including elections, leadership positions, and decision-making procedures. Examines the degree to which PRIs have either promoted or obstructed rural development in Rajouri, with particular emphasis on the involvement of women in these dynamics. Provides a comprehensive examination of the obstacles and facilitators affecting women's involvement in Panchayati Raj Institutions, encompassing social, political, and economic dimensions.

Offers insights on women's perceptions of empowerment in Rajouri via Panchayats, mostly utilizing qualitative data like interviews and surveys. This part also examines women's happiness and problems inside the PRI system.

Chapter 5 examines the challenges women have in achieving full participation and empowerment within Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Addresses institutional difficulties like resource constraints, insufficient training, and bureaucratic impediments. Emphasizes cultural and social conventions, particularly patriarchy, that impede women's involvement in local administration. Addresses administrative and structural obstacles, including inadequate political commitment, gender discrimination among municipal authorities, and insufficient support for women in leadership positions.

Chapter 6 presents pragmatic recommendations derived from my study findings and delineates prospective future advancements. This document summarizes the principal results of my study, emphasizing the influence of Panchayati Raj on the empowerment status of women in Rajouri. It offers pragmatic policy recommendations to boost women's involvement in PRIs, including improved training, affirmative action, increased financing for women-centric initiatives, and other measures. An ultimate evaluation of the function of PRIs in enhancing women's empowerment in Rajouri encapsulates the study's principal contributions to academic debate and proposes avenues for more research. This comprehensive analysis delineates how each chapter and sub-section adds to the overarching study of women's empowerment via PRIs in Rajouri. It guarantees a comprehensive examination of both theoretical frameworks and empirical results, providing significant insights into rural government and women's empowerment.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

According to the information obtained from a wide variety of reliable sources, the review of the pertinent literature is completed. During the literature research, I successfully obtained a comprehensive understanding of the implications of women's political engagement, which is pertinent to the current investigation. A significant amount of written material has established the connection between Panchayati Raj and the empowered status of women. It is essential to conduct a review of the published literature that is either directly or indirectly related to the topic that is being investigated to collect background information on the issue, as well as to determine the methodology, research design, and suitable analysis techniques. This section of the literature review takes a look at the significant aspects associated with the study and emphasizes some of the most noteworthy discoveries from additional research. It puts a research study into the appropriate context by demonstrating the amount of work that has already been done in the specific field that is being investigated. In any research activity, it is of the utmost significance to conduct a thorough examination of the existing body of literature. In addition to assisting in the direction of subsequent study, it is beneficial to have a wide basic knowledge of the subject matter at hand. The principal objective of this review is to identify and comprehend the political engagement of women, as well as to acquire an understanding of the many viewpoints on political participation, awareness, and the variables that either affect or hinder women from being involved in political engagement. In addition to this, the reviews concentrate on being familiar with the study methods utilized by a variety of researchers. In addition, the reviews emphasize the methodologies, tools, and analyses that have been utilized by academics. The researcher has conducted a review of sociologically relevant studies that have focused on studies related to the political involvement of women, studies on political awareness, interest in politics, participation in politics, and constraints, as well as reviews that have focused on studies of political empowerment and women's reservation of seats. It is essential to survey the existing literature to form the foundation for any study activity that is conducted in the domain of social science. By extensively going through the existing literature on the topic, it is

believed that the basis for the current study may be made clearer. Consequently, to identify the research gap that exists before the final selection of the current study, an effort has been made to conduct a literature assessment on the subject that is now accessible. Several studies have been carried out on various topics about women's status. Following are the details of different research works.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Tamale (2000) This study aimed to explore women's involvement in politics during pre-colonial Africa and the barriers introduced by colonialism to their political participation. While most female parliamentarians in Uganda advocate for women's issues both inside and outside the legislative chambers, the author observed that not all Ugandan women politicians are gender-sensitive. She stressed that women's right to participate in politics independently remains heavily restricted, both explicitly and implicitly, in various situations.

Ranjana (2003) The purpose study is to investigate the mobility of women in Japan besides assessing the new growing trends in the number of women who got elected to political positions in local governments. She observed that non-governmental organizations are assisting female candidates who are seeking to take seats of authority in the political spheres. Training programs, information, and fundraising opportunities are some of the ways that social network groups and other organizations assist women in leadership positions. A great number of cooperative networks have been established to address the issues that arise in day-to-day living, and they have started sending members in substantial numbers to the local assemblies.

Chaudhry (2009) an investigation of the movement of women in Japan's Diet and Local Governments, as well as an attempt to assess the recent growing trends in the large number of women who have entered elected political office in Japan. It has come to her attention that non-governmental organizations are assisting female candidates who are seeking to gain leadership positions in the political arena. Employing offering training programs, data, and fundraising opportunities, social networking groups and other agencies offer assistance to women in positions of power. To address these challenges that are encountered in day-to-day living, several cooperative networks have

been established, and they have started sending members in substantial numbers to the local assemblies.

Bhatla et al. (2011) investigated the position of women's engagement in South Asian countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, with a particular focus on the grassroots level of government. The author gave some thought to the circumstances surrounding the involvement of women and the effects that it had. They focused their attention primarily on the structural and institutional barriers that thwart women from participating in the process. They concluded that Bhutan did not have any special quotas or laws in place to safeguard that a certain percentage of women were in positions of authority. The participation of women at family, communal, and administrative levels was the subject of another research and investigation.

Hossain (2012) an attempt was made to investigate the role of women in rural Bangladeshi society, namely in the Union Parishad—the third and lowest level of rural local government—and how rural values and norms influence their participation in policymaking and decision-making. According to his observations, women have restrictions when stepping out in public and are underrepresented when it comes to making decisions at home and in the community. This study illustrates that, due to the prevailing culture of male domination in rural Bangladesh, direct elections for designated women's seats and other administrative support measures have had a limited impact on women's political efficiency.

Phan (2013) The improved situation of women is expected to increase their educational attainment and economic opportunities, which will increase their decision-making power. Due to women's empowerment, fertility rates should fall. Many hypotheses have been proposed on how women's empowerment affects reproduction. However, how female empowerment affects fertility is unknown. This study found four main ways female empowerment influences fertility. Female education, workforce participation, decision-making processes, and contraceptive use coupled with population policy are four essential facets of women's empowerment that affect reproduction. These factors are widely thought to affect women's fertility. Fecundity and women's empowerment are affected by patriarchy's expectation of high reproduction rates and preference for male progeny. These illustrate frequent causes. In

contrast, patriarchal cultures reduce women's empowerment and boost fertility. Women's empowerment often lowers fertility.

Bayeh (2016) This study examines Ethiopia's long-term development and the role of women's empowerment. Using secondary sources, the research highlights that women are underrepresented in sustainable development fields. Women's participation in the workforce is limited, and political power is predominantly held by men. This underrepresentation hampers the nation's social and economic progress, as women's rights are not adequately protected. Despite being disproportionately affected by environmental issues, women's efforts in environmental protection are often overlooked. The study emphasizes that empowering women to make independent decisions is crucial for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. With women constituting 50% of the population, their full participation is vital for national development. The study calls on the government to improve women's status and gender equality, which would lead to long-term economic growth and better governance. The article argues that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for realizing Ethiopia's full potential across economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions.

Niyosabha and Malyungi (2018) Empowering women is essential for achieving great growth and wellness, which comes from doing and being what one admires. Government efforts alone cannot achieve the goal. Each agency has a specific role in this sector. Lower-middle-class women must work outside the home to support their family. This is in addition to childbearing, childrearing, and housework. Empowering women in community development is crucial. This study examined how women's political, economic, and social empowerment affects community development project administration to improve circumstances and promote sustainable welfare. Women's political empowerment in community development had a significance score of 0.612, a notable finding. Social empowerment of women correlated positively with community development initiatives, with a significance level of 0.841. The study suggested that national and international organizations develop initiatives that allow women to exercise full self-determination and participate in the country's social, political, and

economic life. This would improve community development, prevent a reversal of current success, and develop future generations' human capital.

Rameez (2018) This study examines the low political engagement of Sri Lankan women, despite making up 51% of the population. While women in Sri Lanka have made progress in health and education, their political participation remains limited, with only 5% of women working in local government and parliament. The study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, including focus groups, interviews, and surveys, to understand the reasons for this lack of engagement. Findings show that women's collective involvement in grassroots governance has had a greater impact on social welfare, such as livelihood and social security, than political participation. Several factors, including biological, economic, psychological, religious, and political barriers, hinder women's political engagement. Despite an interest in local government, women face obstacles such as poverty, social norms restricting them to domestic roles, and limited financial resources. Political parties and other organizations often overlook women's political participation, focusing more on development and peace. However, a 25% women's representation policy for local government is gaining attention. The study calls for political parties to include women in their election strategies and offers valuable insights for future policy and political planning, especially for women's organizations in upcoming local elections. This study is important for researchers and anyone interested in understanding the political participation of Eastern Sri Lankan women.

Ghafoor and Haider (2018) Pakistani women have been involved in politics since the country's independence, playing crucial roles in the independence movement by organizing campaigns and mobilizing women. Despite their early contributions, women faced limited political representation for much of Pakistan's history, with only a small number of reserved seats in the national and provincial legislatures. From 1947 to 1988, women had only a few reserved seats—ten in the federal parliament and five in each provincial assembly. Between 1988 and 2000, the number of reserved seats increased but remained limited.

Since 2001, women's political participation has improved significantly due to changes in the legal framework. The Local Government Ordinance of 2001 introduced a 33%

quota for women in local government elections, and in 2002, the percentage of reserved seats for women in national and provincial parliaments rose to 17%. This resulted in around 40,000 women serving in local councils, marking a historic achievement. However, despite this progress, many women were still not directly elected to general seats in the national and provincial legislatures, highlighting the continued challenges in achieving full political representation.

Alizai et al. (2020) research examines the factors affecting the political empowerment of women in Pakistan. The significance of women's political empowerment, legislative involvement, and contribution to democracy is universally recognized. Although constituting almost fifty percent of the population, women are still denied the authority to contribute to national development. In Pakistan, women have limited access to political, economic, and educational possibilities. This research paper will primarily focus on the barriers affecting women's involvement in Pakistani politics. The essay will address literacy challenges, social and cultural obstacles, economic impediments, and patriarchy as a system to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Pakistani society. Without the representation of women, no democratic system can operate effectively or yield positive outcomes. Women in Pakistan are unaccustomed to the prevalent notion that males and politicians dominate political affairs. Women must advocate for their political rights to engage in the making of decisions. The Pakistani constitution guarantees women's political rights. Political empowerment is obstructed by social, patriarchal, cultural, and institutional barriers, which persistently exert minimal influence in local, regional, and national politics. The research examines the barriers hindering the political empowerment of Pakistani women.

Dhakan et al. (2021) This study aims to investigate the factors influencing the political attitudes of rural women in Pakistan. The study's main goal is to determine how political orientation is impacted by awareness level, political family support, and personal drive. Women's empowerment's mediating role has been studied. To analyze the data and assess the mediating impact, PLS-SEM was employed. Graduate and postgraduate students in higher education institutions who were employed women made up the respondents. Social media sites were used to disseminate the survey. Analysis was conducted on 460 of the 500 replies that were deemed genuine. To undertake a future

comparison study based on demographic disparities, particular emphasis has been given to the requirement that the respondents be females from Pakistan's rural areas. The findings demonstrate that political family support has a negative yet considerable correlation with the political environment, whereas internal motivation and awareness level exhibit a positive and significant correlation with political orientation. The relationship between orientation towards politics, understanding level, and internal motivation is positively mediated by women's empowerment.

Dauletova et al. (2022) Arabian Gulf states have few women in political leadership despite gender equality and non-discrimination policies. This essay uses Oman as a case study to evaluate public opinion variables affecting MENA women's political disempowerment. A total of 288 surveys were done with Omani people without political science backgrounds and college or graduate students from Oman. The results show that government and socio-cultural issues prevent Omani women from political empowerment. A national assessment on women's political empowerment found political science graduates had less gender bias than non-politicians. Gender discrimination did not correlate with age, education, or other socio-demographic characteristics among the two groups examined. Male general public respondents were more prejudiced against women's political empowerment, whereas politically educated participants were more favourable. Politically aware people may reduce gender prejudice, according to the research. Raising public political knowledge is crucial to empowering women and changing society's attitudes.

Dahlum (2022) This article analyzes the correlation between women's political empowerment and technological progress, the principal driver of sustained economic growth. Three dimensions of empowerment—descriptive representation, safeguarding civil liberties, and engagement in civil society—are proposed to promote technological progress and, subsequently, economic growth by (a) increasing the volume and diversity of innovative ideas introduced into the economy and (b) improving the selection of more effective ideas. Utilizing data from 182 nations over 221 years, it examines many ramifications of the thesis. The political empowerment of women is favourably associated with future economic growth. This association endures across many model settings while considering numerous possible confounders. The three sub-

components of empowerment are separately associated with growth, but not as robustly as the collective idea. The link persists across several contexts but is more evident in "Non-Western" nations and in earlier epochs. This study also identifies evidence that women's political empowerment fosters technical advancement.

Takieldin (2023) The campaign for women's equality was led by Egyptian women's rights advocates. After the 25th and 30th of January, Egyptian women ascended to prominence within the Arab Spring movement, significantly contributing to the advocacy for women's rights in legislative and judicial arenas. After years of discrimination and marginalization, Arab women finally had a voice in politics, policymaking, and everyday life during the Arab Spring Uprising in 2010 and 2011. This research showed how the Arab women's revolution for equality played out in every way imaginable. An essential aspect of the research is the discussion of women's representation in society's most powerful forces and their influence in the State's public policy-making process. With 44% of the vote in the 2020 parliamentary elections going to female candidates, it's clear that Egyptian women have made great strides in recent years, which has encouraged them to actively engage in political life. With 8 ministers or 25% of the population, being women, the Women in Egypt also have the legal right to vote for representatives and senators.

Singh and Kaur (2024) The article titled "Empowering Women Through Decentralized Governance: A Global Perspective" investigates how decentralized governance systems like Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have empowered women worldwide. This study examines how institutional frameworks and policies that favor women, such as reserved seats, have improved female local government participation. The authors give India, South Africa, and Brazil case examples. These case studies show how women's social status, decision-making, and organizational leadership have improved. In particular, the study shows how PRIs in India have raised gender equality awareness and given women a voice to address community issues. In addition, problems including deeply ingrained patriarchal practices, a lack of capacity-building programs, and restricted financial autonomy are explored to identify opportunities for future improvements and international cooperation. This research increases knowledge of how decentralized

governance promotes gender equality and gives methods for expanding women's participation in global systems.

Hussain and Zhao (2024) article "Digital Governance and Women's Empowerment in Rural Communities: A Comparative Study" examines how digital governance might improve rural women's empowerment. It highlights how technology has helped close the gender gap by comparing international projects with an emphasis on Bangladesh, Nigeria, and India. The study identifies effective e-government initiatives that facilitate involvement in local governance, enhance transparency, and assist women leaders. Barriers including sociocultural norms and digital illiteracy are also covered.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

Kaur (1983) has discovered a novel idea about women that is gaining traction in India. She discovered that although women are not just found in the House, they are also present in state legislative assemblies, the Parliament, and other entities that make decisions and have authority. Because of their increased knowledge and self-awareness, they are now calling for the same status as males. They are aware of their legal rights. Their attitudes and behaviours still reflect their cultural background and traditional beliefs, even after completing higher education. The outcome demonstrated that women's attitudes and behaviours had improved.

Hazel (1983) His research demonstrates the function of women in the Panchayati Raj establishment. Four divisions in Maharashtra—Vidarbha Marathwada, Pune, and Bombay—were the sites of the research. 153 female members were chosen from a total of 24 districts. The social development of females in the specific local bodies of Maharashtra was too demonstrated by the research study. The social, political, and economic backgrounds of the female members of the Zila Parishads and Panchayat Samiti were also highlighted by him.

Bhatt (1994) This research was conducted in the Pithoragarh District of Uttar Pradesh. The study's findings reveal that traditional rural political elites have been supplanted by new leadership, marking a significant transformation that has been acknowledged. The study also examined the transformation of women's roles in the social sphere.

Deb and Shukla (1996) Based on the results of a study that focused on female leadership in the state of Panchayati Raj, with a particular emphasis on West Bengal, it was discovered that several women, despite having received an education, had a family history of political involvement, and had a significant amount of support from their respective parties, are unable to take part in the entire process meaningfully. There are a lot of people who feel the obligations to be too demanding; some of them are completely occupied with their household chores, while others do not take care of their health.

Mathew and Nayak (1996) In their case studies conducted in Madhya Pradesh, the researchers discovered that the structure of power at the village level is still oppressive, feudal, and inhuman. The case study of 'Dalit Panchayat' representatives from various villages in Madhya Pradesh reveals that a woman Sarpanch was stripped naked, another female Sarpanch was gang raped, and a Panch was beaten up by people affiliated with higher castes.

Meena (1999) This study primarily focused on the achievement of women inside the institutions of the Panchayati Raj. The Gram Sabha was created following an amendment to the Rajasthan Panchayat Act, enacted in 1994. This allowed for more participation from the general public in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Taking into consideration this, the state effort known as Ward Sabha has become a fresh starting point. However, the participation of women in either the Gram Sabha or the Ward Sabha has been inadequate. In terms of participation, they were fewer in number, and the majority of the time they were passive. Consequently, there has been a rise in the attendance of women at the meetings.

Buch (2000) Indicated that before the 73rd Amendment, the predominant female legislators in Panchayats were predominantly from influential groups, such as the Marathas. Post the enactment of the 73rd Amendment, a considerable number of women were illiterate, and a substantial percentage originated from households within lower socioeconomic tiers, as indicated by the research findings. They were younger than others who had entered the competition earlier. In addition, she observed that the male and female members of the Panchayat, although they declared their support for women

entering the Panchayat, did not actually support the idea, and instead communicated their support through remarks.

Mohanty (2000) Performed a field survey as part of his research on the impacts of the 73rd Amendment in Orissa and found that 80 to 90 percent of women participate in the Panchayat meetings every day. In addition, he observed that these women came from socio-economic backgrounds that are associated with lower income groups at the Panchayat level. Additionally, the research demonstrates that the presence of women has resulted in a shift in the working culture of the Panchayat organization. Furthermore, it was shown that the quality of grassroots political institutions has not deteriorated due to women's apprehensions. Furthermore, the findings revealed that a considerable proportion of women are illiterate and have never received formal education. As a result, they are forced to rely on their male relatives to carry out the duties of the Panchayats. The survey indicates an intriguing fact: the relationship between spouses has changed due to women's reservations, regardless of the dependence of female representatives on their families. The research ultimately shows that the 73rd Amendment positively impacts women's empowerment.

Dutta (2001) Discussions have occurred over the participation of women in panchayats. The poverty line is the threshold at which around seventy percent of women live. They are predominantly illiterate. After 1975, the matter of women's involvement in political processes began to gain prominence. During the 1985 Nairobi Women's Conference, participant nations were encouraged to implement measures to ensure women's political participation by reserving 35 percent of seats in all elections. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution is a pivotal moment in the historical context of governmental initiatives aimed at the political empowerment of rural women. A considerable number of studies have been performed to examine the socioeconomic background and performance of women elected to different levels of panchayats. The survey data indicate that nearly all female legislators receive support from their families. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has resulted in a notable transformation in the Indian state's treatment of women. The enactment of this amendment positioned women as a central focus of growth and a crucial element in the decision-making

process. This amendment stipulates that women from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are entitled to a reservation of no less than one-third of the seats in all bodies.

Sharma (2002) His research revealed that the women leaders' backgrounds mirrored the organization of the region they represented. The majority of the female members came from joint households, while the rest belonged to backward and reserved castes. According to the study, women were aware of the social issues that women faced in society even if they were unaware of their function in the panchayat at the time. The results revealed that women seek reservation in the state legislatures and the Parliament of India, as well as enhanced power within the Panchayat Raj institutions.

Singh (2002) discovered that women in the middle and elderly age groups were the only ones granted permission to vote in Panchayat elections. Additionally, the survey found that two-thirds of the female members are part of joint families. Nearly all of the female members were married, according to the survey. Due to Haryana's strict culture, the survey did not take into account the younger women. The majority of married women were illiterate. Some of the female members had higher education than the average person. His research has also led him to the conclusion that women's leadership is of low quality. The investigation ultimately concluded that the superstructure is similarly ineffectual unless the base is altered.

Mehta (2002) For his research, he chose 93 women who were in charge of village Panchayats out of a total of 497 women who were representatives of village Panchayats belonging to the district of Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. In addition, he investigated a wide range of concerns concerning the structure of reservation policy and the level of knowledge of it among women. According to the results of the research study, the majority of females were coerced into running for the elections of the village Panchayat by members of their own families. Furthermore, the level of engagement of these females was found to be extremely low. During their visit to the office of the block Panchayats, a significant number of female delegates received support from their male counterparts. In addition, the study found that although they were representatives in Panchayats, there was no difference in the way that they carried out their normal tasks. The findings indicated that fifty percent of the women delegates had undergone some

kind of transformation in their status as a consequence of their involvement in social and cultural activities as well as local bodies.

Nahar (2003) An inquiry was undertaken to ascertain the societal context of women employed in Panchayati Raj system, their comprehension of the structure and duties of PRIs, and the socio-cultural obstacles faced by women. A total of six districts from the Jodhpur division of Rajasthan were included in the research project. These districts include Jalore, Barmer, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Pali, and Sirohi. The research was conducted with the participation of the Sarpanch (1579), Pradhans (42), and Zila Pramukhs (6). As female responders, 14 women Pradhans and two Zila Pramukhs were chosen from among the total of 234 women who held the position of Sarpanch. A significant relationship exists between women's socio-economic background and their capacity to fulfill their responsibilities as village Sarpanch. Only fifty percent of the women surveyed were knowledgeable of the reserved seat offer, as seen by the data. According to the findings of the study, male and female activities are markedly different. In addition, the findings demonstrated that Indian women are subjected to several socio-cultural limitations, each of which has a direct impact on their position. Several recommendations were made in light of these findings, including the empowerment of PRIs, the education of both men and women to gain a better understanding, and the organization of awareness camps.

Kishor and Gupta (2004) document empowerment in each of the 26 states that had boundaries in 1999, This study utilizes data from the Second Edition of the National Family Health Survey. As a general rule, it has been discovered that the typical woman in India is powerless in comparison to males, and there has been very little progress made in terms of female empowerment throughout modern history. This finding is consistent regardless of the method that is used to quantify empowerment, whether it be in terms of the indicators of the evidence, sources, or the environment in which empowerment occurs. Despite this, there is a greater inequality across the various states and metrics in terms of the degree to which women are empowered.

Tinker (2004) In the past decade, there has been a significant growth in the number of women occupying legislative roles in various countries, resulting in heightened demand for thirty percent quotas for women in electoral bodies. The individuals who advocated

for quotas anticipated a shift in the policies and goals of the government, along with an escalation in the degree of influence that women would have in making decisions. This transfer in power is contingent not just on the various sorts of party systems but also on the election systems, which are problems that are frequently ignored. According to studies, their influence on policy is rather minor. Changes to the law are necessary to implement reservations in nations that use the single-member constituency system. Within the framework of the single-constituency system, women who hold leadership positions within civil society groups have a larger chance of winning elections and, as a result, have a bigger impact on policy. In all of these male-dominated chambers, there are still many challenges that women must overcome to be effective.

Malik (2004) has brought attention to a few issues related to the women's empowerment process. Following the provisions, women were chosen as members and chairpersons of the institutions. Even if their family members serve as proxies for them, the survey also showed that women members at the village level do not attend meetings. Later, they had their thumb imprints taken. He also concentrated on the idea that women were uneducated and uninformed about political affairs. Their families forbid them from going to gatherings outside of these locations because of this. It demonstrates that women are incompetent leaders who just run for office to represent their families in a certain Panchayat.

Ramanathan (2004) This page covers Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad's history from its founding to its current role in empowering women. However, the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad views empowerment as more than only economic empowerment for women and children. In a patriarchal culture, it allows women to exercise all their rights and build their personal space. This research by the same name examines the grassroots empowerment movement of women. Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad was founded by a small group of lower middle-class women who wanted to work from home to support their families. This study examines its origins, development, and relevance. Oral interviews with group members, newspaper accounts, and a biography were used. Official archives and publications from the organization's 1959 founding are available at its headquarters office in Bandra, Mumbai. This article investigates the development and growth of an organization after a group of women

took steps to earn more. It empowers individuals cooperatively. A follow-up article will explore this topic. The question will be whether the organization's success empowered its women personally. Lijjat gave women from lower socioeconomic groups in India, independent of caste, religion, or location, a chance for a better future, which was vital to the social movement.

Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies (2005) did a research study to find out about the backgrounds and roles of women who get involved in politics. It was the goal of the study to show how women's standing and place change over time. The data was mostly gathered through in-person talks and surveys sent through the mail. Five municipal corporations, 37 municipal councils, and 45 Local Panchayats were selected as examples for the research. Twenty percent of elected women couldn't read or write, fifteen percent were full-time politicians, and the largest percentage of women who were illiterate were mothers. The system of male control is still in place in society, even though women now have their own money. It was also seen that men spent a lot of the family's money. It was found that the fight between the husband and wife was caused by changes in their jobs in modern society, not taking care of their family, and other things. It was found that women liked their job more than men did, even though they had a lot of problems with it.

Sharma (2005) an investigation into the situation of women in a remote region of Nagaland has been carried out. The results of the survey throw light on the fact that Naga women living in rural regions had the perception that their rights were not given attention and that their opinions were not heard by those in positions of authority and responsibility. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that they were not chosen to serve as representatives on either the village council or the village development board because they were not chosen. At the end of the investigation, he offered several suggestions for viable remedies to the issue, such as democracy.

Devi and Lakshmi (2005) Despite the Constitution asserting that men and women are entitled to equal rights, a limited number of women have participated in legislative decision-making. This study aims to discuss the increasing political activism of women in the Indian Legislature, particularly on decision-making and their underrepresentation

in governmental positions. A significant avenue for women to acquire influence and participate in decision-making is through political engagement.

Vissandjée et al. (2006) In this article, we go into some of the most fundamental questions surrounding the political engagement of rural Gujarati women. Using factors like age, education, socioeconomic position, and household dynamics as mediators, this data subset sheds light on the gender operation in rural Gujarat about women's social mobility. This article utilizes qualitative inquiry and gender-based analysis to uncover the gender gap in beliefs around women's political engagement.

Misra (2006) The dynamics of women's empowerment in India has not been thoroughly examined to provide specificity to gender mainstreaming strategies, Consequently, post-feminist analyses must be employed to scrutinize Indian post- feminist activities aimed at establishing "a gender-just society" through the empowerment of women, who are crucial embodiments of the persistent subaltern status. This paper aims to (re)define women's empowerment in India as an ongoing process that seeks to (i) eliminate gender-based discrimination across all Indian institutions and structures and (ii) incorporate women into policy and decision-making processes at both private and public levels, informed by the interplay of mind, matter, knowledge politics, gender dynamics, and the poetics of absence and desire.

Kumar (2006) The current study, "Representation of Women in Legislative Assembly," analyzes the Women Reservation Bill, which Parliament has not yet ratified. The Bill would reserve seats for women in Parliament and state legislatures. The arguments for and against a women's seat reserve have been examined. As stated by the author, constitutional amendment for reserving benefits could only result in formal representation. If the goal is to empower women overall, this clause will legitimize their empowerment. This paradigm proposes that female parliamentarians should not only be female nominees but also impact society. Their role should be to empower women in multiple ways, not only create laws. They work hard to expand female education, especially informal education. This will socialize women, especially rural ones. We should use a value-based strategy, not a form-based one.

Krishna (2006) Using a sample of 53 villages in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The research indicates that reservations do not influence women's involvement in village assemblies, formal gatherings, and campaigning activities. The study's findings indicate that a minimal proportion of women engage substantially, while scheduled castes and tribes exhibit lower participation rates compared to others. The study indicates that enhancing information and transparency about reservations might foster political involvement among underrepresented groups.

Hazarika (2006) The study covered 16 Assamese villages and 12 panchayats, including some severely flood-impacted regions in Assam, conducted across three districts (Sonitpur, Cachar, and Nalbari) from February to December 2004. Through an empirical study of rural Assam, the study reveals egregious ignorance and misunderstandings about the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the 73rd Amendment. The initial stage in implementing these democratic reforms should be awareness-raising, training, and capacity development for both genders. Three types of women were included in the samples: elected women, general women, and female panchayat leaders.

Bhargava and Subha (2007) an investigation was carried out in Bangalore, Karnataka. The study concentrated on the communities that were not included. According to the findings of the study, dominant individuals receive benefits from various programs, rewards associated with small connections, and other similar incentives. On top of that, it was discovered that the expense of running for office in the Panchayati Raj elections has significantly increased. In its conclusion, the research offered some recommendations or mentioned the fact that several different development programs and schemes were required to better the lives of marginalized populations such as women, SC, and ST.

Ahmad et al. (2008) Following a prolonged period of marginalization, women are now being elevated to prominent roles in society through their involvement in decision-making processes. The passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution was a crucial influence in its occurrence. The legislative status of women in leadership roles was instituted through the implementation of reservations. This status aims to establish a framework for tackling women's empowerment and eradicating societal unfairness. Within the setting of Uttar Pradesh, the leadership of women is still in the

process of developing their skills. To assume leadership responsibilities, they are still in the process of learning how to do so. However, taking the reservation by itself is not sufficient to remedy the issues. It may instigate its issues. Consequently, it is imperative to examine all aspects influencing women's participation in the political process. Institutions such as Panchayati Raj are crucial in contemporary society since they facilitate planning, encourage participation, mobilize resources, and motivate individuals to undertake initiatives. These institutions have enhanced governance accessibility by bringing government closer to the populace, especially women.

The research conducted by the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj in New Delhi in 2008** focused on comparing elected female representatives to their male counterparts. A total of 23 states, 114 districts, 228 blocks, and 1,368 Gramme Panchayats were selected for the research. When compared to ward members, the Panchayati Raj institution had a greater proportion of Pradhan members. When it came to female members, their level of involvement in politics was rather low. According to the findings of the survey, 93 percent of male Pradhans fulfilled their responsibility of arranging and attending Gram Sabha sessions, while 83 percent of female Pradhans similarly fulfilled their requirement. In the villages, the participation rate of women citizens was lower than 25 percent. It was discovered that the performance of female representatives who were younger (between the ages of 21 and 35) was superior to that of those who were older than 35 years old. It was discovered that 43 percent of the women who were elected did not undergo any kind of training. Because women are becoming more knowledgeable and experienced, efforts must be made to ensure that they continue to be represented in politics, not just in terms of their proportion but also in terms of their capacity to participate in politics.

Visaria (2008) This study uses third National Family Health Survey data to analyze three domestic violence issues in India. Regardless of socioeconomic status, many women accept gender-based power imbalances and believe males can reprimand them. Males from violent backgrounds are more prone to abuse their partners. Most abused women don't seek help, and those who do generally avoid social agencies and authorities. The data show that many women, regardless of income, support gender-based power imbalances and acknowledge that males can punish them. When people

overlook gender-specific chores like managing domestic duties, caring for children, or cooking meals that please the husband, this is especially true. Women who are beaten or otherwise abused by their partners often excuse their punishment. In India, cultural norms that condone violence prevent women from getting medical care. In conclusion, a complete study of Tamil Nadu women's acceptance of spousal abuse can help us comprehend Tamil cultural and social norms that govern marital relationships.

Makwana (2009) Almost all states and Union Territories currently have over a million rural women holding Panchayat seats as members, with a third of them serving as chairpersons, thanks to the legislative reservation provision. Women's presence in other political strata and in previous Panchayat institutions stands in stark contrast to their entry into Panchayat institutions. However, women's integration itself has generated mixed emotions, including fear and even hostility in social and political circles, as well as excitement, especially in print and public declarations. In light of this, the current study has made an effort to investigate several topics pertaining to the socioeconomic, political, and personal characteristics of women elected by PRIs, as well as their involvement in various phases of the execution of welfare initiatives and development initiatives and the degree to which their mobility, freedom, socioeconomic standing, and empowerment have improved since serving in the Panchayats. Researchers, planners, and political science students will find value in the study's conclusions.

Kaul and Sahni (2009) In the course of their investigation, brought to light the difficulties that women who took part in Panchayats encountered, as well as the extent to which they engaged in Panchayats. The study was conducted in the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Only two were selected for research. According to the research findings, it is evident that very less female members regularly participate in meetings held in panchayats. This is demonstrated by the majority of the women, who claim that male members are discouraging to them and that they are not given equal standing in contrast to males. The overwhelming majority of respondents who took part in the poll expressed the belief that the growth of the region requires the provision of financial assistance. The findings of the study were taken into consideration, and it was further suggested that the attitude of male members should be changed from one of rejection to one of encouragement from the beginning.

Salgaonkar and Salgaonkar (2009) The notion of women's empowerment emphasizes the creation of an environment that promotes equality between genders. The state has endeavoured to establish this environment through the execution of its policies, plans, and programs. In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women emphasized two aspects: the economic growth and integration of women into the mainstream economy, and the promotion of equality and social justice for all women. The allocation of a 33 percent reservation for women in institutions of the Panchayat Raj and the advancement of a micro-credit initiative for Women Self-Help Groups (WSHGs) exemplify the state's recent endeavours in this domain. Each of these strategies can independently effect positive change, and when integrated, they possess the capacity to instigate a grassroots movement referred to as the Quiet Revolution.

Khanna (2009) Women gained legal equality with the Constitution. Even if the constitution allowed women to leave the relative tranquillity of the home and engage the male-dominated political sphere, Women in politics are underrepresented. There is a large discrepancy between the 'dejure' and 'defacto' status of women's political activity in India. This article lists the causes. Political engagement can be understood by evaluating numerous aspects. The paper's author divided the variables into three categories to investigate this complex situation: psychological, socio-economic, and political. The paper says that women's participation is essential for transparent justice and human survival. This can be achieved by increasing the number of women in leadership posts and ensuring they are aware of and can overcome challenges. If they acknowledge their equality and believe in themselves, they can change politics. They should know that they are legally equal to men and should not be denied their rights. Their recognition of equality and confidence in their abilities would revolutionize politics.

Sarmah (2010) In the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, the Bodos are the most significant tribal population. They are a group of people that belong to the Bodo tribe. Their social life is characterized by age-old customs and a cultural legacy that is rich in history. A new social upsurge, however, has emerged as a result of the beginning of the "homeland movement," in which the position of women has taken on a far more vital significance. 1985 marked the beginning of the movement, which lasted until February 20, 1993,

when the agreement of settlement was signed. Nevertheless, the movement resumed once again since this pact was unable to fulfill the requirements that were set forth by the people. The level of intensity was at its highest during the later time, when the greatest number of persons participated in the activity. In the end, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was established on December 7, 2003, following the signing of the Bodo Accora on February 10, 2003. Following the movement, there has been a surge in the political engagement and involvement of Bodo women in the decision-making process, as the survey demonstrates and confirms.

Kaur (2010) This essay understands women's empowerment, its complexity, its expanding need, and women's participation in it. Women's empowerment measurements have also been debated. Despite its economic growth, Punjab's women's position is similar to that of other countries due to patriarchal customs. Several reliable sources have been used to investigate Punjab's women's predicament. The data shows that women's economic, social, and political status differs between rural and urban areas, making the state's situation severe. This issue requires a comprehensive strategy to empower women, establish their equality in society, and advance it. Conclusion: Punjabi women are marginalized in politics, society, culture, and the economy. Their growth in these areas requires a more empathetic, bottom-up approach. Comparing the facts in the second part of the study to the theoretical framework in the first helps explain women's empowerment. Sub-regional differences make the issue worse, with rural women slipping more behind metropolitan women everywhere. Punjabi women need to be empowered, but they must first acknowledge their collective strength and understand why they are not empowered.

Rajendra and Doddamani (2010) concentrated their research on the advancement of women in political status in India. According to the results of the research, the all-around growth of women, including their physical, economic, and political development, is what is meant by the term "women's empowerment." When women are empowered, their rights are protected, their standard of living is improved, and they are also included in making decisions at all levels, including those that pertain to their families and their personal lives. This is the goal of empowerment. According to the report of the National Crime Records Bureau, India reports a crime every 17 seconds.

This information is based on the reported facts. It was also recommended, in light of the study that had been done, that women will only be able to achieve empowerment when both men and women acknowledge that women should be respected, and that one must respect them and embrace the achievements and sacrifices that they have made.

Ojha (2011) emphasizes that women are undeniably one of India's most valuable resources, having made significant contributions across various sectors and continuously making the nation proud. They lead, achieve goals, and serve as sources of inspiration to many. However, women in India also face systematic discrimination and neglect in various forms, including inadequate nutrition, limited access to education, health services, and property rights, child labour, domestic violence, and other forms of mistreatment. The fear of sexual assault has a profound impact on women's behaviour and their sense of freedom. The fight against violence is just as crucial as addressing the unequal distribution of power between genders, both physically and economically. The media, which mirrors society, plays a powerful role in shaping public perception and communication. The rapid advancements in information technology have further amplified its influence. Unfortunately, today's media often strays from its true purpose, presenting biased information that hampers societal progress. The Indian media needs to become more aware of gender issues and make a concerted effort to focus on women's concerns, as its current role may hinder the empowerment of women in the country.

Jharta (2011) This study aimed to examine the factors affecting the degree of political engagement among women in Himachal Pradesh. The data was obtained from the office records of the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, the State Election Commission, the State Election Department, and the Panchayati Raj Department. The research findings indicated that women in Himachal played a significant role in the struggle for national liberation. After the state acquired independence, female political engagement within the state increased. The findings indicated no substantial disparity in the number of male and female voters across the numerous elections held in the state. Moreover, the data indicates that women's involvement in state legislative assemblies is significantly lower than that of men. The depiction of women is discouraging in this context. The proportion of women occupying posts in the state's Parliament and Council of Ministers

has remained exceedingly low. It was additionally said that women's equal participation in politics is essential for both the efficacy of the democratic system and the restoration of society. This was in consideration of the previously given results. Qualitative modifications are required.

Vanaja (2011) It was brought to everyone's attention that the position of Indian women has resulted in a great deal of alteration from the past to the present. According to the findings of the research, women attained a high position in contemporary India. They are in prominent positions of authority and hold high status in India. In 2011, the office of the president of India, speaker of the Lok Sabha, and opposition leader in the Lok Sabha were all held by women. This was demonstrated by the historical record. Even though women continued to enjoy high status, the study concluded that they were confronted with a multitude of institutional, personal, and political problems. These challenges mostly arose due to the enduring predominance of the upper and middle classes in local governments which led to the low-caste women having a tough time representing their own.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2012) As a result of this study, it has been determined that states, namely Rajasthan, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh, have recently implemented a rule that mandates a minimum of two children for members of the Panchayat. There were thirteen female members in the reserved group out of the total, and there were two ladies in the general category who were completely unaware of the situation. Forty-seven of the members of the ward were unaware of the available financial resources. In the reserved category, there was just one Sarpanch and one ward member who showed a significant amount of awareness. One of the primary reasons for the dependency of women in institutions of Panchayat on their family members and the officials of the Panchayats is the low level of awareness that exists among women in these organizations.

Kadam (2012) The author of the report made an effort to bridge the gender gap by focusing on empowering women in India. In the course of the research, the idea that women made both direct and indirect contributions to economic development was the primary emphasis. In the study, the position of women was compared to both the historical and the contemporary situations. The conclusion that was reached was that

India made an effort to empower women by implementing a variety of programs, such as creches, daycare centers for children, self-help groups, and hostels for working women, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, and other similar initiatives. In addition, it was disclosed that the government to safeguard the rights of women, enacted the Muslim Women's Act and based it on a ruling handed down by the Supreme Court in the year 1986.

Manoharan and Devi (2012) stressed the significance of education in empowering women. Their analysis revealed that women constitute fifty percent of the global population, although they have only garnered ten percent of the total revenue worldwide. This occurred due to their denial of the right to education. Ultimately, their research concluded that education is the sole means to eradicate the challenges faced by women and to enhance their understanding of empowerment. An elevation in the families' educational attainment resulted in a rise in their income and an enhancement in their health status.

Sharma (2012) exposed both the good and bad effects that globalization has had on Indian women during her research. The findings indicate that globalization has influenced all facets of human existence, encompassing social, economic, religious, and cultural domains. Her research examined the evolution of the position of women over the past two decades due to globalization. In addition, it brought an additional layer of complexity to her relationship status. Traditions, moral ideals, and ethics have all been compromised as a consequence of this act. Even though the process of globalization brought up many new work opportunities, it also placed excessive pressure on the women of India. The introduction of technology by multinational corporations (MNCs) in the agricultural sector has resulted in a reduction in job prospects in rural areas. This is only one example of how many opportunities for one have become a threat to the other. It was also stated, in light of the findings, that for the state to develop from the detrimental influence that globalization has had, it must pay attention to women.

Kumari and Singh (2012) The study reveals the extent of women's involvement in elected posts within Panchayati Raj Institutions. A random sample of fifty women was selected from all Panchayats in the Pusa Block of the Samastipur district in Bihar. Despite the predominant low involvement levels among women, the study's results

indicated that some attended the sessions punctually. According to the results of the research, women have not yet made a significant contribution to the involvement in Panchayati Raj Institutions of the country.

Acharya et al. (2012) This article discusses how empowerment markers increase the possibility of forced sexual exploitation in marriage in India. It also shows how dowry affects forced sexual encounters in marriage. However, it supports education and women's autonomy in married households. Additionally, programs and laws to protect dowry exchange must be established. A shocking number of married women in India have been forced to have sexual relations by their husbands, despite the fact that it is illegal. The data suggest that educating women can prevent sexual coercion in marriage. Our findings also show that improving women's autonomy will assist them avoid having their husbands force them to have sexual relations. Our findings show that the deeply embedded traditional practice of dowry exchange significantly impacts the risk of forced sex in marriage. Although the likelihood of forced sex is lower for women without dowries or whose husbands don't care, Programs must be holistic and focus on empowering women while changing underlying norms and habits.

Kalaramadam (2012) This 1993 Indian law gave marginalized populations the vote in local governments, promoting participatory democracy and growth. Quotas have brought nearly one million women into municipal posts, but empowerment, involvement, and sustainability remain issues. EWRs confront institutional and societal obstacles, notably the "rotation" system for reserved seats, which hurts their re-election chances and encourages incapability. It rewards male elites and reinforces gender biases. Public Responsibility Initiatives (PRIs) use citizens' councils to increase grassroots engagement, although they typically collide with local power dynamics. EWRs face campaign money, candidate selection, and patronage network obstacles. Analyzing PRIs' daily operations shows how gender, caste, and class inequities hinder development and deliberative democracy, emphasizing the need for local social and political administration.

Gochhayat (2013) conducted an inquiry into the extent of women's participation in the political process during the Gramme Panchayat elections. The investigation was conducted subsequent to the general panchayat elections held in February 2012. One

hundred twenty-five female participants were selected from the five-gram panchayats situated in the Hindol block of Dhenkanal District, Orissa. The study's conclusions revealed that the level of participation is unsatisfactory. The female participants were unfamiliar with the political party names and voted solely based on the accompanying insignia. Furthermore, the study revealed that their deficiency in culture and education were the principal causes contributing to their underdevelopment.

Asaram (2013) concentrated on the status of women in India overall. The research findings indicate that women's position is affected by various macro forces, including economic growth, women's participation in political processes, and societal norms and values. This led to the discovery of multiple diverse perspectives of the status of women in ancient times, the medieval period, and the age of British rule. Following the attainment of independence, women commenced their involvement in several societal domains, encompassing art, culture, politics, education, and the service industry. The Government of India chose 2001 as the year of women's empowerment, referred to as Swashakti. Research indicated that women with elevated levels of education and training will not only earn higher incomes but also attain greater social prestige in a male-dominated culture.

Singh (2013) The empowerment of females in the Panchayati Raj was the key emphasis of his study. Panchayat members in Uttar Pradesh's Bundelkhand area were the subjects of the research. He makes an effort to examine the information that is currently available on the involvement of female representatives in Gram Panchayats. Three-tier PRIs were offered in the research study, with women's representation provided. Nonetheless, the study's findings demonstrate that formal and effective power differed. It was also proposed that a more varied perspective is required about elected women's involvement in areas with poor economic growth.

Lahon and Datta (2013) examined the provisions of many statutes that gave women the opportunity and scope to engage in politics. They identified the factors that contributed to women's low involvement rates. Both the empirical and analytical approaches were used. The Dhemaji District of Assam is where the study was carried out. A total of 225 female respondents were chosen. According to the report, young women in the district step up to actively participate in grassroots politics. Married

women made up the bulk of the women actively involved in politics. Additionally, the study discovered that women only possess limited knowledge and are not conscious. Women's ineffectual engagement in grassroots democracy has been credited to several factors, including a lack of education, the patriarchal heritage of our culture, governmental corruption, a lack of confidence, and a lack of freedom. It was discovered that most of the PRI's female delegates were chosen from reserved seats.

Mohan (2013) His research examines the impact of community-based groups in promoting women's participation in the Gramme Panchayats in Karnataka districts. His principal objective is to enhance the political engagement of women. The study examined the motivations driving the Community-Based Organization's (CBO) initiatives to promote women's engagement in political activities. 141 women who are members of Gram Panchayats in three talukas in the Udupi district and 147 women who are members of Gram Panchayats in four talukas in the Chamarajanagar district participated in the study. The results of the survey indicate the necessity of implementing procedures to enhance women's awareness of social activities, and the study also reveals that community-based organizations significantly contribute to the public life of individuals. They facilitated the enhancement of women's skills and competencies by offering a forum.

Nandal (2013) The current study titled "Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions" was carried out using a sample of 50 female respondents from the hamlet of Anwali in the Sonipat District of Haryana, India. A stratified sampling method was employed to pick the sample from several wards of the hamlet. The study indicated that women's cognizance and constitutional understanding were inadequate. The involvement of women in Gram Panchayats is restricted only to their role as voters. Some of the female respondents are unaware of the operations of the Panchayat. In the Panchayati elections, women lack autonomy in their voting decisions, since their husbands and families dictate their choices. Upon analyzing the data gathered from the respondents, we discovered that the majority engage in the election process as voters. ii. This study revealed that respondents possess a limited understanding of the 73rd Amendment of 1992. They are aware that each village possesses a Panchayat dedicated to its development, although they lack knowledge regarding the specific powers,

functions, and responsibilities of the Panchayats. iii. Their understanding of the distribution of seats to women in Gram Panchayats is limited. iv. This poll revealed that the majority of respondents voted for the candidate selected by their husbands. They lack the right to vote for their preferred candidate.

Sharma (2014) Women's illiteracy in India is a major concern for the state and civil society because educated women drive national growth. Education is essential to social change because it empowers women to challenge established norms, combat disparities, and improve their lives. Despite India's growth goals, women's education, especially in rural regions, remains slow, leaving many exploited, disenfranchised, and uneducated. Tribal women experience socioeconomic disadvantage and little education. These women suffer with limited autonomy owing to cultural changes, affecting their household and community duties. Facilitating leadership, economic independence, and social change through skill-building and vocational training is crucial. Education and targeted activities can empower tribal women to achieve their goals and participate in development.

Sadhu and Sharma (2014) The study's findings suggest that reserving seats for women may significantly catalyze women's empowerment in Indian villages; however, it does not guarantee that elected women will effectively participate in the process. Reservations are not the sole method for promoting women's empowerment; various socioeconomic and demographic factors also facilitate the effective engagement of elected women representatives in local self-governance. This is because offering reservations is not the sole method to attain this objective. Establishing additional policies that enhance women's self-confidence, strengthen their bargaining abilities, and eliminate operational barriers to their participation and decision-making is essential for accelerating this process. These policies should be implemented promptly. Current research indicates that women have not attained complete empowerment; however, it is also evident that they have gained a degree of authority and confidence due to the women's reservation in Gram panchayat.

Ashappa (2014) A survey was conducted focusing on women who are members of Panchayats in the Gulbarga District of Karnataka, as part of the author's research project titled "Awareness of Women Panchayat Members on Panchayat Administration." He

concentrated on the ages of the female members as well as the educational backgrounds of those members, and he also made an effort to find out about their administrative expertise. In addition to this, the study investigated the level of knowledge that female participants had regarding social welfare programs for rural development. One thing that was noticed was that the bulk of the people who responded were well-known for the aims and ambitions that they had for Panchayats. On the other hand, the female members must have a comprehensive understanding of the various development programs, such as employment guarantees, social welfare programs, and rural development programs.

Ghosh and Sarkar (2014) Their study concentrated on elected female members in West Bengal's Sagar block in the South 24 Parganas district. The report emphasizes how much women representatives participate in Panchayats. The study's findings indicate that a majority of women were elected to Panchayats for the very first time. Although most women joined Panchayats to serve society, many entered politics as a result of pressure from their spouses and political organizations. On their own, some women were also drawn to politics. In addition to handling home duties, women today take part in several projects that advance society.

Mohapatra (2014) His descriptive research examined women's empowerment from various angles, including social, cultural, political, economic, and personal. According to the report, women's position in India has fluctuated over some time. The position of women in India improved as women's education gained traction. Article 15 of the Constitution establishes equivalent status for both genders. It was also noted that the last three decades demonstrated the necessity of empowering women by implementing policies such as access to basic human rights, political and economic equality, etc.

Rathod (2014) examined women's political engagement and representation. In 2009, 11.2% of the 15th Lok Sabha in India was female, with 61 members. From 9.02% in 1999, it has increased significantly. It beats the global average of 22.2% by almost 50%. Unlike Parliament, Panchayati Raj institutions in India have enough women. Women made up 37.8%, 37.0%, and 35.3% of gram, intermediate, and district Panchayats in 2008. Women made up 36.87% of all three organizational levels. The study found 556 women, 5.9% of Lok Sabha candidates, ran in 2009. A slight increase after the 2004

elections. Women registered to vote in India rose from 45% in 1951 to 47.6% in 2014. The increase is 2.7%. Political parties participated in the election adopted various proposals. Political parties may also ensure that the women's reservation bill passes and that the National Commission for Women is made up of qualified women rather than just an organization.

Subhashini (2014) The study examines the empowerment of girls and women through education. The advancement of women's education in rural areas is notably gradual. A significant number of women remain illiterate, marginalized, disadvantaged, and subjected to exploitation. The study indicates that education is the sole mechanism for reducing inequalities. It was further concluded that after six decades of independence, women are still powerless. The main reason for that was the discrimination faced by women. It was found that 2.3% of women were administrators and managers. The government attempted to advance the living conditions of women by passing various provisions and legislation, various recommendations were provided like changing the attitude of men, creating awareness among the youth, laws to protect women's rights, etc.

Krishna (2014) This study examines the participation and awareness levels of women representatives, specifically about Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The research involves 144 elected female representatives. It was observed that a majority of women submit their candidacies under the influence of their husbands and political parties. All women representatives demonstrated awareness of the objectives of PRIs. The study found that the majority of women participated in poverty alleviation programs. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government implement special provisions to support women representatives.

Sharma and Sharma (2014) Analyze the study on women's empowerment in the context of Panchayati Raj Institutions, particularly regarding the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992. The study is limited to the two blocks of the Solan district: Solan and Kandaghat. This study focuses exclusively on female members and pradhans elected during the December 2005-2010 elections of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the Solan districts. In 2008, the Himachal government decided to allocate 50 percent of seats for

female candidates. This increased women's participation in the 2011 elections. The survey also indicated that women with middle and matric education had a higher presence in elections. Based on the results, it was further proposed that structural improvements such as economic independence, enhanced educational awareness, and gender equality are essential requirements for the political empowerment of women. It was suggested that training be offered to the women serving as officials in the PRI, along with improved facilities to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling their tasks.

Sadhu and Sharma (2014) The investigation clarified the extent of women's participation in these institutions and the factors influencing their engagement. Forty-one female elected members were chosen from two blocks in the Karauli district of Rajasthan. The study findings indicate that women may be incentivized and supported through the implementation of a quota system. Moreover, it was proposed that, with reservations, other social and demographic variables also motivate women to engage actively in the PRIs. Based on the research findings, it was advised that women be empowered by establishing Panchayat centers, exposure visits, and extending training incentives.

Mokta (2014) The Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution collectively support the principle of gender equality. The Constitution not only ensures equality for women but also empowers the state to implement laws that favour women positively. Empowerment can be defined as a process that enables individuals to assume control over the factors that affect their lives. Women are empowered when they become more self-aware, autonomous, economically successful, politically engaged, and capable of having thoughtful conversations about issues that impact them. This article analyzes India's position in the UN's Global Gender Gap Index and Gender Inequality Index, highlighting the various measures implemented by the Indian government to empower women. The essay ends with the observation that women need to be given the credit they deserve and that society should take action to guarantee women's equality in all areas of life.

Kavya et al. (2015) Rural poverty is rising in India. Rural India's poverty can be partially eradicated in few ways. Offering economic opportunities to rural Indians,

especially women, has helped reduce poverty. Gram Panchayats encourage women and enhance society by allowing them to make choices and get financial aid. This study examines how Gram Panchayats strengthen women in Karnataka through social, educational, economic, and political empowerment. Field surveying was used to acquire primary data in Hassan, Karnataka. In particular, this study explores the Panchayath Raj's influence in Gram Panchayat women's social, educational, economic, and political empowerment. This study shows that the Panchayath Raj empowers the most women. However, some women are not empowered. Since they lack this education, their family members, and even top officers, are unwilling to collaborate with them. They must change their view of women and prioritize gender empowerment. Rural societies will develop if women have more power.

Babu and Panda (2015) This study aims to understand the concept of women's empowerment at the Panchayat level and assess its impact on their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. This article discusses the Reservation Policy and constitutional provisions related to women's empowerment. The Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) and the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act of 1993 are two legislative measures that were examined. The current work is based on secondary data from published literature on the topic. Various sources have been consulted, including reports on women's empowerment, research articles published in Economic Political Weekly, publications by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, and materials available on websites about the 73rd Amendment in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Shetty and Hans (2015) This article examines education's impact on women's empowerment and the hurdles and modifications needed to achieve it. We recommend a current, high-quality, and complete educational recommitment to attain desired results. Humans cannot solve poverty, unemployment, and inequality alone. Women must engage equally and actively. Without an education, women won't understand their rights and entitlements. Empowering women seeks to improve literacy, education, health care for women and children, equitable ownership of productive resources, economic and commercial participation, rights awareness, living standards, and self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-respect. The NDA government launched Beti

Bachao, Beti Padhao recently. This initiative helps young women achieve social and financial independence. It will also improve women's welfare services and spread information. Such programs should be national to bring about desired changes. Never forget that women, like men, must initiate lifelong learning. That defines freedom. The focus should shift from "women for development" to "women in development," including men's group involvement and administration. This change is needed since time has come. A "quality" shift is inevitable for equality. Despite our attraction to progress and globalization, we must be confident enough to reject marginalization.

Pidugu (2015) To encourage women to take part in both economic and social welfare initiatives, the government of India developed several different programs. The success of initiatives aimed at assisting the economically disadvantaged in rural areas is contingent upon the participation of rural women in these programs. Since 1970, policymakers and academicians have begun to consider how development initiatives may be connected to economically disadvantaged women. The bulk of research studies on microfinance and women's empowerment begins with the economic empowerment of women. These studies begin with the assumption that female borrowers who can effectively raise their income are automatically empowered. The growth of income resources is a critical factor in the perceived levels of economic empowerment within self-help groups (SHGs). However, the group method in microfinance can impact other dimensions of empowerment, such as welfare potential.

Khurshid (2015) According to the information presented in this article, women have been overlooked as a class that is oppressed not only at the level of society but also inside their own homes. Their socioeconomic standing is the lowest of all the groups. They are the oppressed victims of a society that operates based on gender. The author has stated in a piece of writing that the feminist movement might be interpreted as a challenge to the patriarchal culture that we live in. A particular focus has been placed on political engagement, which is a field in which the participation of women is quite low. Although the Constitution provides equal political rights for its inhabitants (Articles 325 and 326), the participation rate of women continues to be low owing to several difficulties. They are not taken into consideration throughout the decision-making process. Specifically, this research had an impact on the Lok Sabha, Rajya

Sabha, and PRI systems, which have the lowest percentage of women participating in these bodies.

Gosh et al. (2015) This article evaluates women's empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), focusing on Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) and SHGs in promoting girls' education and empowerment. Despite progress, women globally remain subordinate, with India facing rising violence and gender gaps in education. The 33% reservation for women in Panchayats and SHGs has advanced empowerment but falls short without sufficient educational support. Findings from West Bengal and Mizoram show that while affirmative action increases representation, it doesn't guarantee participation without education, and education alone is insufficient due to cultural norms. True empowerment requires both education and affirmative action. Education beyond literacy is essential to challenge patriarchy and enable agency. Current initiatives focus on measurable indicators, but for sustainable progress, education must be integrated into empowerment policies to help women lead autonomous lives.

Kumar (2016) This study evaluates the impact of bottom-up planning within Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and the participation of women in Bihar, with a focus on the empowerment of elected members from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), both male and female. It examines the social profiles of respondents and their roles in administering Gram Panchayats. The research explores various aspects of PRIs, including constitutional amendments, powers, reservations, bottom-up planning, the status of Gram Sabha provisions, the role of District Rural Development Agencies, women's participation in Panchayats, and relevant legislation. It also investigates institutional mechanisms and barriers affecting the involvement of SC and ST women in decision-making processes and their socio-political empowerment through PRIs. Key issues analyzed include the social exclusion of SCs, their cultural and political assertion within PRIs, economic conditions, the role of traditional Panchayats, and the influence of major political parties on SC participation. Additionally, the study considers the implications of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989, and proposes measures to address the challenges faced in the effective functioning of PRIs.

Billava and Nayak (2016) Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) play a key role in rural development and empowering marginalized groups, especially women. This paper reviews the impact of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment on the empowerment of women in PRIs, focusing on their understanding of panchayat operations, decision-making, community involvement, and political engagement. Affirmative action has increased women's participation, particularly from marginalized communities, leading to better governance outcomes like reduced corruption and improved public services. However, challenges persist, as many women depend on male authorities for decision-making and struggle with balancing political duties and domestic responsibilities. Despite progress, true equality remains distant, with women and marginalized groups continuing to face significant barriers in a patriarchal society. Scholars predict future improvements in social status, leadership, economic conditions, education, and political awareness for these groups.

Singh (2016) Any community serious about self-determination and progress must address its vulnerable members. The foundation of every nation is its women, and it is only fair that they have agency over their own lives. Understanding and exercising one's political rights and responsibilities is also essential to empowerment. This sets the stage for the field known as "Political Socialization," which examines how individuals of all ages, including teenagers, come to understand and engage in politics. In this article, we take a look at how PRIs and the entrepreneurship sector have helped women advance in society. We will be particularly interested in how self-help organizations contribute to economic autonomy and how this, in turn, could foster entrepreneurial spirit. In addition, we will talk about how Panchayati Raj Institutions encourage women to become politically active and involved in national matters. To promote women's political and economic empowerment, this study examines the function of PRIs and SHGs. Women are economically, socially, politically, and ethically empowered when there is political and economic stability, which boosts their social significance, which in turn makes them stronger and more efficient. When women are politically and economically empowered, their living conditions will rise dramatically, allowing them to participate in more meaningful activities and giving their lives purpose.

Singha (2016) Despite the existence of numerous national and international laws, women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making roles globally. In India, even after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, women's participation in democratic processes remains limited, largely due to the prevailing patriarchal system. This study examines the efforts by the Government of India to empower women through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), with a focus on the Silchar and Lakhipur development blocks in the Cachar district. The research highlights several challenges faced by women representatives in Panchayats, including societal patriarchy, lack of support from family members and male counterparts, and limited understanding of meeting agendas. While many women attended meetings regularly, active participation remained low due to these obstacles. However, some female legislators successfully overcame these challenges, addressing local issues and improving Panchayat's effectiveness. Survey participants emphasized the need for financial support to help women carry out their responsibilities independently. True empowerment requires collective efforts from families, religious leaders, and political Figs. Overcoming entrenched patriarchal structures is essential to creating an equitable socio-economic environment where men and women can work together effectively. Addressing these barriers is crucial for achieving meaningful empowerment for women.

Chakraborty (2017) The research explores the level of empowerment among women and their involvement in politics in Surat. The study involved 360 female respondents aged between 18 and 75, selected using stratified random sampling. One key finding of the study is that when women's empowerment is linked to economic and social progress, the respondents indicated significant challenges in terms of political engagement and empowerment. Additionally, the study revealed a common misconception that literacy does not significantly impact political participation, which helps explain why women from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds are less likely to engage actively in politics.

The study also reflects respondents' views on current political actors and events. About 72% of the respondents believe that reserving seats for women is crucial. Household responsibilities and women's situational constraints were identified as major barriers to their active participation in politics. The study underscores that women's empowerment

is interconnected with various social, economic, and political factors. It was also found that the assumption that literate and affluent women are automatically empowered is only partially accurate, as many still have low political engagement and limited empowerment. Moreover, the respondents emphasized the importance of financial independence and economic success as essential components of political empowerment, highlighting the need for financial support in modern political activities.

Rai (2017) In the article "Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in India: Silent Feminization," a time series analysis of women's voting patterns is presented. This study utilizes secondary data sourced from the archives of India's Election Commission and election survey data provided by the Data Unit of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi. The research indicates that political parties consistently lack coordinated efforts to engage female voters on issues related to women in both national and state-level elections. The commitments made by political parties in their manifestos regarding gender issues are often overlooked, as evidenced by the failure to enact the Women's Reservation Bill.

Panackal et al. (2017) This article examines the various dimensions of Kudumbashree aimed at women's empowerment across different hierarchical levels, highlighting issues that necessitate urgent attention at each tier. The primary focus of this inquiry is to assess the degree of Kudumbashree's contribution to women's empowerment. A Literature Review has been carried out by the researchers, which serves as a foundation for the process of determining the variables that will be used in the development of the ISM Model. The theory serves as the foundation for latent constructions. The researchers are motivated to investigate a variety of characteristics and relationships between Kerala Self-Help Groups (SHG) and Women Empowerment via the use of a technique known as Interpretive Structural Modelling. After becoming a member of SHGs, there is a good influence on the empowerment of both the family and the social environment. Obtaining funds and facilities from a variety of banks and post offices has been made easier with the assistance of SHG. They were able to obtain the amenities that were offered by the post offices and savings banks with the assistance of SHGs. Using the financing and training that they had gotten from the SHGs, the women who were affiliated with the SHGs have begun their new businesses. This was made possible

by the SHGs. To increase the number of women who are self-sufficient enough to establish their firms and become entrepreneurs in society, more programs aimed at entrepreneurship were implemented.

Gajjar (2017) Women comprise 50% of the global population and one-third of the workforce but receive only 10% of worldwide income and own less than 1% of international property, despite contributing two-thirds of total working hours. Reports of human rights violations against women are a daily reminder of persistent inequalities. Empowerment provides women with a constitutional platform to confront oppression, voice their concerns, and assert their identity within a traditionally male-dominated socio-political structure. It also offers a critical avenue for addressing issues directly affecting them—capturing true empowerment's essence. Empowerment is a multifaceted process that enables women to realize their full potential across all aspects of life. It begins with self-awareness—understanding one's identity, rights, talents, and the socio-cultural and political forces shaping one's life. Transforming societal values and elevating the status of women is essential in today's world. A society without women is likened to a body without a heart. Achieving gender equality requires providing women with equal opportunities and recognition, which enhances the values and standards of families, communities, and nations. True empowerment integrates women into core development initiatives and ensures they have ownership of financial resources and property, fostering independence and societal recognition. The ultimate measure of empowerment lies in women's ability to interpret, implement, and uphold laws while reflecting their perspectives, beliefs, and concerns in these frameworks.

Prathiba (2017) This study aims to analyse the status of women's empowerment in India and clarify the associated issues and challenges. Women's empowerment represents a significant concern in the 21st century. Since the early twentieth century, their statuses have experienced gradual and incremental changes. The research demonstrates that women in India experience relative disempowerment and hold a lower status than men, notwithstanding various governmental initiatives. Gender disparities persist in access to education and career opportunities. Authority in household decision-making and women's mobility varies significantly according to age, educational attainment, and employment status. The acceptance of disparate gender

standards by women remains prevalent in society. Women in rural areas exhibit a higher vulnerability to domestic abuse compared to their counterparts in metropolitan regions. There is a notable gender disparity in political engagement. The research demonstrates that access to education and employment serve merely as facilitating factors for empowerment; instead, advancement in this area primarily depends on individuals' perspectives regarding gender equality.

Sama (2017) In recent decades, women's empowerment has become a central topic of global discourse and action. It has consistently been a top priority in government policies and strategies worldwide, with ongoing efforts to improve the socioeconomic status of women. However, many of these initiatives tend to equate empowerment solely with economic self-sufficiency, neglecting other crucial factors such as health, education, and literacy. This narrow focus often defines empowerment primarily in economic terms. Historically, women have played roles as significant as men. A nation's progress can be measured by the status of its women, the opportunities available to them, and the nature of their work. Without active involvement of women in national development, social, economic, and political progress will remain stagnant. Women comprise 50% of the global population and contribute two-thirds of the total labor hours. Yet, they generate only one-third of global income and own less than one-tenth of global resources. In India, this disparity is stark. Women account for half the population, perform two-thirds of the labor, and produce half the food consumed in the country. Despite this, they receive only a third of the wages and hold just 10% of the nation's wealth. This highlights the critical need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing gender inequality and fostering women's empowerment (Reddy et al., 1994).

Das and Dhar (2017) This article analyze the concept of democratic decentralization and the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). West Bengal has experienced more than 40 years of success in Panchayati Raj Institutions, recognized as a national model. The study will employ primary evidence collected from Women Pradhans in specific blocks of Burdwan District, West Bengal, as per the 2013 elections. The demographic statistics indicate that the Burdwan district has a substantial representation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, alongside a general caste female population. The designation of Burdwan district is based on its recognition as

one of the most advanced agricultural districts in West Bengal. This research utilizes participatory observation, selected case studies, and structured interviews to examine how women's political engagement can promote a concrete model of empowerment at the grassroots level. This study analyses the relationship between participation and the development of a specific leadership style among women, based on Leadership Theory in management.

Singh (2018) This article examines strategies for promoting gender and women's empowerment in selected villages in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Himachal Pradesh in northern India. Based on field research conducted from 2009 to 2011 and theoretical frameworks supported by global donor organizations, the study highlights key findings. It reveals that the involvement of civil societies and the allocation of power and positions to women in local governance have a limited impact on women's empowerment within patriarchal Indian societies. The study emphasizes that a targeted women's empowerment approach is crucial for achieving gender equality in rural north Indian communities. Strengthening the capacities of village committees, alongside other key stakeholders such as Pradhan and Pramukh at block, district, or national levels, is necessary to ensure that Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are equipped to drive women's and gender empowerment efforts effectively. The article also explores the potential of PRIs to deliver meaningful empowerment and advocates for including women in committees responsible for planning, monitoring, and conducting social audits at the village level. The findings suggest that education and intensive training to enhance women's potential are foundational to other empowerment measures implemented by the government and civil society organizations. Thus, it is essential to prioritize women's empowerment as a prerequisite for addressing broader gender empowerment in patriarchal Indian communities.

Jogi (2018) The participation of suitably qualified women in village panchayats during the initial phase of the Panchayati Raj initiative in rural areas is crucial for improving social status and empowering women. This group of women, when given representation at the village panchayat level, could effectively advocate for women's advancement, play a crucial role in decision-making, and present relevant proposals to improve the status of women within the assembly. It allows women to have increased influence in

the design and provision of products, as well as in the management of resources available to them. The participation of women alongside men in local politics, advocating for gender-related agendas, indicates advancement in gender equality.

Nisha and Vezhaventhan (2018) Enhancing women's political agency is a vital process for societal progress and development. Assessing the global status of women involves analyzing their empowerment and participation in political processes. Despite some advancements, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles. This article explores the barriers, statistical trends, and international comparisons related to women's political engagement in India. Using a descriptive research approach, the study highlights those various factors—economic, religious, social, and cultural—that contribute to the low levels of women's political participation. While women's involvement in Indian politics has gradually increased, as reflected in data from 1952 to 2014, the progress has been modest. The findings emphasize the need to raise awareness among women about the importance of active and courageous political participation. Political empowerment is essential for establishing a genuine and sustainable democracy. Active engagement in politics allows women to take control of their futures, secure their rightful place in society, and achieve economic and social independence. Furthermore, their participation in public life addresses a range of societal challenges, fostering transformative change and creating a more inclusive democratic framework.

Prabhakaran (2019) This article examines the current challenges hindering women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), focusing on the barriers created by patriarchal norms, caste systems, and male dominance. The study highlights that rural communities often lack awareness about the importance of equitable political participation, and male members involved in PRIs frequently undermine the role of female representatives. This interference weakens the impact of women's reservation policies and democratic decentralization efforts. Political parties, particularly those in power, often undermine grassroots democracy, while factors like education, rural banking, self-help groups (SHGs), and electoral awareness also influence the effectiveness of PRIs. To strengthen the leadership and participation of elected women, it is essential to promote training and knowledge-sharing. Achieving active

participation in political processes requires collaboration among the government, political parties, social activists, academicians, and the public to foster gender equality and empower women to make autonomous decisions. Historically, women have been marginalized socially, economically, and politically, with patriarchal and caste-based structures continuing to limit their opportunities. Despite provisions such as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which mandates reservations for women in PRIs, many women still face illiteracy, dependence on male counterparts, and token representation. However, states that have implemented 50% reservations for women in PRIs have seen progress in increasing female leadership. This descriptive study uses secondary sources, including books, scholarly articles, government reports, and statistics, to analyze the ongoing challenges and opportunities for women's empowerment through PRIs. To promote gender equality, the male-dominated cultural mindset must shift to view women as equal, active contributors to nation-building.

Naik, Suna, and Pattnaik (2020) Achieving women's empowerment can be furthered through an amendment reserving seats for women in national and state legislatures, marking the final step in the empowerment process. Empowerment cannot rely solely on local resource allocation; incentives are crucial to ensuring elected representatives actively participate in decision-making. Exemplary women leaders have successfully executed developmental projects, fostering progress in their constituencies across all Panchayat levels. Recognizing and celebrating their contributions in public forums can inspire other women and promote the adoption of effective strategies. At the Panchayat level, governance is often managed by male relatives such as husbands, fathers, or brothers, limiting women's direct involvement. However, in Odisha's Keonjhar district, women actively participate in local governance, demonstrating awareness of the Panchayati Raj system and its objectives. This awareness is bolstered by the stability of the governance structure in the state. Women play a critical role in rural development, with their participation being integral to grassroots reforms. Highlighting successful female leaders and ensuring their increased representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions will enhance rural development efforts and facilitate meaningful empowerment.

Priyanka and Tomar (2020) Introducing an amendment to reserve seats for women in the national Parliament and state legislatures could complete the unfinished agenda of women's empowerment. Such empowerment requires more than local resource allocation, as incentives play a vital role in engaging elected representatives in decision-making. Several active and capable female leaders have successfully implemented developmental projects at various Panchayat levels, contributing to their constituencies' progress. Publicly recognizing these leaders can inspire others and encourage the adoption of their effective strategies. The study highlights the need for women at the Panchayat level to better understand local governance structures. However, decision-making in Panchayats often remains dominated by male relatives such as husbands, fathers, or brothers, with occasional control by brothers-in-law. In Odisha's Keonjhar district, women have actively participated in local governance, demonstrating awareness of the Panchayati Raj System and its objectives, supported by a stable administrative framework. Women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is crucial for grassroots development and village improvement. Engaging more women in these institutions fosters change and enhances rural development. Many women in Odisha are familiar with the Panchayati Raj Act and its goals, and they actively contribute to governance and development, showcasing the significant role women play in advancing rural regions.

Kumari and Shankar (2020) Rural women play a pivotal role in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) within rural regions, contributing both as entrepreneurs launching new ventures and as managers of existing enterprises. Their involvement is essential for the development of the rural ICT sector, as their localized expertise in service delivery can significantly advance the industry. This analysis examines the empowerment of rural women in the ICT sector by exploring the challenges they face, the entrepreneurial opportunities available to them, the obstacles they encounter, and strategies to overcome these barriers. The study highlights the positive impact of ICTs on rural women, focusing on how ICT entrepreneurship enhances their financial standing and motivates them to pursue higher education due to improved social status. Women in rural areas increasingly recognize their potential to leverage ICT for new business opportunities. This is evidenced by rural women in the

West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, who have successfully established ICT enterprises, gaining access to self-employment, economic independence, and personal and social growth. Through self-employment, rural women contribute to community development, benefiting themselves and their families while fostering regional growth. These advancements have improved the quality of life for rural women and promoted the preservation and celebration of local traditions and history. This paper seeks to analyze the impact of ICT enterprises run by rural women in the West Godavari district on their living standards and cultural heritage.

Kumari (2020) Ideologies promoting women's empowerment have become increasingly prominent in modern society, driven by the widespread influence and active engagement facilitated by social media. As a powerful agent of social change, social media has played a pivotal role in empowering women by raising global awareness of women's rights and addressing issues of prejudice and sexism. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms—such as blogs, chat rooms, online campaigns, discussion forums, and virtual communities—offer a space where women's challenges and issues can be openly expressed and discussed. This paper explores how women entrepreneurs in India, both in rural and urban areas, leverage social media for self-promotion and support-building. It examines the role of social media as a critical platform for advocating women's rights, influencing policymakers to strengthen commitments, and implementing gender equality measures. Social media has contributed to women's empowerment across emotional, financial, and social dimensions. The article also investigates the benefits and drawbacks of social media usage, emphasizing the creation of digital safe spaces that enable unrestricted participation for women. Furthermore, it addresses challenges such as the virtual gender gap caused by cybercrimes and limited digital literacy. The research employs a qualitative methodology to analyze these dynamics.

Ghuge and Mahajan (2020) A significant portion of India's population resides in rural areas, with more than 50% dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. As such, the development of rural communities is vital for the nation's overall progress. Advancing both genders is essential for driving this rural transformation, and women's empowerment plays a crucial role in a nation's journey toward prosperity. Empowering

women involve a series of interconnected processes that foster autonomy, structure, and social awareness, going beyond mere rhetoric. India, the world's largest democracy, has a female population of over 50%. The equality provisions in the Indian Constitution have established a legal framework for women's participation in public life, granting them political rights. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was introduced to further empower women in rural areas by reserving one-third of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), encouraging their active involvement in socio-economic development. Despite these constitutional guarantees, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms continue to influence the everyday lives of women. In traditional Indian society, daughters are often viewed as burdens and subservient to their fathers, while sons are valued and respected. Since independence, women's representation in positions of authority has remained disproportionately low, reflecting centuries of societal restrictions on women's access to the rights and opportunities available to men. This article examines the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in promoting women's equal participation in household and community decision-making, as well as in economic and social activities. It highlights how these initiatives empower rural women, contributing to their overall development and enabling them to play a more active role in shaping their communities.

Cassan and Vandewalle (2021) An individual's sense of self plays a pivotal role in shaping their financial behaviours. This study demonstrates that policymakers risk overlooking significant and unintended consequences of economic policies if they fail to account for the complexities of intersecting identity dimensions. While previous research has often focused on isolated aspects of individual identity, this study highlights the importance of considering multiple dimensions simultaneously. Using the random allocation of political reservations for women in India, the study reveals how a policy targeting one identity dimension (gender) can influence the distribution of benefits across another (caste). A key factor is the variation in gender norms among different caste groups. For instance, higher castes in India are often associated with stricter restrictions on women's freedom of movement. This explains why women from higher castes are less likely to contest or win elections in areas with political reservations for women. The research shows that gender quotas can lead to policy

outcomes that benefit both women and individuals from lower castes, reshaping the distribution of benefits along these two identity dimensions. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating multiple identity factors into public policy design and opens avenues for further exploration into how intersecting identities influence policy outcomes.

Geeta and Mishra (2022) The research project explores the impact of reserved seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) on their active participation and leadership in rural governance. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the socio-political transformations brought about by women's involvement in grassroots decision-making processes. It examines the influence of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which introduced mandatory reservations for women in PRIs, on their ability to assume leadership roles and positions of authority. The study highlights the importance of these measures in promoting gender equality within local governance structures. Examples from Rajasthan, a state renowned for its pioneering efforts in implementing reserved seats in PRIs, are presented to illustrate the outcomes. Women leaders in these areas have significantly contributed to initiatives related to education, sanitation, and healthcare. The findings reveal instances where female leaders have taken proactive steps to improve rural infrastructure and public services, leading to greater transparency and inclusivity in governance.

Saxena (2023) This article examines the transformative impact of digital technology in empowering women through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It highlights how digital inclusion can help bridge gender gaps in rural governance, encouraging women's active participation in decision-making processes. The paper focuses on how digital tools can break down traditional barriers that limit women's involvement in governance. Technologies such as mobile applications, e-governance platforms, and digital literacy programs play a key role in enhancing women's engagement in PRIs and public-private partnerships. By participating in targeted digital literacy programs, women can access crucial information, monitor government activities, and actively engage in Gram Sabha meetings. Digital platforms provide a space for self-expression and advocacy, enabling women leaders to address local issues and effectively voice their concerns. Technology reduces women's reliance on male counterparts for

information and resources, fostering greater independence. Furthermore, it challenges patriarchal norms by demonstrating women's ability to lead and innovate. The article includes case studies from various Indian states that illustrate how women have leveraged digital tools in governance. These examples show how women are monitoring welfare programs, sharing health-related information, and ensuring transparency in fund allocation. However, several challenges persist, including limited access to digital devices, poor internet connectivity in rural areas, low education levels among women, and cultural stigmas surrounding women's use of technology. The article advocates for targeted investments in rural digital infrastructure and women-focused technological training. It recommends the integration of digital tools into government programs within PRIs, emphasizing inclusivity and sustainability. While there are challenges in incorporating technology into PRIs, the benefits far outweigh the obstacles. The author stresses the importance of systemic measures to prevent women from being excluded from the digital revolution, calling for proactive and inclusive initiatives to empower women through technology.

Sharma and Gupta (2023) The paper titled "Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Promoting Women's Leadership" explores how PRIs in rural India have a major influence on women's leadership development. The purpose of this research is to investigate how decentralization and reservation laws affect women's advancement into leadership positions in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In order to shed light on the difficulties and achievements associated with women's involvement in local government, the writers examine data gathered from multiple sources. In order to promote inclusivity, this study intends to investigate how the 73rd Constitutional Amendment's reservation requirements affect women's involvement in governmental institutions, especially among underrepresented populations. Despite the enormous progress that has been accomplished, many women in leadership roles still face challenges such as social norms, limited decision-making power, and the proxy role that is typically played by male family members. By addressing regional issues like healthcare, education, and sanitation, empowered women leaders have improved the quality of life in their communities, as the article demonstrates. The research study emphasizes the significance of capacity-building initiatives that are intended to enhance

women's leadership abilities in order to guarantee that women can effectively use their duties in governance. The authors conclude by offering suggestions for legislative changes that would enhance women's representation and autonomy within PRIs, thereby promoting equity and sustainable development.

Chowdhury & Bhatnagar (2024) This article presents a series of case studies showcasing the transformative role of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and their impact on rural governance. It highlights how women's active participation in these local bodies has improved education, healthcare, and sanitation services in rural areas. Drawing on empirical examples from rural India, the authors illustrate how women leaders in PRIs have successfully addressed critical local challenges, such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and economic development. The study underscores the significant influence of women leaders in traditionally patriarchal rural settings, emphasizing the empowering role of PRIs in fostering women's engagement in local decision-making processes. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which reserves one-third of seats in PRIs for women, has markedly increased female representation in these institutions. Through case studies, the research demonstrates how women's involvement in decentralized governance positively affects their communities while transforming their individual lives. The paper concludes that empowering women through participation in PRIs strengthens local governance and challenges entrenched gender norms, driving broader societal change. It advocates for enhanced structural support to enable women leaders to realize their full potential. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners working toward gender equality and rural development in India.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Yasmin and Khan (2013) The concept of "women's empowerment" refers to the measures implemented to guarantee that women receive the respect and dignity they are entitled to, enabling their full participation in societal advancement via democratic institutions. Panchayati Raj Institutions have recently become an effective mechanism for enhancing women's empowerment and increasing public representation in decision-making processes. This article examines the impact of the 33 percent reservation in local body elections on the empowerment of rural women in Kashmir. There are two

sections to the paper. Several previous works on women and panchayat raj are reviewed in the first section, which deals with the theoretical and conceptual aspects. Part two of the article delves into the data, including topics like the election process, the women leaders' socioeconomic backgrounds, their performance, and public opinion on them. Research in the Kupwara area took place in the winter of 2012.

Kumar et. al (2013) This research is divided into two distinct sections. The initial section addresses the theoretical framework, encompassing the 73rd amendment to the Constitution that facilitated the creation of Panchayati Raj Institutions as local self-government entities, alongside the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989, which outlines provisions for the establishment of Panchayats at the state level. The second part of the study focuses on the empirical findings, encompassing the electoral process, the socio-economic background of elected leaders, the percentage of women elected, the awareness of elected leaders regarding the various provisions of the act, and the constraints they encounter while performing their duties. The research was conducted in seven randomly selected Panchayats from four Blocks in the Jammu District of Jammu and Kashmir during September and October 2011. The study revealed that thirty-two percent of respondents belonged to the weaker sections, while over seventy percent were under fifty years of age. Furthermore, one-third of the elected representatives in the study were women. The majority of respondents identified the lack of collaboration among village-level workers and the absence of monetary compensation as the primary challenges in effectively executing their tasks.

Kavita (2013) The research article "Empowering Women through Education: A Study of Rural Jammu and Kashmir" indicates that the female literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is 56.43 percent, based on the 2011 census, which is significantly lower than the national average. Women exhibit a lower literacy rate in comparison to men. A disparity in education levels is evident, with only 53.36 percent of rural women being literate, in contrast to 70.19 percent of urban women. In the 2001 Census Report, rural female literacy was recorded at 36.7%, while urban female literacy stood at 61.9%. The research indicates a notable disparity in literacy rates between males and females. Centrally sponsored education programs for girls, including the "National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)," "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

(SSA)," and "Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)," have contributed to a reduction in gender and urban-rural disparities. The expansion of goal-oriented programs has led to an increase in the number of schools and the regions served, resulting in a reduction in the average distance students must travel to attend school. Notwithstanding the significant initiatives undertaken by federal and state governments, the gap in literacy rates between men and women in the state continued to exist. Jammu and Kashmir presents significant challenges to achieving universal education and literacy, including a limited network of rural schools, insufficient infrastructure, unique geographical conditions, and a prolonged conflict spanning over a decade.

Kumar (2014) Panchayats, historic organizations in India, were regarded as virtually sacrosanct. Their members, termed Panchas, were designated as "Panch Parmeshwar," translating to "member as God." Panchayats were anticipated to manage local interpersonal and communal conflicts with fairness and reasonableness. The origins of the new panchayats can be traced to the initial efforts made during colonial India. The Panchayati Raj system in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) possesses a distinct historical trajectory that sets it apart from other regions. In 1989, the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act facilitated the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The 73rd Amendment Act's provisions were not applied to the State due to Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370. Although the State Government has enacted certain provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act, the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 allows for considerable interpretative flexibility.

Khanday et al. (2015) The article "Empowerment of Women in India: Historical Perspective" asserts that the status and position of women in society serve as key indicators of a civilization's strengths and weaknesses. The roles of Indian women have transitioned from sages and intellectuals in the Rig Vedic period to active participants in military, information technology, politics, industry, and other significant sectors, while simultaneously fulfilling their responsibilities as daughters, spouses, and mothers. The trajectory toward modernity has been complex. Indian women needed to overcome a historically male-dominated society to evolve into more empowered and

financially independent individuals. While these represent significant accomplishments, dowry killings, job harassment, and rape persist frequently. A significant number of women remain uninformed regarding their legal rights. This research focuses on the advancement, position, development, and historical progress of women in India within this framework.

Gul (2015) Researchers in Jammu and Kashmir are working to shed light on the pervasive issue of violence against women in the region. The female population in Jammu and Kashmir faces particular vulnerability due to the ongoing armed conflict and insurgency. Many women endure chronic depression from the severe humiliation, persecution, and extraordinary experiences they face. Kashmiri women, in particular, are highly vulnerable to the adverse conditions prevalent in the region. After divorce, many women are left to shoulder the full responsibility for supporting their families and paying bills. The study highlights the numerous challenges and barriers faced by women in Jammu and Kashmir, including issues related to health, economics, education, politics, domestic violence, declining sex ratios, female infanticide and feticide, state violence, dowry harassment, eve-teasing, wage inequality, and child labour. Empowering women in Jammu and Kashmir requires a coordinated effort involving federal, state, and local governments, along with non-governmental organizations. Women in the region need more than just targeted funding and supportive policies; the leadership of the state and other key stakeholders must demonstrate a strong, unwavering commitment to addressing gender inequality. Over time, improving educational opportunities and increasing public awareness will be essential for women's progress. Changing legislation, fostering a supportive culture for women, and promoting awareness of gender equality could lead to meaningful progress in the future. Women's empowerment has been a consistent focus in development plans for Kashmir since the initiation of the Five-Year Plans.

Banday & Ganesan (2016) The document "Women Empowerment and Its Challenges in Jammu and Kashmir" addresses the topics of women's empowerment and the associated challenges. Women represent the most vulnerable demographic due to the high incidence of violence stemming from armed conflict and militancy. The protracted conflict and associated melancholy have particularly traumatized many women,

resulting in widowhood, while also presenting various challenges related to health, politics, economy, and education. The researchers sought to examine women's mobility within and outside their families, as well as their ability to pursue education before and after marriage, through the use of primary and secondary data. The study revealed that women exhibited considerable autonomy regarding their education before marriage and demonstrated significant mobility within and among their groups. The majority of respondents indicated that they could travel without restrictions to visit friends, family, hospitals, and wedding celebrations. However, they face significant constraints when they attempt to operate independently outside their villages and districts. The majority of respondents possessed significant access to education before marriage, which they generally ceased in alignment with cultural norms post-marriage. The women in the research region experience comparable impacts from unemployment, violence, and conflict, positioning them as the female counterparts to men. Women in Kashmir face significant challenges in politics, education, economy, and health, despite legislation and initiatives aimed at improving their status. Issues include dowry harassment, eve-teasing, irregular earnings, child labour, sexual abuse of minors, diminishing sex ratios, female feticide and infanticide, late marriage, state violence, and sexual harassment in the workplace. It is essential to implement continuous initiatives that empower women in Jammu and Kashmir. These initiatives must prioritize the improvement of education and knowledge, the inclusion of individuals in the development process, and the creation of an environment that supports their well-being.

Bhat (2016) Barriers to Panchayati Raj in Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj constitutes a significant element of the democratic framework operating at the local level in India. Panchayati Raj was initially implemented in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, four years before the 73rd Indian Union Panchayati Raj Amendment Act of 1993. The inaugural Panchayat election, originally scheduled for 2001 in compliance with this Act, was delayed by twelve years due to armed conflict. Compared to previous surveys, the Panchayat elections held in Jammu and Kashmir in 2011 were notably successful. This article discusses the various challenges faced by the Panchayati Raj in Jammu and Kashmir. In summary, the Panchayati Raj in Jammu and Kashmir faces several challenges, including poor management of the Panchayati system, political

interference, corruption, insufficient motivation, inadequate financial management, unresponsiveness, lack of transparency, insufficient manpower and skills, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of guidance. The expansion of the Panchayat system and its operational efficiency are impeded by these issues.

Singh (2017) The study "Women Empowerment through Microfinance" investigates the effectiveness of self-help groups (SHGs) and the women involved in these groups in the Jammu Region of Jammu and Kashmir, India. The study found that NGOs have significantly contributed to the advancement of the SHG movement in Jammu and Kashmir. Overall, SHGs demonstrated effective performance, and their membership positively impacted a significant number of women. Participation in SHGs enabled women to enhance their psychological, social, economic, and political capacities, along with their inner strength and confidence.

Sarwer (2017) The advancement of women in Jammu and Kashmir requires a supportive policy environment, strategically allocated resources, and consistent backing from all stakeholders. The overall advancement of women will be enhanced by increased educational and awareness opportunities in the long term. Enhancing public understanding of gender equality, improving relevant policies, and fostering an inclusive environment are effective strategies for making progress in the short term. The Five-Year Plans incorporated women's development as a fundamental aspect of their development strategy. Numerous issues continue to affect Kashmiri women, such as low sex ratios, domestic violence, delayed marriage, state violence, dowry harassment, eve teasing, wage inequality, child sexual abuse, child labour, workplace sexual harassment, and declining sex ratios. To reduce domestic violence, society must address issues such as dowry, drug abuse, and child marriage. Domestic abuse counselling ought to occur in diverse environments, such as mosques, mohalla committee meetings, and peer support groups. To reduce the incidence of domestic violence, collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations is essential. The former should enhance their law enforcement agencies, while the latter can create counselling cells, organize community programs, and facilitate group collaboration towards a common objective.

Bargotra and Bhardwaj (2017) The advancement of women is a critical issue in the twenty-first century, affecting global, national, and state levels. Numerous initiatives have been undertaken across various levels of government to establish laws and programs designed to empower women and advance gender equality. The state government has advocated for equal opportunity for women and the eradication of gender discrimination. Examples of such programs include the "Swayam Sidha" initiative, which supports women's self-help groups; the "J&K Social Welfare Department," dedicated to helping women acquire vocational skills; and the "Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls," which provides girls with formal and informal education to enhance their nutrition, health, skills, and educational opportunities. However, these efforts must be executed and managed correctly. This article analyzes various provisions at the international, national, and state levels to identify opportunities for improvement. The analysis presented in this paper will be supported by empirical investigation and will include recommendations aimed at assisting women in attaining their desired positions.

Arif (2018) It is commonly asserted that women can enhance their social, economic, cultural, and political status through the acquisition of property. The acquisition of property by women enhances their autonomy and enables them to compete with men in societal contexts. The capacity of women to engage in decision-making across local, state, and federal levels is directly linked to their level of economic independence, in contrast to their level of dependence. This contributes positively to women's emancipation. This article presents a case study conducted in the Kashmir province, focusing on women's property inheritance rights and their potential to empower both themselves and their families, drawing from my experience as an ICSSR fellow. Despite a small percentage of women inheriting property as daughters or wives, attributed to social pressures discussed in this paper, it is observed that a woman's status differs from that of women who do not inherit. The government of Jammu and Kashmir has enacted a law that exempts women from paying stamp duty tax on property purchases or transfers into their names, representing a significant advancement in women's empowerment. This reflects a trend of women obtaining property rights, subsequently enhancing their influence in decision-making processes. It is essential that laws be

implemented in all states to ensure inherited property rights that promote women's empowerment. The inheritance of property rights serves as a significant mechanism for women's empowerment, which this article aims to elucidate.

Chowdhary (2018) Democratic decentralization is a fundamental element of the democratic governance system, reliant on the inclusion of public dimension and public governance components. The beliefs of Mahatma Gandhi inspire the concept of decentralization within the Indian context. This important concept is addressed in Article 40 of the policy features of our Constitution. The 73rd Amendment has conferred constitutional validity, which has been ratified by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, along with the J & K Panchayati Raj Act of 1989. The 2011 Panchayati Raj election enhances the empowerment of elected representatives within the democratic framework, thereby fostering public confidence and ensuring practical public participation in the democratic process. Addressing the democratic aspirations of the populace, which has shown authentic involvement in the local political process, represents a critical challenge for the administration. This document provides a systematic analysis of the 2011 rural development and Panchayati Raj reforms in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir and Jammu. Twenty randomly selected Panchayats from two Blocks in District Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir, participated in a survey conducted from March to April 2017. The study's findings indicate that Sarpanchs are elected representatives. The majority of respondents identify the lack of collaboration from Sarpanchs and the absence of financial support in the form of salary as the main obstacles to effectively fulfilling their responsibilities.

Hussain and Ahmed (2018) The Panchayati Raj system and rural development are established institutions in India. The Panchayati Raj system serves as a significant mechanism for enhancing rural development. This constitutes a crucial aspect of India's democratic decentralization process, transferring authority from the federal government to rural regions. This is the sole means by which rural residents can access resources that facilitate political engagement, enhance political power, promote economic independence, and support full democratic participation. The Panchayati Raj system establishes a connection between rural areas and the federal government. This article examines rural development in Jammu and Kashmir under the Panchayati Raj system

and highlights the current challenges it faces. This research report is based on secondary sources. The secondary data is sourced from various materials, including research papers, newspapers from J&K, websites of the Election Commission of J&K, J&K Panchayati Raj, District Panchayat, as well as books, articles, journals, and magazines. The Panchayati Raj systems in India face comparable challenges in rural development; however, the research indicates that the system in Jammu and Kashmir is significantly more complex. Rural development in Jammu and Kashmir is stagnating, despite the potential for progress if the Panchayati Raj system were to operate effectively. The temporary Panchayati Raj system in Jammu and Kashmir is ineffective and contributes to disorder. The political, social, economic, and contentious conditions in Jammu and Kashmir are the fundamental causes of these challenges. The Panchayati Raj system and rural development in Jammu and Kashmir face numerous challenges, similar to those encountered across India.

Srivalli (2018) The participation of women in political spheres and decision-making bodies is essential for empowerment. The current priority for women's empowerment is their involvement in governance structures at all levels. Women's political empowerment is often understood as participation in governance or electoral processes, which is essential for ensuring that women have a voice in the policies affecting their lives. The political engagement of women in India has been overlooked since the nation's independence. The modifications enacted in the Panchayati Raj Institution are apparent in the political framework and decision-making procedures. Enhancing the socio-economic status of women requires the implementation of targeted initiatives and measures that empower them. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 established a minimum reservation of one-third for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions at all levels. In specific jurisdictions, this has been raised to 50% in recent years. Despite the rapid increase in women's participation, it remains inadequate. This study examines the political empowerment of women in India, focusing specifically on Panchayati Raj Institutions. This study examines the factors contributing to the low participation of women and provides recommendations for enhancing their involvement at the grassroots level.

Mandal (2018) This study aims to shed light on the contemporary phenomenon of women's empowerment. The objectives of this research are to shed light on the following topics: the evolution of women's education in India from its pre-colonial roots to the present day; different types of women's empowerment; gender-based violence against women; women's rights; the legal protections afforded to women by the Indian constitution; the part played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this movement; government initiatives and programs designed to empower women; the influence of education on this movement; and lastly, the ways in which feminist movements are shaping Indian society in the modern day. So, it's evident that education for women in Vedic-era Indian culture had a strong historical basis. This study shows that women's empowerment is about giving women more power in the social, economic, political, and legal spheres so that they can stand up for their rights and feel confident doing so. For a nation to grow holistically, it must first empower its women. The study also emphasizes the advantages provided by various national agencies, NGOs, etc., and the constitutional rights of women. Education for women must always be a priority if we want to see a return to women's empowerment. Women will face economic, social, and political instability as a direct outcome of their educational experiences. Through women's empowerment, Indian society is changing and progressing in the 21st century, according to this study.

Pawer (2018) The author of "E-Panchayat" highlights the importance of transparency in governance and the impact of information technology on the development of panchayats. The research findings indicate that the use of information technology in the operation of the panchayat system enables individuals to obtain greater benefits. The implementation of e-panchayat nationwide faces a significant obstacle due to the lack of adequate infrastructure at the village level. This encompasses the lack of power, inadequate access roads, and insufficient knowledge. The research recommends that the government implement measures to promote the execution of e-panchayat projects, including information dissemination, mindset alteration, process re-engineering, behavioural adjustments, training, and methodological improvements.

Ganie (2019) Panchayati Raj is fundamentally grounded in Indian tradition. Panchayati Raj institutions serve as legitimate democratic decentralized entities, providing

significant opportunities for rural populations to participate actively in developmental and democratic decision-making. This engagement promotes self-help, self-reliance, and self-dependence, while enhancing skills in local self-governance. Panchayati Raj institutions play a crucial role in the management of rural development schemes. These institutions have successfully facilitated the identification of legitimate beneficiaries to optimize the benefits of these programs. Numerous limitations, obstacles, and flaws contribute to the ineffectiveness of rural development schemes. This article analyzes various challenges, characteristics, and dimensions related to Panchayati Raj Institutions in the Shopian region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Ganie and Shukla (2019) The Panchayati Raj is a key grassroots institution in India's democratic system. Established in Jammu and Kashmir through the 1989 Act, following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1993, it faced challenges, particularly during the 2001 elections amid armed conflict. The 2011 elections showed better outcomes, yet women's participation in governance remains limited due to male dominance and cultural constraints. To address this, a 33% reservation for women was introduced in 2002, promoting broader representation. The 2011 elections highlighted improvements, with indicators such as village participation, training attendance, and independent expression showing progress. Despite these advances, only 246 women served as Sarpanches and Panches in Jammu division out of 23,248 elected members state-wide. Reserved seats have enabled women to engage more actively in governance, often exceeding the 33% quota, challenging stereotypes about their political capabilities. Their participation has fostered empowerment, confidence, and political knowledge. However, women still face significant challenges, with their involvement in political processes remaining inadequate. Addressing the gender gap is vital for societal progress, requiring systemic reforms, cultural shifts, and greater self-awareness among women to ensure their full inclusion in governance and development.

Mir (2020) Panchayati Raj, a system of rural self-governance, plays a crucial role in local development across most Indian states. Jammu and Kashmir has a unique history, governed by the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989. Following the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 and the reorganization of the state into the union territories of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, efforts to strengthen Panchayati Raj have

intensified. Despite these efforts, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) face significant structural and functional challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, ineffective grievance redressal, and outdated regulatory norms. While elections have boosted public engagement, the goal of establishing self-governing panchayats remains unfulfilled. The administration is actively working to bridge gaps between PRIs and the public, aiming for democratic decentralization and rural development. Addressing these challenges is vital for the system's continued growth and effectiveness.

Prasad and Thampi (2021) This article aims to examine the 2019 general elections and the subsequent by-elections in Kerala, India, to identify the evolving gender dynamics influencing perceptions of "desirability" and "approval" concerning female political candidates. This study aims to identify the coordinates of evolving gender dynamics that significantly influence women's political representation. This is achieved by analyzing the historical trajectory of women's participation in public politics within the state. This article identifies specific frameworks such as "honorary masculinity," "relaxed honorary masculinity," and "welfarist feminine altruism." These frameworks facilitated the entry of three generations of women politicians into public politics, allowing them to establish their own distinct roles. Interestingly, the framework of "welfarist feminine altruism," originally developed at the municipal level in the mid-1990s within the context of decentralization, is now being expanded to the state level. The analysis incorporates specific indicators of 'desirability' relevant to the existing caste and religious identity politics. Consequently, women politicians have been effectively marginalized within mainstream politics. This study examines intersectionality in women's political leadership, a critical aspect of contemporary analysis of women's political representation.

Cassan and Vandewalle (2021) Identity is a significant factor influencing economic behaviour. This study illustrates the importance of considering multiple identity dimensions in economic behaviour. Neglecting this aspect may lead policymakers to overlook significant and unforeseen consequences of economic policies, in contrast to existing literature, which typically focuses on a single identity dimension at a time. This study illustrates how a policy designed with respect to one identification dimension (gender) alters the distribution of its benefits across another dimension (caste), utilizing

the randomized nature of political reservations for women in India. We propose that gender norms differ across caste groups. This dissertation examines the importance of considering various identity dimensions in public policy formulation, specifically through the analysis of reservations for women in Indian municipal elections. In India, high castes generally impose stricter restrictions on women's mobility beyond the domestic sphere. The implementation of political reservation for women likely decreases the likelihood of higher caste members contesting and succeeding in elections. Consequently, gender quotas modify policies to address the needs of lower castes and women. A policy developed in relation to one dimension of identification, such as gender, also influences the distribution of advantages across another dimension, such as caste. This finding is significant and warrants further investigation into the unintended consequences of public policy, particularly due to the diversity of identity dimensions.

Ghosh (2022) This study examines the impact of women's political empowerment on financial inclusion in India, using survey data from over 100,000 participants. Findings reveal that women's political empowerment increases account activity by over 7%, though account ownership remains unchanged. User-friendly account features also boost activity by 0.5%. The study highlights that empowerment influences literacy rates, infrastructure, and account usage while addressing gender gaps. Key policy recommendations include promoting direct digital transactions to women's accounts for privacy, implementing consumer protection laws to reduce gender disparities in loans, and ensuring clear terms for financial products. Women are more likely to engage with financial services provided by female personnel, emphasizing the need for gender diversity in financial institutions. Collecting sex-disaggregated data and improving long-term gender-specific financial literacy and infrastructure are essential for advancing financial inclusion in India's diverse regions.

Chowdary (2022) Education is a powerful tool for empowering rural women, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, where educated women can significantly contribute to the state's development. Women's education is a transformative force for both societal and national progress. While the expansion of women's education was initially slow, it has recently gained momentum. According to the 2011 census, 56.43%

of the 5.9 million women globally were literate. However, women's education in Jammu and Kashmir still faces significant challenges, limiting its advancement. Education enhances women's status within households and society, making it a critical factor in their empowerment. The 2011 census also reported a rural female literacy rate of 53.36% in Jammu and Kashmir, compared to the overall rural literacy rate of 64.97%. This study examines the current state of women's education, including the barriers, opportunities, and factors affecting female literacy rates and sex ratios in the region. Despite their substantial contributions to society, rural women face challenges such as domestic abuse, militancy, and familial pressures, which hinder their educational progress. With 72.79% of Jammu and Kashmir's population residing in rural areas, the low literacy rate among rural women highlights the need for targeted interventions. Efforts should include awareness campaigns on the benefits of education, financial support for girls' families through scholarships and free education, and improved healthcare and other incentives. Recruiting more female educators and providing special accommodations for volunteers in remote areas are also essential steps. To further boost literacy rates, particularly among women, the state must invest in additional educational facilities and resources.

Ahmed and Chowdhary (2022) This study also focus on the current state of education for indigenous women and their societal roles. Tribal women faced numerous challenges beyond their educational pathways, leading to various explanations for the low educational attainment among this group. Education is essential for the progress of any civilization. Parental pressure often leads to the early marriage of many indigenous females, which subsequently limits their opportunities for further education. Women serve as the initial educators of children, and education constitutes a fundamental element in the prosperity of any nation. Currently, the roles of women are considered in all aspects of life. This research aims to identify the challenges faced by tribal women in their educational endeavours and to examine their societal roles. This study employs both primary and secondary data and adopts a qualitative approach. Tribal women play a crucial role in Indian society and education. The discussion clearly illustrates the significance of tribal women in Indian culture, as they persist in their roles despite numerous challenges. Barriers to women's education include economic factors as well

as cultural influences, which are often based on segregation and gender stereotypes. Women are more likely to participate in domestic programs due to stereotypes and gender profiling. In higher education, women tend to select fields in the arts and education rather than in science and technology. Programs provided by non-formal education and training providers generally focus on women's domestic responsibilities rather than their productive roles. Furthermore, families remove girls from school to assist with household responsibilities or for other socially driven normative reasons, resulting in lower educational opportunities for girls compared to boys. Many indigenous women in rural areas have likely missed educational opportunities; therefore, it is essential to design and implement skill-training programs to empower them. The capacity to assume political leadership may facilitate the attainment of social change or economic independence.

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Chapter-3

Research Methodology

A research methodology is a structured and systematic approach used to conduct a research study. It serves as the overall strategy that outlines how the research will be carried out and identifies the methods and techniques to be used. Sociologists commonly utilize social research as a scientific tool to gain a comprehensive understanding of human behavior and the relationships individuals maintain within society. Research is "a systematized effort to gain new knowledge." In the present study on women's political participation, a systematic approach is employed to examine and understand women's attitudes and behaviors toward political engagement (Redman and Mory, 1952). This section presents an overview of the research methodology adopted for the study on Women Empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The chapter offers a concise analysis of the research objectives, the nature and scope of the study, the geographical area covered, the universe and sampling plan, the tools used for data collection, and how the study addressed its limitations.

Key terms commonly used in this context include research methodology, research methods, and research techniques. Research methodology refers to the scientific and systematic process of investigating a research problem. It encompasses both the methods used for data collection and the logical reasoning behind their selection and application.

Essentially, research methodology answers critical questions such as:

- What must be done?
- Why should it be done?
- How should it be done?
- What type of data is required?
- Which tools and techniques will be used to gather data?
- How will the data be analyzed?
- How will conclusions be drawn?

In this study, data was collected through various means, including documents, questionnaires, and observations. A descriptive research method as well as exploratory

methods were adopted, and the percentage method was used to analyze the responses of the participants. Descriptive studies, as the term implies, aim to accurately depict the characteristics of a particular group or community (Das, 2005). In this study, a descriptive research design has been employed to portray the characteristics of women respondents in Rajouri. The primary objective is to gather detailed information about their demographic profile, including educational qualifications, occupation, marital status, religion, caste, community, place of origin, family structure, number of siblings, educational background of family members, and monthly household income. In addition to demographic data, the study explores the political background of the respondents, including any political involvement of their family members. It also examines their exposure to mass media and social media. Overall, this descriptive approach provides insight into the respondents' backgrounds, which helps in understanding their level of political awareness and empowerment. Common methods used in exploratory research include literature reviews, case studies, field observations, focus group discussions, and interviews. These tools help in generating postulates and analyzing them within the framework of selected constructs related to the identified issues.

To meet the objectives, a research study was designed to generate data on the subject using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches seek to observe, gather, and analyze data for exploration. The research employs both historical and comparative methodologies to provide a holistic approach. An empirical investigation using an interview schedule will augment the theoretical understanding. Respondents must be chosen by using a multi-stage random sampling methodology. Multi-stage sampling methodology should be employed to ascertain the target population.

Area of Study

The district Rajouri is located in India's north and northwest, as well as the south-western section of the Jammu-Kashmir union territory, and is around 150 kilometres from downtown Jammu city. It is situated in the foothills of the Pir-Panjal range, between 32°58' and 33°35' north latitude and 70°00' to 74°40' east longitude. Its altitude ranges from 500 to 4535 meters above mean sea level. The district is flanked to the east by the Reasi district, to the southeast by the Jammu district, to the north by

the Poonch district, and to the west by the Line of Control (LoC). The district has a lengthy border with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, stretching from Sunderbani to Bhimbergali. The district covers 2630 square kilometres (Ministry of MSME, Government of India). The district's greatest length from east to west is around 444 kilometres, and from north to south it is 112 kilometres. Rajouri, originally known as Rajapuri, gave the district its name. On September 22, 1967, the Jammu and Kashmir Government separated the Poonch district into Rajouri and Poonch to expedite growth and enhance control of the area's economic operations, including agriculture and other infrastructure. Rajouri District was once part of Poonch District. Rajouri officially became a district on January 1, 1968. Rajouri, often known as the "land of kings," was historically prominent in terms of politics, society, and economics. Panchal Desa was the name of a country from the Mahabharata. Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese explorer, narrates his journey to Rajouri, then known as Rajapuri, "the land of kings," in the year 632 AD. In his travelogue, he described it as a territory inside the Kashmiri dominion. Throughout the Buddhist period, it was part of the Gandhar domain (Afghanistan, Gandhar, and Tashkent), and it eventually became a portion of Darabhisanga, a mountainous area extending from Poonch to Kashmir. Rajouri was included in the newly established Poonch-Rajouri District upon independence. Rajouri was designated as a new district on January 1, 1968.

Physical Profile

The topography of Rajouri district resembles neighbouring areas like Poonch and Reasi, featuring a mix of hills, mountains, and valleys with varying slopes. The northern region is mountainous, while the southern area comprises plains and valleys. Elevation increases from south to north, with rugged terrain dominated by the Pir Panjal Range to the north and northeast and the Kali Dhar Range to the south, separating the district from the Kashmir Valley. Key summits include Pir Panjal, Dera Gali, and Rupri Pass, with elevations ranging from 608 meters in Nowshera and Kalakote to 1,368 meters in Rajouri and Budhal tehsils. The district is drained by perennial rivers and seasonal streams, which dry up in summer but cause flash floods during the monsoon, carrying rocks, sand, and silt. Major rivers include the Manawar Tawi and Ans River, both part of the Chenab basin. The Manawar Tawi drains 2,060 square kilometers, with its flow

increasing during monsoons and snowmelt. The Ans River, originating from the Pir Panjal Range, is fed by tributaries like Chuni Perai and Gulabgarh streams before merging with the Chenab near Arnas, where it reaches a width of 1,700 meters. These rivers and their tributaries support the region by providing water for various uses.
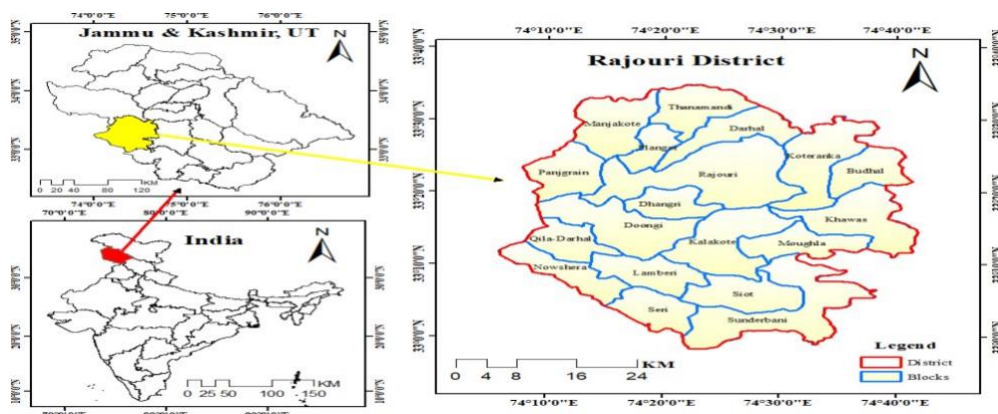
Source: District Statistical Handbook of Rajouri,2018

Fig-3: -Showing map of District Rajouri

Climate significantly influences the physical and social environment, impacting people, plants, animals, and economic activities. Key climate components include precipitation, temperature, air circulation, humidity, and atmospheric pressure. In regions like the Rajouri district, climate varies due to elevation, with subtropical conditions in the south and temperate climates in the northern hills. Rainfall averages 957.1 mm annually, with the southwest monsoon (June–September) contributing 69% of the total. The area also experiences snowfall in winter. Temperature varies significantly across the district due to topography, with southern areas being warmer. January is the coldest month, with temperatures ranging from 7°C to 18°C, while June is the hottest, reaching 38°C. Soil types include alluvial, forest, and mountain soils, each shaped by the region's climate, vegetation, and geology. These soils support agriculture and natural vegetation, which is vital for ecological balance, providing resources and preventing erosion. The district hosts diverse wildlife, including leopards, bears, and various bird species, although urbanization and human activity have reduced populations.

Rajouri District, Administrative Divisions/Blocks

Any section of a nation that is demarcated for administrative reasons is called an administrative division, entity, unit, or area; other names for these divisions include subnational entity, constituent unit, and country subdivision. The huge land area of India is made up of twenty-seven states and eight union territories. Districts, which are further split into sub-districts (tehsils) and blocks, provide for the efficient and successful administration of these union territories and states. For the sake of growth and planning at the most fundamental level, the entire nation is therefore partitioned into smaller administrative entities. In metropolitan regions, towns and villages serve as the principal administrative entities at the lowest level.

There were 7 Tehsils and nine blocks, 312 Panchayats, and 385 villages in the Rajouri district, including one Municipal town in District Rajouri (Census, 2011). The population density of villages and cities varies greatly across diverse geographical settings, land and water availability, and other factors. Rajouri District in Jammu and Kashmir has undergone administrative restructuring since the 2011 Census. The government of Jammu and Kashmir through a Cabinet decision in 2014 approved the creation 135 new tehsils and 46 new sub-divisions. The district now contains 13 Tehsils, 19 Blocks, 312 Panchayats, 386 villages. Beripattan, Darhal, Kalakote, Khwaas, Koteranka, Manjakote, Nowshera, Qila Darhal, Rajouri, Siot, Sunderbani, Teryath, and Thannamandi are the thirteen tehsils that make up the Rajouri district. Along with the five cities that make up the Municipal Corporation—Rajouri, Thanamandi, Kalakote, Nowshera, and Sunderbani—there are nineteen development blocks: Budhal, Budhal New, Darhal, Dhangri, Doongi, Kalakote, Khawas, Lamberi, Manjakote, Moughla, and

Nowshera. Rajouri, Darhal, Kalakote, and Nowshera are the four assembly seats that make up the district for political representation.
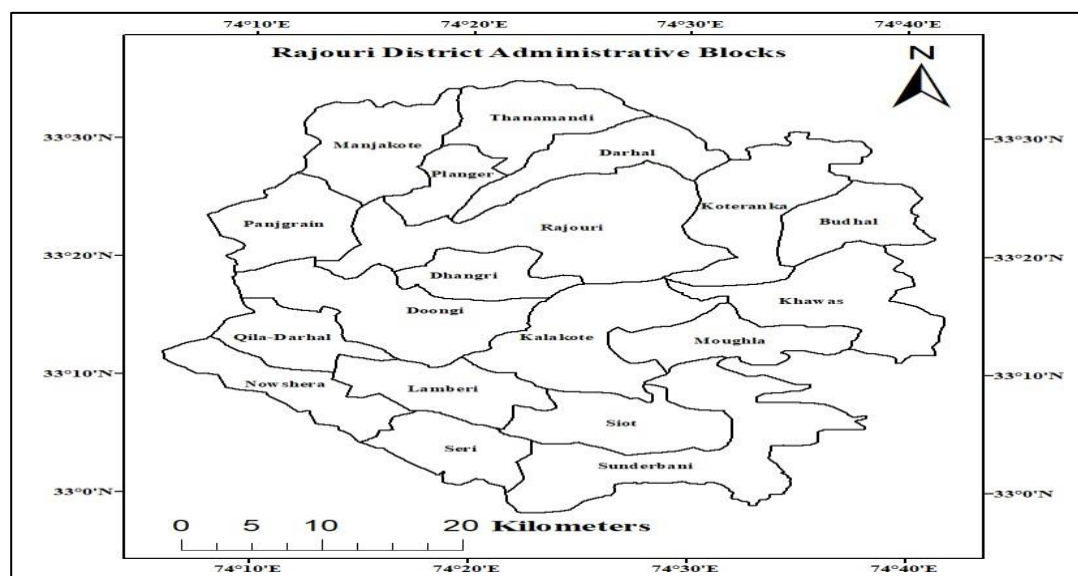
Fig-3.1: -Shows administrative Blocks of District Rajouri

Ethnic Composition

The social-political idea of ethnicity is the one that is utilized the most commonly (Ford & Kelly, 2005). This term encompasses shared origin, shared language, and similar cultural practices. The word "ethnic" is derived from the Greek word "ethos," and can be translated as "tribe" or "race". However, the term "ethnic group" has become more closely associated with "ethos" or "custom" in recent years. This is because custom is now analyzed and understood in terms of the laws of social learning and social inheritance, in contrast to the earlier conception of "biological and genetic determination of cultural pattern. "A social group that, within a wider social system, claims or is awarded a geographic position in terms of ethnic qualities that it shows or is supposed to exhibit is referred to as an ethnic group (Hussain, 1985)". The phrase "ethnic group" is synonymous with "ethnic group". People who speak Pahari and Gujjar are the most prominent ethnic groupings in the district. Other members of the Pahari-speaking community include Hindus and Muslims. Gujjars are a large ethnic community in the district, and their culture is distinguished by several distinctive characteristics that are unique to them. The raising of cattle, goats, and sheep is their primary occupation source. According to the occupations that they

engage in, the Gujjars may be classified into two primary sects. (i) Bakarwals who engage in transhumance and move their cattle (herds) between the upper reaches and lowland regions throughout the summer and winter seasons of a year, respectively; and (ii) Bakarwals who are sedentary, semi-transhumance, and transhumance individuals. The majority of Gujjars live in villages, and their primary means of subsistence is the raising of buffaloes on tiny plots of land for cultivation.

Profile of the Population

The population of the district is not distributed evenly over the district's space, and this is true across all demographic characteristics. When it comes to defining the population density and dispersion in any particular location or region, the topography, terrain, drainage, soil, natural vegetation, climate (temperature and precipitation), mineral resources, and accessibility are all important aspects that have played a considerable impact.

Distribution and Density of Population

Population distribution refers to how individuals are spread across their habitat, offering a clearer understanding of their dispersion compared to population density. Geographical distribution is thus more significant than density for analyzing populations within a specific area. Table 1 illustrates block-wise population distribution and density, commonly measured as crude or arithmetic density, defined as the number of people per square kilometer. This method effectively highlights variations in population spread. Crude density, the simplest and most commonly used measure, is particularly useful for smaller land units such as districts and blocks (Hussain, 2000). According to the 2011 census, the average population density in Rajouri district is 244 people per square kilometer. Rajouri block has the highest density at 498 people per square kilometer, while Doongi block has the lowest at 108 people per square kilometer.

Out of 19 blocks, 10 have below-average density: Doongi (108), Kalakote (210), Khawas (172), Lamberi (154), Moughla (171), Nowshera (232), Qila-Darhal (120), Seri (147), Siot (241), and Sunderbani (180). The remaining nine blocks exceed the district average: Budhal (466), Darhal (362), Dhangri (316), Koteranka (359), Manjakote (305), Panjgrain (362), Palanger (289), Rajouri (498), and Thanamandi (491).

S. No.	Blocks	Total Population	Area in km^2	Density
1	Budhal	24195	51.93	466
2	Darhal	36227	100.1	362
3	Dhangri	31879	100.77	316
4	Doongi	31115	288.24	108
5	Kalakote	41738	198.85	210
6	Khawas	35212	204.38	172
7	Koteranka	63643	177.16	359
8	Lamberi	12897	84.01	154
9	Manjakote	35141	115.24	305
10	Moughla	25837	151.20	171
11	Nowshera	40772	175.49	232
12	Panjgrain	13543	37.42	362
13	Planger	25985	89.75	289
14	Qila Darhal	18615	154.77	120
15	Rajouri	80910	162.45	498
16	Seri	15564	105.55	147
17	Siot	21240	88.02	241
18	Sunderbani	46114	256.60	180
19	Thannamandi	41788	85.03	491
District Rajouri		642415	2626.96	244

Table-3: - Shows Block-wise distribution of the population as well as the density of the population

Growth of Population

Population growth denotes an augmentation in the number of persons within a certain region over a specified duration. The primary factors influencing population growth or change are birth rates, death rates, and migration. The primary factors influencing population increase in a particular area or region are fertility and immigration. These two components augment the population density of a particular area or region. The primary distinction between the two elements of population increase, migration and

natality, is that migration only influences the population of a particular place, whereas natality impacts both the population of the specific location in which it happens and the world population. Table 2 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the Rajouri district. The population growth rate from 2001 to 2011 ranges from a minimum of 23.46 percent in Darhal to a maximum of 46.89 percent in Kalakote tehsil. The tehsil of Nowshera has registered the greatest growth rate at 43.62 percent, second only to the Kalakote tehsil. The district's overall population growth rate from 2001 to 2011 is 32.93 percent.

S. No.	Tehsils	Total Population			Growth in Percentage
		2001	2011	Variation	
1	Rajouri	144145	189067	44922	31.16
2	Thanamandi	52252	67773	15521	29.70
3	Darhal	29342	36227	6884	23.46
4	Budhal	93844	123050	29206	31.12
5	Kalakote	49467	72667	23200	46.89
6	Nowshera	62257	89416	27159	43.62
7	Sunderbani	51977	64215	12238	23.15
District's total		483284	642415	159131	32.93

Source: District Statistical Handbook of Rajouri, 2018.

Table 3.1: - Shows Demographic characteristics of the Rajouri district

Sex ratio

The sex ratio is typically expressed as a ratio of females per 1000 males.; but, in certain nations, it is articulated as the number of males per 100 females, serving as a significant indicator of women's societal position. Sexual discrepancy exists in the majority of the globe. The female population is decreasing, particularly in highly populated areas such as China and India. This condition is particularly widespread in Asian countries. Numerous factors contribute to sex imbalance in an area, including biological, political, socio-economic, and demographic issues, among others. The decreasing tendency of the female population may have several socio-political and demographic repercussions. A segment of the male

demographic will remain unmarried, leading to intensified rivalry for partners (Gautam et al., 2015). In Jammu and Kashmir, ladies, particularly Muslim females, are usually marginalized. This cultural prejudice is especially pronounced among the rural populace and the transhumant groups, including the Gujjars and Bakarwals (Husain, 2000). There are considerable disparities in the spatial distribution of sex ratios at various levels. The district's population is 642,415, consisting of 345,351 men and 297,064 females. The sex ratio of the district is 860, which is lower than the state ratio of 889 and the district ratio of 878 according to the 2001 census. The district had the lowest ratio of girls to men with 878 per 1000 males in the 2011 Census.

Census Year	Total	Rural	Urban
1901	893	893	NA
1911	900	901	825
1921	909	910	856
1931	900	902	767
1941	922	930	536
1951	911	913	791
1961	900	902	833
1971	900	903	840
1981	906	911	822
1991	NA	NA	NA
2001	878	890	736
2011	860	899	512

Source: District Statistical Handbook of Rajouri, 2018.

Table 3.2: - Shows Demographic characteristics of the Rajouri district

Violence against Women

Violence against women is a serious violation of human rights. This study examines the geographical distribution of violence against women in Jammu & Kashmir, India, a region with unique physical, socio-cultural, economic, and political characteristics. The area is marked by diversity in race, caste, creed, ethnicity, religion, and traditions, which influence moral and behavioural attitudes

at both interpersonal and community levels.

Women in Kashmir face violence in various forms—domestic, public, and politically motivated—stemming from entrenched social and cultural issues. These include marital discord, interference by in-laws, dowry demands, and discriminatory attitudes toward the birth of a girl child, contributing to the rise in domestic violence. Beyond the home, women are vulnerable to molestation, harassment, eve-teasing, kidnapping, rape, and trafficking. According to the Jammu & Kashmir Police, women are often treated as inferior to men, a reality that persists even for those who are financially independent and educated. Social norms also impose restrictions on women's mobility and education in the state (Sarwer, 2017).

The region's political instability, rooted in the partition of India in 1947, has further exacerbated the challenges faced by women, particularly in the Kashmir Valley, a predominantly Muslim area deeply affected by the prolonged conflict between India and Pakistan. There are documented cases of mass rapes and sexual harassment perpetrated by both security forces and insurgents, especially in rural areas, with accusations exchanged between opposing sides (Asia Watch & Physicians for Human Rights, 1993). The loss of family members due to conflict also contributes to women's psychological trauma and increases their burdens (Katherine et al., 2015). Recent data on domestic violence in the Rajouri district is limited. However, a 2022 report highlighted a tragic incident involving Seema Devi from Nowshera, Rajouri, who reportedly died by suicide due to domestic abuse, shedding light on the persistent issue of domestic violence in the region (Precious Kashmir, 2022). According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-20, 9.6% of women aged 18-49 in Jammu and Kashmir have experienced domestic violence, with a higher prevalence in rural areas (Precious Kashmir, 2022). While specific statistics for the Rajouri district remain unavailable, reports indicate a rising trend of domestic violence in its rural areas (The Tribune, 2012). This study assesses various forms of violence against women through spatial and temporal analyses, considering the scale and nature of male aggression. Utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS), it identifies hotspots

where women face heightened risks, both inside and outside their homes. By highlighting previously overlooked areas of concern, the study provides actionable insights to address and mitigate violence against women. The lack of research on this issue in the region underscores the importance of this study, which can inform future research and interventions targeting the subjugation and discrimination of women in a region marked by prolonged human suffering.

Gujjar Disparity

The Gujjar community in Rajouri district, part of the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory, has historically faced socio-economic and political disparities. As a Scheduled Tribe (ST) under the Indian Constitution, Gujjars have legal recognition and certain reserved rights, yet they continue to struggle with marginalization in several areas. Predominantly residing in rural and hilly areas, the Gujjars in Rajouri often lack access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This is compounded by their reliance on traditional occupations like cattle rearing and agriculture, which are becoming less sustainable due to changing socio-economic conditions and inadequate government support (Bhat, 2019). The political representation of Gujjars in Rajouri is also limited, despite their significant population in the district. While they are beneficiaries of reservation policies in education and government jobs, the implementation of these policies is often inconsistent. Additionally, the geographical remoteness of their settlements and limited infrastructure further isolate the community, restricting their participation in mainstream economic and political activities (Rahi, 2020). Education remains a critical challenge, as many Gujjar children in the district drop out of school due to economic constraints, cultural barriers, and the lack of educational facilities in remote areas. Moreover, healthcare access is limited, with many Gujjar families unable to afford or physically access medical services. Such disparities perpetuate a cycle of poverty and exclusion, hindering the community's development (Sharma, 2018). Efforts to address these issues have been made through government schemes and non-governmental organizations. However, the effective implementation of policies and programs targeting the Gujjar community in Rajouri requires a more inclusive and participatory approach to reduce

disparities and promote their socio-economic development.

Literacy Rate

According to the Indian census, a person is considered literate if they are seven years old or older and can read and write in any language with at least some level of understanding. A person is deemed to be illiterate if they are just able to read but cannot write. Except for children who can read and write, all children under the age of six are regarded to be illiterate, regardless of whether or not they attend school. It was determined by the census that was conducted in 2011 that 364109 persons in the district were literate. This represents 68.17 % of the total population of the district. In the list of districts that comprised the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, Rajouri district holds the eighth spot. Between the years 2001 and 2011, there was a 10.18 % rise in the percentage of literate people, which was 57.99 % in 2001. According to the census completed in 2011, the literacy rates for males were 78.13 %, while the literacy rates for females were 56.57 %. According to the census completed in 2001, 69.76 % of males and 44.51% of females were literate. This indicates that the percentage of literate males and females rose by 8.37 percent and 12.06 percent, respectively, over the decade that is being considered. According to the breakdown of the literacy rate between rural and urban regions, the urban sector of the district has a much greater percentage (90.38) than rural areas, which have a percentage of 66.0 percent. According to the District Statistical Handbook for Rajouri and 2018-19, the proportions that correspond to the rural and urban regions of the state are 63.18 percent and 77.12 %, respectively.

Economy Based on Agriculture

Agriculture serves as the primary economic activity in the Rajouri district. Similarly, for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, agriculture and domestication of cattle serve as the primary economic means of subsistence. It is estimated that over 80% of the population of the district is reliant, on agriculture and allied activities related to it. No manufacturing facilities can be found in the area. A primary source of revenue is cattle farming. The economic situations of the majority of people are often unsatisfactory. The district has a total area of 6.26 lac acres, of which 1.36 lac acres are cultivable and only 0.12 lac acres are irrigated.

Use Pattern of the Land

An investigation into the utilization of land is of the utmost significance in order to comprehend the growth of agriculture and the economics that is related with it in the Rajouri area. The pattern of land usage is depicted in the table provided.

S. No.	Categories	Area sq. kms
1	Net Sown Area	1269.29
2	Area sown more than once	564.00
3	Area under Fruit Plantation	134.61
4	Area put to Non-Agricultural use	90.69
5	Area under Forests	1267.00

Source: District Statistical Handbook of Rajouri, 2018

Table-3.3: - Shows Demographic characteristics of the Rajouri district

Research Design: Research design refers to the structured framework of methods and techniques that a researcher adopts to systematically investigate a chosen problem. It serves to guide the researcher in selecting appropriate methods to conduct the study efficiently and accurately, while minimizing potential errors throughout the processes of operationalizing concepts, measuring variables, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions (Polit & Hungler, 1995). A research design refers to the structured arrangement of conditions for data collection and analysis, aiming to balance relevance to the research objectives with efficiency in execution (Jahoda and Cook, 1959). A research design as a comprehensive plan, structure, and strategy of investigation, formulated to address specific research questions and problems. It serves as a complete blueprint or program for conducting the research (Kerlinger, 1986).

Sampling Design: In this study on the district of Rajouri, the researcher provides a comprehensive description of the study universe, sample, sample size estimation, sample selection process, and the rationale behind these decisions. The sampling design section of the research methodology outlines how study participants are defined, the eligibility criteria for inclusion, the number of participants or sample size, and the process for selecting study participants, along with the reasoning behind the size and

selection procedures. The primary objective of this subsection is to inform readers about the logical and methodological decisions made regarding the sample selection process.

Defining the Study Universe: In this study, the researcher has defined the study universe as "all elected women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir, India." The sample is defined as "elected women representatives in village panchayat, block panchayat, district panchayat, and municipality."

Study Population and Sample: The study population or sample is defined as "women elected representatives currently holding political office in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir." The study sample refers to "women elected as public representatives in village Panchayat, block Panchayat, or district panchayat in Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir."

Sampling Methodology: The Sampling methodology that has been used is multi-stage sampling. Multi-stage sampling involves selecting a sample in two or more stages. In this sampling all the stages involve Simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is defined as one in which each element of the population has an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample.

Sampling Techniques of Data Collection:

The scope of the current study includes all the women who were elected in Rajouri districts. The sample for this study has been obtained from the elected Panchayat members of the Rajouri district. Simple Random Sampling technique is used for data collection.

Tools of Data Collection

This research is empirical and relies on both primary and secondary data. The primary data were gathered via fieldwork. A comprehensive questionnaire has been developed as the primary research tool. The survey comprises closed-ended and open-ended questions. A structured interview was conducted using an interview schedule to gather primary data. When an investigator distributes a questionnaire during an interview, it is referred to as a schedule (or interview schedule). The distinction between an interview and an interview schedule lies in the former being a specialized conversational method characterized by much improvisation. In the latter scenario, the investigator reads the

pre-formulated questions and documents the replies. The interview schedule is a crucial instrument that guarantees a high response rate and comprehensive responses to all inquiries. The respondent's surroundings are likewise regulated. This study employed interview schedules for elected women to fulfil the research goals. Prior to finalizing the interview schedule, a pilot study was conducted to uncover problems in its design. In addition to the questionnaire, the observational approach is employed to enhance the information provided by respondents when completing the surveys. The observational approach was utilized to gather essential information on sociocultural and political activities. The researcher has consulted all the women-elected representatives and collected data. Respondents must be chosen from the blocks utilizing the multi-stage random sampling technique. Multi-stage sampling methodology should be employed to determine the target demographics. The Secondary data were sourced from official documents, specifically through the official web portals of the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India, District and Block Development Offices, and village Panchayat Offices. Additionally, pertinent information has been sourced from the Economic Survey of the Government of India, the Statistics from the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, numerous studies and reports conducted by researchers in the domain, Yearly Reports from the Department of Rural Development, reports from various rural development organizations, as well as an array of books, articles, journals, government publications, newspapers, research papers, and other documents pertinent to the research topic.

Tools of Data Analysis

Numerous methodologies exist for data analysis. The current study involved statistical tools for analysis and interpretation. Data gathered from questionnaires on several problems have been organized into tables and pie charts using an Excel spreadsheet. A straightforward percentage strategy has been utilized to assess the data organized under several table headings. The study of data has been interpreted based on the respondent's answers.

Pilot Study

The pilot research used a multi-stage sampling method to investigate women's empowerment in rural regions via Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Rajouri District.

The aim of the pilot study was to assess the research instruments, specifically the questionnaire, concerning their clarity, applicability, and effectiveness in collecting the requisite data on the political and socio-economic dynamics of women serving as elected representatives in village panchayats. The initial pilot study has been executed across all development and revenue blocks of Rajouri District in the Union Territory, utilizing data gathered from various sources, including Block Development Officers at the block level, Panchayat Secretaries at the Panchayat level, and Sarpanches and Panches from their respective panchayats and villages. In addition, other reference books and other information sources were utilized during the pilot research. The pilot study's findings indicate that all Panchayats in the Rajouri district were operational and stayed active, with a significant number of women participating in the Panchayat system. Furthermore, the pilot research has revealed indicators that women are participating in Panchayat meetings, demonstrating an understanding of Panchayats, and engaging in the decision-making process. The research examined these. A pilot experiment serves as a preliminary assessment for comprehensive research to verify the adequacy of all operational parameters. A pilot study encompasses several experimental kinds, but its primary objective is to duplicate the full-size experiment on a reduced scale. This method ensures geographic and alphabetical variety in your sample, guaranteeing a comprehensive representation of the district's rural scenery and socio-economic situations. This sampling method facilitates a comprehensive and geographically equitable evaluation of women's empowerment via PRIs in Rajouri, establishing a robust basis for understanding the efficacy of PRIs in varied rural contexts.

A pilot study is frequently employed to evaluate the design of the comprehensive investigation. The design can subsequently be modified over time. This may be advantageous: if any elements are lacking in the pilot research, they may be incorporated into the experiment, hence reducing the likelihood of necessitating a repeat of the full-scale (and more costly) trial. In sociological applications, pilot trials are frequently employed to market the product and furnish quantitative evidence of the system's potential for success on a broader scale. Pilot experiments are employed to minimize expenses, as they are significantly more economical than the complete system. In the absence of sufficient justification for comprehensive applications, a pilot study can often furnish this evidence. In sociology, a pilot study refers to preliminary

research conducted on a small scale before the major study. This mitigates the occurrence of mistakes in the primary study. The subsequent phase in this research necessitates the identification of reference groups, as well as the agents and carriers of change. This research included both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources comprised surveys and structured interviews. It also encompassed empirical research in its essence. The pilot research was executed in the district Rajouri. Data was gathered with consideration for the representation of all age demographics, economic brackets, educational attainment, religious affiliations, occupations, and genders. It also encompassed secondary materials derived from official and non-governmental papers, documents, books, magazine articles, and journals pertinent to the topic. The pilot research had a sample size of 50 participants. A timetable for interviews was established for data gathering.

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	10	20
31-40	12	24
41-50	18	36
51-60	7	14
61 and above	3	6
TOTAL	50	100. 00

Table-3.4: -Shows age of the Respondents chosen for Pilot Study

During pilot research in Rajouri District regarding the role and developmental activities of women in the Panchayats, we initially sought to ascertain the age demographics of our respondents. Upon collecting and evaluating the data, we determined that 10 respondents belonged to the age range of 21-30, followed by another 12 respondents in the age category of 31-40. Likewise, 18 respondents belong to the age category of 41-50, and 7 respondents belong to the age group of 51-60. Finally, there were 3 responses in the age category of 61 and above.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
General	24	48
Schedule Tribe	25	50
Schedule Caste	0	0

Other Backward classes	0	0
RBA	1	2
Total	50	100.00

Table-3.5: -Shows category of the Respondents chosen for Pilot Study

The respondents were inquired about their classification, specifically whether they identified as General category, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and others. It was observed that the majority of the women, 25 out of 50, belonged to the Scheduled Tribe. However, 24 respondents were found to be from the General Category, and 1 was from the OBC category.

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	35	70
Unmarried	15	30
Widow	0	0
Divorcee	0	0
Total	50	100.00

Table-3.6: -Shows marital status of the Respondents chosen for Pilot Study

The study's findings indicate that 70 percent of respondents were married, whilst 30 percent were unmarried. Marital status affects an individual's emotional security and insecurity to a certain degree. Individuals in a happy marriage tend to be free of anxiety, calm, industrious, and driven to improve the quality of life for their families. Individuals dissatisfied with their marriage can exhibit irritability, critical behaviour, and a lack of dedication to their work. They exhibit emotional instability, tend to ruminate, and experience anxiety. Unmarried individuals, particularly young women, often struggle to channel their desires for the opposite sex. For an appropriate husband, provided their vitality and youth remain intact. Marriage is the key means to achieving a fulfilling life and uncovering the essence of existence.

Family Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployed	22	44
Labourer	2	4

Agriculture	24	48
Business	0	0
Politician	1	2
Social Worker	1	2
Total	50	100.00

Table-3.7: - Shows family occupation of the Respondents chosen for Pilot Study

The survey revealed that the majority of respondents were involved in agricultural occupations, 24, while 22 respondents were jobless in the Rajouri district. Of 50 respondents, 02 were a labourer, 01 were a politician, and the remainder were social workers. Consequently, the study as mentioned above demonstrates that a significant portion of the population relies on agricultural resources.

Sample Selection: Goode and Hatt, 1952, a sample are essentially a smaller representation of a larger population. Similarly, Young, 1960 describes a statistical sample as a miniature reflection or cross-section of the entire group from which it is drawn. The total group from which a sample is selected is referred to as the "population" or "universe." The researcher first created a sampling frame comprising a list of all elected female representatives at Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir, utilizing the official web portals links of the Ministry of Panchayat Raj Affairs. The researcher interviewed 232 elected women members from Panchayat, Block Panchayat, and District Panchayat in the Rajouri district, which has a population of 64,2415 according to the 2011 Census. The district has 13 Tehsils namely Beripattan, Darhal, Kalakote, khawas, Koteranka, Manjakote, Nowshera, Qila Darhal, Rajouri, Siot, Sunderbani, Teeryath Thannamandi out of which 4 tehsils were selected namely Koteranka, Rajouri, Sunderbani, and Thannamandi having 386 villages along with the four cities that make up the Municipal Corporation—Rajouri, Thanamandi, Nowshera, and Sunderbani. The district has 19 rural development blocks namely Budhal, Darhal, Dhangri, Doongi, Kalakote, Khwas, Lamberi, Manjakote, Moghla, Nowshera, Panjgrain, Plangarh, Rajnagar, Rajouri, Seri, Siot, Thannamandi, Koteranka, Sunderbani out of which 8 blocks were chosen Plangarh, Thannamandi, Siot, Sunderbani, Dhangri, Rajouri, Budhal, and Koteranka. After blocks, panchayats/ villages are selected. In designated PRIs, the researcher catalogued all elected female

representatives and spoke with them via PRI organizations. All contacted elected female members were apprised of the study's goal and objectives. All selected female participants have guaranteed the confidentiality of the information provided and its meticulous usage just for the researcher's dissertation objectives. All willing women were approached for interviews until a sample size of around 232 was achieved. Multi-stage sampling involves selecting samples through multiple levels or stages, starting with larger units (e.g., districts or tehsils) and narrowing down to smaller units (e.g., villages or households). The multi-stage sampling has been done in the following stages:

Division of the population (Stage 1)

Out of the twenty districts of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, ten in the Jammu region and ten in the Kashmir region, Rajouri district was purposively selected. This choice was deliberate, as Rajouri is characterized by socio-cultural diversity, geographical distinctiveness, and a vibrant functioning of PRIs, making it a particularly suitable setting for examining women's empowerment and participation at the grassroots level.

Selection of Tehsils (Stage 2)

Within Rajouri, four tehsils—Koteranka, Rajouri, Sunderbani, and Thannamandi were selected. To ensure fairness and avoid bias, a simple random sampling method was used, giving each tehsil an equal chance of being chosen. This step helped strengthen the representativeness of the study by including areas with varied socio-political contexts.

Step 3 Selection of blocks within each Tehsil (Stage 3)

Since each of the selected tehsils comprises two blocks, eight blocks in total were included in the sample: Thannamandi, Plangarh, Siot, Sunderbani, Dhangri, Rajouri, Koteranka (Budhal Old), and Budhal New. Covering blocks from across the district allowed the study to reflect the administrative and socio-political diversity of Rajouri.

Step 4 Panchayat/ Village Selection (stage 4)

At the grassroots level, 50 percent of the Panchayats/Villages within each selected block were systematically chosen. From these Panchayats, elected women representatives (EWRs) were identified as respondents. This ensured that the voices of

women leaders from both central and peripheral Panchayats were represented in the study.

Sampling Technique of Rajouri District

The following table provides the details of the data collected:

District	Tehsil Selected	Block Selected	Sample Collected (BDCs)	Panchayat or village selected	Sample Collected (Sarpanches, Panches)
Rajouri	Thannamandi	Plangarh	1	Badakhana	3
				Bathian	3
				Dodasan Remote	3
				Khablan B	3
				Lah	3
				Nerojal	2
				Saaj 1	3
				Saim samith	2
		Thannamandi	1	Alal	3
				Baryoon Dara	3
				Hasplote Proper	3
				Kala Ban A	2
				Mangota A	3
				Manyal Lower	3
				Panghai Lower	2
				Rajdhani A	3
				Shahdara B	3
				Tota mohra	3
				Bakhar	3

Sunderbani	Siot			Chamm A	2
				Dharamsal	3
				Marcholla	3
				Siot Lower	3
				Thanda Pani	3
	Sunderbani			Bambliya	3
				Devak	3
				Kangri Lower	4
				Kangri Upper	4
				Lower Bhajwal B	3
				Nallah	2
				Seiya	3
				Thangriote	3
				Upper Bhajwal B	3
Rajouri	Dhangri	1		Androlla	3
				Badhoon A	3
				Baljarallan	2
				Dalhori Salyote	3
				Dhangri Lower	2
				Kalakass A	3
				Ladote	4
				Sagota	3
				Saranoo Bridge	4
				Aithi	3
				Charran	4

		Rajouri		Choudhary Nar	2
				Dhanor Jarallan Goursian	3
				Fathepur Danna	3
				Fathepur Khass	3
				Kote Dhara	4
				Mubarakhpura	2
				Muradpur B	3
				Nagrota Saldhar	5
				Rethal	3
				Sawani	3
	Koteranka	Budhal New	1	Dandote	4
				Kewal Lower	3
				Phalni	2
				Rajnagar Upper	4
				Shahpur	2
				Targain Upper	3
		Budhal Old		Chambitarar	3
				Draj	2
				Gakhrote A	3
				Hubbi	4
				Jamola Lower	3
				Jamola Upper B	2
				Kandi Upper	3

				Kanthol Marhuta	3
				Khah No Two	3
				Koteranka	4
				Larkuti	3
				Mohra B	2
				Panjnara Swari	3
				Rehan A	2
				Sakri	2
				Swari Kott	3
				Soker	2
				Taralla Gujran	3
			4		228
Total			**4 samples + 228 samples**		**232 samples**

Table-3.8 Shows sample size of the elected women

<mark>**Research Methodology Overview**</mark>

Components	Details
Research Design	Descriptive as well as Exploratory
Approach	Mixed Methods (Quantitative + Qualitative)
Study Area	Rajouri District, Jammu and Kashmir
Blocks selected	Eight blocks (Thannamandi, Plangarh, Siot, Sunderbani, Dhangri, Rajouri, Koteranka/Budhal old, and Budhal new) from four tehsils.
Sample Size	232 women representatives

Sampling Method	Multi stage sampling
Sampling Technique	Simple Random Sampling
Primary Data Sources	Questionnaires, Interviews, Field Observations
Secondary Data Sources	Official documents, specifically through the official web portals of the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India, District and Block Development Offices, and village Panchayat Offices etc.
Tools of analysis	Descriptive Statistics (for quantitative data), Thematic Analysis (for qualitative data)
Ethical Consideration	Informed consent, Confidentiality, Anonymity

Table 3.9 Shows overview of research methodology

Chapter-4

Result and Discussion

Q.1 Are you fully aware of the existing System of Panchayati Raj?

The effective representation of women in Panchayats depends upon their awareness of PRIs in India. The responses of elected women about their knowledge of the current Panchayati Raj are shown in Table 4. The Panchayati Raj System is known to the vast majority of elected women (93.96%). This suggests that these women have a high degree of participation and comprehension of local governance, which may be explained by their active involvement in governance, training, or educational initiatives. The fact that just 6.03% of those who participated were unaware of the system suggests that the Panchayati Raj System outreach and informative initiatives are generally successful. Overall, the research shows that elected women are generally well-informed about the Panchayati Raj System, underscoring their potential for success in local government and decision-making positions. For them to be able to actively engage in local governance and support the growth of their communities, this understanding is essential.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	218	14	232
Percentage	93.96	6.03	100

Table-4 Shows responses of Elected Women regarding their awareness of the existing PRIs

Q. 2. Are you satisfied with the 33% reservation for women in PRIs?

The policy of reservation for women aims to address the issues of social inequalities, injustices, and underrepresentation in political participation. It empowers women to address their issues and foster inclusive governance. The responses from the majority of elected women on their satisfaction with the percent reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj system are shown in Table 4.1. The 33% reservation for women in PRIs is judged satisfactory by the majority of elected women (86.20%). This suggests that a

fair number of women view the reservation as a move in the right direction toward greater participation and involvement in local government. Merely 13.79% of those surveyed express discontent. This comparatively low number may indicate that elected officials generally support policies that encourage women in politics, indicating that the reservation policy is widely approved. The results show that elected women strongly support the 33% reserve for women in PRIs, indicating that such policies are successful in encouraging female involvement in local government.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	200	32	232
Percentage	86.20	13.79	100

Table-4.1 Shows responses of elected women regarding their satisfaction with 33% reservation for women in PRIs

Q.3 Whether you faced problems when you contested for PRIs elections?

Certain societal barriers affect the participation of women in contesting elections. The responses of elected women on being asked whether they faced difficulties when running for the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are compiled in Table 4.2. It is evident from the data that a sizable majority of elected women (71.5%) said they encountered difficulties throughout their campaigns. This implies that women face several barriers throughout the election process, which may include logistical, cultural, or sociological issues. A lesser portion (28.4%) reported no problems, indicating that although some women may be able to effectively traverse the political landscape, many still face difficulties. Given the significant number of women experiencing difficulties, measures and focused support are needed to assist women in the election process. This might be lobbying, financial aid, or training initiatives to meet the particular difficulties they encounter.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	166	66	232
Percentage	71.5	28.4	100

Table-4.2 Shows responses of elected women regarding problems faced in contesting for the PRI election.

Q.4. Do you think that lack of education is the main problem behind less participation of women in politics?

The evidence indicates that elected women's engagement in politics is frequently hampered by a lack of quality education, suggesting the necessity for focused educational programs to promote and support women's increased political participation. The replies of elected women to the question of whether they think that low levels of literacy are the primary cause of women's poor political engagement are displayed in Table 4.3. The vast majority of elected women (92.6%) agree that women's political representation is greatly aided by education. This implies that a great number of women believe that education is crucial to their self-determination, political education, and the development of the self-assurance required to engage in political processes. 7.3% of respondents disagree, suggesting that although some may consider other reasons (including institutional, cultural, or economic hurdles) to be more important, they still only make up a small portion of the group. The broad agreement on education emphasizes that expanding women's access to education may be a critical first step in boosting their political engagement.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	215	17	232
Percentage	92.6	7.3	100

Table-4.3 S h o w s responses of Elected Women regarding lack of education as the main problem behind less participation of women in politics.

Q. 5 Do you think that male members control the women members in decision-making?

Indian society is considered as patriarchal society. The male dominations are seen in all the spheres of women's life. According to the responses received through fieldwork as shown in Table 4.4, elected women have a considerable opinion about how much influence male members have over made decisions. A large percentage of elected women (94.8%) believe that male members have power over their ability to make decisions. This points to a widespread belief that men predominate in the decision-making processes in their various contexts (e.g., political parties, local governance,

etc.). There may be some women who support equal decision-making authority, but they are greatly outnumbered by those who do not, since just a small minority (5.1%) consider this to be the case. The information unequivocally reveals that women are perceived to have considerable male influence over decision-making situations. Developing solutions that advance gender equality and enable women to be involved actively in processes of decision-making requires an understanding of these dynamics.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	220	12	232
Percentage	94.8	5.1	100

Table-4.4 Showing responses of elected women regarding that the male members control the Women members in decision making.

Q.6 Do you believe that women's situation in society can be raised by financial independence?

Economic independence has been historically considered as one of the important factors in the empowerment of women in society. Financial independence helps women in making independent choices in their lives. According to the statistics in Table 4.5, a sizable majority of elected women think that the place of women in society may be raised by economic independence. In particular, 226 of the 232 respondents (97.4%) selected "Yes," whereas just 6 (2.5%) selected "No." This resounding endorsement indicates that these elected women strongly agree that economic independence improves women's position in society. The data obtained through survey show that women believe in promoting economic independence as it is essential to raising women's status and this in turn benefit their families and communities as well.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	226	12	232
Percentage	97.4	2.5	100

Table-4.5 Shows the responses of elected women regarding how economic independence can improve the status of women in society.

Q.7. Do you think that there is high interference of bureaucracy in the working of PRIs?

A considerable number of elected women representatives appear to think that bureaucratic procedures and officials have a significant impact on the decision-making process, operations, and overall efficiency of local governance, as indicated by this overwhelming majority. The responses of elected women are presented in Table 4.6. The results suggest that a sizeable majority of the individuals who participated in the survey have a perception of high levels of intrusion from bureaucracy. Concerning the operation of PRIs, 88.7% of elected women believe that there is a significant amount of intervention from bureaucracy. While bureaucracy is necessary for effective functioning of PRIs, excessive interference on the other hand can result in reducing its effectiveness. 26 out of 232 (11.2%) of respondents express a lack of perception of bureaucratic involvement. This perception may be the result of several factors, including personal experiences, the efficiency of local governance, or the support they receive from bureaucratic structures. A critical perspective of bureaucratic engagement in local government by elected women is suggested by the data, which highlights a possible area for policy development and capacity building within PRIs. In conclusion, the data support this view.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	206	26	232
Percentage	88.7	11.2	100

Table-4.6 Showing Responses of elected women regarding that there is high interference of bureaucracy in the working of PRIs.

Q.8. Do you think that women are compelled to cast their votes according to their choice of male family members?

Compelling women to vote as per the choices of their male members of family is a significant obstacle in gender equality and democracy. The replies of elected women to the question of whether they feel pressured to vote based on the preferences of male family members are shown in Table 4.7. According to the findings, male family members have a big impact on these women's voting choices. Voting behaviour may be

strongly influenced by gender dynamics and familial expectations, especially for women in certain areas or towns, as seen by the 93.5% of elected women who say that they are forced to vote based on the preferences of male family members. Compared to those who feel compelled, the tiny fraction (6.4%) who do not experience this urge may reflect a more autonomous or unconventional attitude to voting. The results obtained through survey is reflection of larger societal and cultural conventions, where women might experience pressure to make decisions based on the preferences of male family members.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	217	15	232
Percentage	93.5	6.4	100

Table-4.7 Shows responses of elected women regarding that there is high interference of bureaucracy in the working of PRI

Q.9 Do you think that the participation of women in PRI is satisfactory?

The results of the survey asking elected women whether the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj system is satisfactory are displayed in Table 4.8. Out of 232, a major proportion 199 (85.7%) of elected women report that PRIs are significantly increasing their presence in the decision-making at grass root level. The data also revealed that those areas in which women are elected as leaders has seen improved focus on healthcare, sanitation, education and social welfare programmes. On the other hand, 14.2% of those who took the survey believed that women participation is not satisfactory. This is because women face harassment, lack of respect and sometimes even threats when they try to perform their task independently. Lack of financial independence also restrict women in taking decisions.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	199	33	232
Percentage	85.7	14.2	100

Table-4.8 Shows the responses of elected women regarding their family's traditional beliefs restricting women's participation in PRIs.

Q.10 Do you think that women are getting equal opportunity and liberty in PRIs?

The views of elected women representatives in the Panchayati system about equal opportunity and liberty are presented in Table 4.9. These replies imply that these institutions have a strong belief in gender equality. 219 out of 232 elected women replied "Yes," indicating that they feel women are afforded equal opportunities and liberty in PRIs. This amount is a 94.3 percent response rate. On the other hand, just 13 women, or 5.6% of the total, replied "No," indicating that they believe women do not have access to the same opportunities or freedoms as their male counterparts. Based on these results, it can be deduced that a significant majority of elected women have a favourable perception of the environment for gender equality inside PRIs. This is most likely the result of measures that are targeted at strengthening women within these institutions, such as reservations for females in local governing posts. On the other hand, the 5.6% of respondents who are in disagreement suggest that there are still obstacles to overcome, which may be the result of societal, cultural, or institutional hurdles that prevent perfect gender equality

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	219	13	232
Percentage	94.3	5.6	100

Table-4.9 S h o w s responses of elected women regarding their thinking that women are getting equal opportunity and liberty in PRIs.

Q.11 Have you heard about reservations for women in Panchayats?

The awareness about the provisions of reservations is crucial for the political participation of women. In Table 4.10 the views of elected female representatives about their understanding of reservations for women in Panchayats are presented. Of the total respondents, 216 women (93.1%) indicated awareness of these objections. Conversely, just 16 respondents (6.8%) reported a lack of awareness. The elevated knowledge rate of 93.1% indicates that most elected women are cognizant of the reservation policies facilitating women's involvement in local governance, presumably demonstrating the efficacy of awareness initiatives or educational endeavours on these regulations. The minor fraction (6.8%) who were uninformed may indicate locations where further

outreach or education may be advantageous to guarantee that all elected women comprehend the laws established to assist their functions in Panchayats

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	216	16	232
Percentage	93.1	6.8	100

Table- 4.10 shows responses of elected women regarding their awareness about reservations for women in Panchayats.

Q.12 Do you understand the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992?

The responses from several elected women regarding their understanding of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 are presented in Table 4.11. The table indicates that 192 elected women (82.7%) reported being aware of these reservations, out of the total respondents. In contrast, only 40 respondents (13.5%) declared that they were unaware. This suggests that a substantial majority of the elected women respondents (82.7%) are completely informed about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, while a lesser proportion (17.2%) are not. The role of mass media is significant in creating awareness and understanding of political culture in society. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which was enacted in 1992, sought to enhance local governance in India by granting constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions. This act emphasized the increased participation of women and marginalized groups in local governance. This level of awareness among elected women indicates a positive trend toward informed participation, which is likely to help the effective enactment of the Act's provisions.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	192	40	232
Percentage	82.7	17.2	100

Table-4.11 Showing responses of elected women regarding their full awareness of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

Q.13 Do you think that the status of women has been improved through PRI? The responses of elected women about whether they believe the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) have improved women's status are shown in the table 4.12. Just 4 respondents (1.5%) disagree with the vast majority of 228 out of 232 respondents (98.4%), who think that PRI has positively impacted women's empowerment. By giving women, a forum to participate in grassroots governance, decision-making, and policy influence, PRI has increased their self-esteem and leadership abilities. Training programmes by government has helped women in getting respectable place in PRIs. Women are now at the positions of sarpanches and panches allowing them to influence decision making in PRIs. Despite formal representation, the small percentage of women (1.5%) who do not perceive an improvement may be impacted by issues like political resistance and harassment, enduring traditional roles, or a lack of actual decision-making power.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	228	04	232
Percentage	98.4	1.5	100

Table-4.12 Shows responses of elected women regarding their thinking that the status of women has been improved through PRI.

Q.14. Do you think that a high literacy rate among women contributes positively to their empowerment in PRI?

Table 4.13 shows that 224 of elected women (96.5%) think that a high learning rate among women makes them more powerful in PRI, while only 3.8% do not. This huge support shows that most women know that reading can help them do their jobs better and feel more confident in their PRI roles. Education helps the women to develop their opinion and participate independently in Gram Sabha meetings. Getting an education gives women the information, skills, and confidence they need to make good decisions. When are educated, they know more about their rights and duties, which lets them take an active role in PRIs. Women who can read and write more are more likely to speak out, change laws, and fight for the well-being of their communities. This can lead to a more fair and open government. So, getting more women to read and write can be seen

as a basic step toward giving them more power and a voice in local government.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	224	08	232
Percentage	96.5	3.8	100

Table 4.13 Shows responses of elected women regarding their thinking that a high literacy rate among women contributes to their empowerment in PRIs

Q.15 Are you aware of the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, of 1989?

The information in Table 4.14 shows how much elected women know about the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act enacted in 1989. The act is important because it spells out who is responsible for what in Jammu and Kashmir's local government. The results show that a slightly higher percentage of women (51.7%) were unaware of the Act compared to those who were aware (48.2%). This indicates a gap in knowledge dissemination or education about legislative provisions that directly impact the roles and responsibilities of elected women in Panchayats. This promotes democracy decentralization at local levels. That is, just over half of the elected women who answered (51.5%) do not know about the act. The data suggests that it elected women, aren't getting enough knowledge or training. Because knowing these kinds of laws is important for good governance and smart decision-making, these results may mean that more needs to be done to teach and tell elected officials about their jobs, powers, and the rules that govern local government. The lack of awareness among more than half of the respondents underscores the need for capacity-building initiatives and training sessions to inform elected women about legislative acts like the Panchayati Raj Act, which is fundamental to their governance roles. Empowering women through knowledge can help enhance their effectiveness and confidence in local governance.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	112	120	232
Percentage	48.2	51.7	100

Table-4.14 Shows the responses of elected women regarding their awareness of the Panchayati Raj act 1989

Q.16 Do you think that family's traditional beliefs restrict women's participation in PRIs?

The replies of elected women to the question of whether they believe that the involvement of women in Panchayati Raj is restricted by traditional family values are shown in Table 4.15. The results are explained as follows: The fact that 187 women (80.6%) said "Yes" shows that most elected women think that traditional family values limit women's capacity to take part in PRIs. The fact that 45 women (19.3%) said "No" indicates that fewer elected women believe that their family values prevent them from participating in PRIs. The larger number of women (80.6%) who selected "Yes" indicates that many elected women believe that social norms and traditional family responsibilities which are frequently influenced by conservative viewpoints create obstacles for women to engage in local government. These conventional views may include the notion that women are unfit for leadership jobs or that they should put their home duties ahead of their public or political obligations. To illustrate the wide diversity of experiences among women in the PRIs, the 19.3% who said "No" may have less restricted home settings or may have surmounted these obstacles, maybe with the help of friends or relatives.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	187	45	232
Percentage	80.6	19.3	100

Table-4.15 Shows responses of elected women regarding their thinking that family's traditional beliefs restrict women's participation in PRIs.

Q.17 Do you know about the Gram Sabha meetings in your Panchayat?

The table presents the comments of elected women concerning their frequent attendance at Gram Sabha sessions within their Panchayat. Among 232 elected women respondents, 94.8% (220 women) indicated regular attendance at meetings, whilst 5.1% (12 women) reported irregular attendance. This signifies a substantial degree of engagement among elected women in Gram Sabha sessions, reflecting their active participation in local administration. The minimal proportion of women who abstain from attendance may be attributed to several factors, including personal, social, or

logistical impediments. The research indicates that the majority of elected women engage actively in decision-making processes within their Panchayats, which is essential for the proper operation of grassroots democracy and community development. The majority of women responded that they were regularly informed about the day and date of Gram Sabha meetings through Block official via WhatsApp groups or sometimes through phone calls from the concerned Block Development Officers.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	220	12	232
Percentage	94.8	5.1	100

Table-4.16 Showing responses of elected women regarding to attending the Gram Sabha meetings in your Panchayat regularly.

Q.18 Have you held Gram Sabha Meetings?

The replies of elected women to the question of whether they have attended Gram Sabha sessions are shown in Table 4.17. Gram Sabha meetings are a vital aspect of local governance, where decisions related to community development, budget allocation, and other local matters are discussed and finalized. The high percentage of elected women conducting these meetings indicates active participation in governance and decision-making. The "Yes" response from 214 elected women indicates that 92.2% of the women polled have attended Gram Sabha sessions. This demonstrates that a sizable majority of elected women are actively attending or setting up these gatherings, which are crucial for rural community's local government and decision-making. The data reflects a positive trend of engagement among elected women in grassroots governance processes. Also, it was observed during field visits that the Block development Officer banned proxy representation and did not allow the male relatives of elected women to exercise power on their behalf. However, attention should be given to the small group (7.7%) who are not conducting meetings, possibly due to challenges such as lack of awareness, administrative support, or social barriers.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	214	18	232
Percentage	92.2	7.7	100

Table-4.17 Shows responses of elected women regarding holding Gram Sabha Meetings

Q.19 Have you ever gone to any Panchayati Raj training courses?

The replies of elected women when asked if they had participated in any training courses in Panchayati Raj, India's system Panchayati Raj, are shown in the Table 4.18. According to the statistics, 82.7 % of elected women have taken part in Panchayati Raj-related training, demonstrating a high degree of readiness and knowledge regarding the operations of local self-governance. However, 17.2 % of elected women report not having had this kind of training, which may point to possible weaknesses in attempts to increase capacity or restricted access to training materials. A significant effort has been made to teach elected women about Panchayati Raj, which is essential for increasing their efficacy in governance. Still, a tiny percentage (17.2%) have not received this training, indicating a potential area that needs more focus, such as expanding training availability for all elected women.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	192	40	232
Percentage	82.7	17.2	100

Table -4.18 S h o w s responses of elected women regarding their attending any training program related to Panchayati Raj.

Q.20 Did you attend the Gram Sabha meeting of other Wards/Panchayat/Areas?

The information in the table 4.19 pertains to elected women's answers when asked if they attended the Gram Sabha sessions of other Wards, Panchayats, or Areas. In other Wards/Panchayats, the majority of elected women did not show up for Gram Sabha meetings. It could also be a sign of less cooperation or involvement amongst Panchayats. About 42.2 % of respondents did attend meetings in other locations. This implies that some elected women are actively attempting to partake in decision-making at a larger community level, maybe to obtain expertise, comprehend various difficulties, or work together on local concerns. Their involvement could facilitate networking or foster growth in a variety of fields more thorough examination may identify regional,

educational, or socioeconomic tendencies that affect elected women's attendance in meetings outside of their assigned districts. Therefore, even while participation is modest, the fact that a higher percentage of people (57.7%) did not show up suggests that there may be obstacles to further involvement, which might be a crucial consideration for organizational or policy.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	98	134	232
Percentage	42.2	57.7	100

Table-4.19 Shows responses of elected women regarding their attending any Gram Sabha meeting of other Wards/Panchayats/Areas.

Q.21 Do you feel that there should be exposure visits for all elected Panchayat representatives?

The replies of elected women on exposure visits for all elected Panchayat representatives are included in the table 4.20. All elected Panchayat members should have exposure trips, according to a vast majority of elected women (97.8%). The purpose of exposure trips is usually to provide elected officials with the chance to see and learn from excellent practices in other towns or areas. Through these trips, they may interact with local officials, observe how initiatives are implemented successfully, and learn about various governing styles. The resounding endorsement of exposure tours may be a sign that the women elected to Panchayats think these visits will broaden their knowledge, strengthen their ability to govern and assist them in making wise decisions for their local Panchayats. A very tiny percentage of respondents just 05 (2.1%) were opposed to exposure trips. Some elected women may have been against exposing visits for a number of reasons. For example, they could believe that exposure visits are expensive and would be better used to address local concerns, or they may believe that they already know enough and have enough expertise to not require them.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	227	05	232
Percentage	97.8	2.1	100

Table- 4.20 Showing responses of Elected Women regarding exposure visits for all elected Panchayat representatives

Q.22 Do you think that most of the elected women members have difficulties in doing official paperwork, particularly in financial matters?

The replies of elected women to the question of whether they think the majority of their colleagues struggle with official documentation, especially financial concerns, are shown in the table 4.21. The majority of respondents (62.0%) think that most elected women think that it is tough to handle official documentation, particularly financial paperwork. The difficulties with paperwork could be caused by several things, including limited access to financial literacy programs, inadequate training for administrative duties, or even systemic issues that make it more difficult for women, especially those in underrepresented roles, to get the help or skills they need to handle financial paperwork. However, 37.9% of the participants do not believe that the majority of elected women face these challenges. It is possible that these women possess the necessary resources, mentoring, or training to manage their responsibilities effectively.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	144	88	232
Percentage	62.0	37.9	100

Table-4.21 Shows the responses of elected women regarding difficulties faced in doing official paper work, particularly in financial matters.

Q.23 Do you think that women's entry into PRIs has changed the nature of rural power structure?

According to Table 4.22 statistics, the vast majority of elected women (93.9%) seem to think that the rural power structure has altered due to their admission to the Panchayati Raj System. The percentage of respondents who do not believe the participation of women in PRIs has had such an influence is just 6.0%. This implies that women's participation in local administration in rural regions is causing an alteration in the balance of power. Women's greater involvement in administration, a change in gender

roles, and possible changes in the socio-political climate might all be contributing factors to the high percentage of women who see change. At the local level, this might encourage more inclusive government, empower women, and upend established power systems.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	218	14	232
Percentage	93.9	6.0	100

Table-4.22 Shows responses of elected women thinking regarding whether women's entry into PRIs has changed the nature of the rural power structure.

Q.24 Do all the male members accept reservations for women?

Table 4.23 elucidates the perceptions of elected women on male members' approval of reservation rules for women. It specifically indicates the number of elected women who feel that all male members support reservations for women, in contrast to those who see some resistance. Among the respondents, 214 women (92.2%) expressed the belief that male members endorse the reservation policy for women. Twenty-two women (7.7%) contend that not all male members endorse this policy. The majority of elected women believe that male members endorse or are at ease with their misgivings. The data indicates a favourable environment for women's participation in governance, with most elected women perceiving acceptance from their male counterparts. However, the 7.7% who reported negative experiences highlight the need for continued efforts in gender sensitization and awareness to foster complete acceptance of women's political roles.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	214	18	232
Percentage	92.2	7.7	100

Table 4.23 Shows responses of elected women regarding their thinking whether all male members accept reservation for women.

Q.25 Do your husband and family members provide support when you engage in Panchayat activities?

Table 4.24 gives information about the support elected women receive from their spouses and family members when they participate in Panchayat (local government) activities. Out of a total of 232 responses 71.9% of elected women claim they get support from their families and husbands, while 28.01% don't. This overwhelming response suggests that a significant percentage of women in Panchayat responsibilities get encouragement and support from their families, which can be critical for their successful engagement and success in local administration. This aid may include assistance with domestic tasks, encouragement to participate in public life, or guidance in dealing with obstacles in their roles. The minority response shows that around one-quarter of elected women confront obstacles or lack support from their families and husbands. Positive answers may be because they come from well-educated families, have great political influence and background, have the freedom to communicate with the outside world, and may be members of the elite.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	167	65	232
Percentage	71.9	28.1	100

Table-4.24 Shows responses of elected women regarding husbands and family members providing support when they engage in Panchayat activities

Q.26 Does your family or community cause any issues with your performance of your duties?

Table 4.25 indicates that a significant majority (89.2%) of elected women respondents reported no familial or community-related challenges in executing their responsibilities, although a minority (10.7%) acknowledged encountering difficulty among the elected women, 10.7% indicated experiencing issues from their family or community. This suggests that although they are a minority, some elected women face

familial or cultural obstacles that may impede their official duties. An overwhelming 89.2% of elected women indicated that they did not encounter any such issues. This indicates that the majority of families or communities are either supportive or neutral, enabling these women to fulfil their tasks without obstruction. The data indicates a predominantly favourable trend in familial and communal support for elected women, but a minor yet significant portion continues to face problems in their jobs.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	25	207	232
Percentage	10.7	89.2	100

Table -4.25 Shows responses of elected women regarding any problems from their family/community in the discharge of their duties

Q.27 After becoming a member of PRI do you think that women are getting more respect in society?

The responses of elected women regarding their perceptions of receiving increased respect from society due to their membership in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) are presented in Table 4.26. Out of the 232 respondents (227 responded "Yes" and 5 responded "No"), 97.8% of the elected women reported that they believe they are receiving more respect from society as a result of their membership in PRI. Conversely, only 2.1% of the respondents did not perceive any increase in respect. This overwhelmingly positive response implies that the social stature and respect of these women have been considerably enhanced by their positions within PRI, suggesting a positive shift in societal attitudes toward women in leadership roles.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	227	08	232
Percentage	97.8	2.1	100

Table- 4.26 Shows responses of elected women regarding getting more respect in society after becoming a member of PRI

Q.28 Do you have enough time to fulfil your responsibilities as a member of PRI?

Table 4.27 shows the answers given by chosen women officials when asked if they think they have enough time to do their jobs as members of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). Among the people who answered, 205 chosen women (88.3%) said "Yes," which means they think they have enough time to do their PRI duties. In contrast, 27 women (11.6%) said "No," which suggests they don't think they have enough time to do their PRI tasks. The large number of "Yes" answers suggests that most chosen women can handle the time needed for their PRI jobs. The lower number of "No" answers shows that a smaller group of people have trouble finding enough time. This could be because they have other personal, family, or work obligations that conflict with their PRI duties. Based on these numbers, it looks like elected women can generally handle their PRI tasks along with other duties. The support of family is crucial in carrying out responsibilities as a member of PRI.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	205	27	232
Percentage	88.3	11.6	100

Table-4.27 Shows responses of elected women regarding getting enough time to fulfil their responsibilities as a member of PRI

Q.29 Did you encounter any challenges while contesting for election?

In the table 4.28, information from a poll of women who have been elected shows the difficulties women face when they stepped out for contesting elections. Out of all the people who answered, 118 elected women said they were having problems and 114 said they weren't having any major problems. Based on the answers, the numbers that were found are close to 50.8% of those who answered said "Yes," which means they did face problems. 49.1% of those who answered said "No," which means they didn't have any problems. These numbers show that elected women are pretty evenly split on how many problems they face during their campaigns. This shows that while a lot of women had problems, almost the same number did not have major problems. This shows that elected women had a range of situations. This could mean that different things, like differences in regional settings, personal support networks, or political situations, may

make it easier or harder for women to run for office. It was also observed that women belonging to political families did not encounter any challenge in contesting for election while the women from non-political background faced problems in contesting for elections.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	118	114	232
Percentage	50.8	49.1	100

Table-4.28 Shows the responses of elected women regarding facing any problem in contesting the election.

Q.30 Do you get support from your family?

Responses from elected women about whether or not their families support them are displayed in Table 4.29. One obstacle in their duties as elected officials may be the fact that most elected women (55.1%) say they are not getting family support. Their capacity to carry out their duties or seek leadership positions may be hampered by this lack of assistance, which points to the necessity for stronger systematic support systems. According to the findings, elected women see a notable disparity in family support, which can be a reflection of cultural norms and social expectations on gender roles. The society is predominantly conservative and women is expected to perform household activities on priority. Anyone demanding public responsibilities needs family support, yet the majority of these women lack it, which may limit their effectiveness or discourage others from pursuing such occupations. Promoting supportive policies that recognize and lessen the particular strains women experience while juggling family and public service might help close this gap in both the workplace and the home

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	104	128	232
Percentage	44.8	55.1	100

Table-4.29 Shows the responses of elected women regarding getting support from their families

Q.31 Is there a member of your family involved in politics?

Table 4.30 elucidates the political origins of elected women by analysing the involvement of their family members in politics. Among the total responses, 174 female participants said that at least one family member is politically engaged. Simultaneously, 58 elected women said that no family members are engaged in politics. This 75% percent constitutes a significant segment of the respondents. Notably, 75% of the elected women originate from households with political engagement, indicating a possible impact of familial history on political participation. Conversely, 25% of the elected women lack familial connections to politics. This indicates that although a majority has familial political connections, a significant minority attained their political roles independently, reflecting many routes to political power. The research reveals that a considerable percentage of these women had relatives engaged in politics. Familial connections in politics may furnish these women with resources, networks, and mentorship, so facilitating their entry and navigation within the political arena. The 25% without political familial ties demonstrate that political achievement may arise from individual aspiration, communal backing, or professional connections rather than familial influence.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	174	58	232
Percentage	75.4	25	100

Table-4.30 Shows responses of elected women regarding if any member of their family being active in politics.

Q. 32. Do you believe involving women in PRIs can lead to the effective implementation of rural development programs?

Table 4.31 contains responses from elected women representatives regarding their perspectives on the effectiveness of rural development programs' implementation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Following the table, 200 elected women (81.8%) think that the effectiveness of rural development initiatives is positively impacted by the involvement of women in PRIs. In contrast, 32 women (13.7%) do not subscribe to this perspective. The positive influence of women in leadership roles within PRI on rural development initiatives is emphasized by the majority response (81.8%) in favour of women's involvement. Nevertheless, the minority (13.7%) is revealing of

the fact that the ability of certain females to fully participate is still impacted by social challenges and structural barriers.

The effectiveness of rural development programs can be improved by addressing these barriers through training, resource allocation, and awareness programs, which can further empower women in PRIs.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	200	32	232
Percentage	81.8	13.7	100

Table-4.31 Shows responses of elected women regarding thinking that involving women in PRIs can lead to the effective implementation of rural development programs.

Q.33 Are you considering a career in politics?

The research reveals that a significant majority of elected women are inclined to pursue a career in politics, with approximately 77.1% of respondents expressing a desire to continue in politics as a long-term profession. Conversely, nearly one in four respondents (22.8%) indicated disinterest in pursuing a political career. This high proportion of affirmative responses suggests a strong commitment to political engagement among these women. The increasing tendency of women to pursue long-term political careers reflects growing support for female leadership and representation in the political sphere. On the other hand, the 22.8% of respondents who expressed disinterest in continuing their political careers may have various reasons for their stance. These could include personal priorities, dissatisfaction with the political environment, or alternative career aspirations outside politics. The favourable responses may stem from a combination of factors, including the respondents' comprehensive understanding of the political system, commitment to humanitarian service, passion for politics, and political backgrounds. Conversely, the negative responses might be influenced by challenges such as corruption in politics, familial constraints, indecision, lack of sufficient information, or societal perceptions that politics remains predominantly male-dominated.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	179	53	232
Percentage	77.1	22.8	100

Table-4.32 Shows responses of elected women regarding whether they want to choose politics as a career.

Q.34 Have you participated in any political activities before joining PRIs?

Table 4.33 displays the replies of elected women concerning their previous engagement in political activities before they participated in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Among the 232 respondents, 96.9% acknowledged past participation in political activities, whilst 3.01% indicated no previous engagement. This distribution reveals a significant tendency of political involvement among elected women before they accede to PRIs. The elevated proportion of yes replies indicates that most of these women have an active interest or experience in political affairs, perhaps rendering them better equipped and driven to assume positions within PRIs. In contrast, the minimal percentage of individuals lacking prior political experience suggests that certain women entered PRIs without a formal political background, highlighting a variety of routes to political leadership within these organizations.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	225	07	232
Percentage	96.9	3.0	100

Table-4.33 Shows responses of elected women regarding their taking part in any political activity before becoming members of PRIs.

Q.35. Do you think women's involvement and representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) have enhanced their social, economic, and political empowerment?

According to the data collected through field survey, most elected women (90.08%) think that their participation Panchayati Raj System has improved women's political, social, and economic empowerment. This high proportion implies that membership in PRIs gives women a forum to actively engage in decision-making, access resources,

and tackle community-affecting issues, all of which can improve their socioeconomic status, confidence, and leadership abilities. Women are challenging traditional patriarchal system by their active participation in grassroot democracy. Just 9.9% of respondents do not believe that PRI representation has a substantial influence on empowerment; this might be because of institutional framework restrictions, lack of support, or conventional gender roles.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	209	23	232
Percentage	90.0	9.9	100

Table 4.34 Shows elected women's responses regarding their thinking that women's involvement and representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) have enhanced their social, economic, and political empowerment.

Q.36 Do you believe that a higher caste or a segment of society impacts the decisions made in Gram Sabha meetings?

The opinions of elected women representatives about whether they believe that choices made in Gram Sabha meetings are influenced by upper castes or certain society segments are captured in Table 4.35. In percentage terms: 40% of elected women said that certain social groups or higher castes affected choices made in Gram Sabha sessions. The fact that 60% of respondents did not detect any such impact indicates that most respondents think the Gram Sabha makes decisions fairly or without being influenced by social hierarchy. Although somewhat more than half of the elected women believe that the Gram Sabha's decisions are impartial, this data reveals a mixed opinion. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that a sizable minority (almost 40%) do perceive influence, suggesting that caste or social prejudices may still be a factor in local government decisions for a sizable part of women delegates. This could point to areas that need work to guarantee more equity and inclusion in the decision-making procedures.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	93	139	232
Percentage	40.0	59.9	100

Table 4.35 Shows responses of elected women regarding their thinking a higher

caste or a section of the society influences the decision in Gram Sabha meetings

Q.37 Do you think that male members of PRIs give you high respect or regard?

The overwhelming majority of elected women (96.1%) think that their male counterparts in PRIs appreciate or value them. This overwhelmingly favourable reaction indicates that male elected officials are generally seen as courteous, encouraging, and appreciative of the contributions and duties played by women in local government. This could point to a change in the conventional gender dynamics of PRIs, as male members may come to value women's involvement and contributions more. It may also be a reflection of the increasing social acceptability of women in positions of leadership in local government. These actions probably create an atmosphere where males are more likely to treat their female co-workers with respect. A small percentage of women (3.9%) believe that male PRI members do not value or respect them. Despite the extremely low proportion, it implies that some women could still encounter obstacles or typical gender prejudices in the institutional setting. This minority opinion could represent sporadic instances in which male participants may oppose shifts in conventional gender roles or may not yet completely embrace women's power.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	223	09	232
Percentage	96.1	3.9	100

Table 4.36 Shows responses of elected women regarding their thinking that male members of PRI gave them high respect and regard

Q.38 Does your husband help in your household?

According to Table 4.37, 90.9% of elected women report that their spouses assist them around the house, indicating supportive family relations that allow them to successfully manage their duties. The 9.0% who do not obtain this assistance, however, show that some people are still subject to outdated gender role norms. In addition to indicating the necessity to keep promoting shared household duties to further empower women in governance, this data shows a favourable trend toward gender equality within the home. A good trend toward shared family obligations is indicated by the fact that the most of

elected women (90.9%) get assistance from their spouses with household tasks. The 9.0% who do not receive this kind of assistance, however, indicates that traditional ideas about gender roles may still exist in some situations. All things considered, this data shows both the advancements made in gender equality in the home and the significance of ongoing initiatives to encourage shared duties to empower women in public life

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	211	21	232
Percentage	90.9	9.0	100

Table-4.37 Shows the responses of elected women regarding getting help from their husbands in their household

Q.39 Do you think that lack of education among women is a hurdle in Political participation?

According to Table 4.38, the overwhelming majority of elected women (91%) think that women's lack of education prevents them from participating in politics. Just 9% of people have negative opinion in this regard. This research indicates that most elected women perceive education as significantly influencing their involvement in politics. The high rate suggests that education probably gives women the information, self-assurance, and abilities needed to get involved in politics. Thus, raising women's educational attainment may be a crucial tactic in boosting their political engagement.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	212	20	232
Percentage	91.3	8.6	100

Table 4.38 shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that lack of education among women is a hurdle in Political participation.

Q.40 Do you think that allocating seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has enhanced their involvement in the democratic process?

The vast majority of elected women (97.4%) think that having seats reserved for females in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has increased their involvement in the democratic process, according to Table 4.39. Just 2.5% of respondents disagree. This high proportion shows that many people believe that PRI allocating for women is the

best way to get more females involved in democratic administration. Reservations may give women a vital platform to break down historical barriers and participate more actively in governance and political decision-making. During field survey participants responded that they are in politics mainly due to seats reserved for them. They further added that allocating seats for women guaranteed their participation in PRIs.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	226	06	232
Percentage	97.4	2.5	100

Table 4.39 Shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that allocating for women in PRIs has increased their participation in the democratic process.

Q. 41 Do you think it is essential also to allocate seats for women in State Assemblies and Parliament?

Table 4.40 indicates that a great majority of elected females (95.6%) consider it imperative to allocate reserved seats for women in State Assemblies and Parliament. A mere 4.3% express disagreement. This study indicates that the great majority of elected women regard seat reservations as an essential measure to increase women's engagement in higher government. Considering the efficacy of reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), implementing analogous measures in State Assemblies and Parliament might facilitate the sufficient representation and influence of women's voices in the formulation of policy at the national and regional levels

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	222	10	232
Percentage	95.6	4.3	100

Table 4.40 Shows the responses of elected women regarding their view on reserving seats for women in State Assemblies and Parliament.

Q.42 Does reserve seats benefit capable women entering the political mainstream?

The research indicates that a significant majority (86.6%) of the questioned elected women assert that seat reservations facilitate the entry of competent women into the political mainstream, whilst just 13.3% dissent. This indicates that reserved seats are typically regarded as advantageous for women's political engagement. The distribution indicates a robust agreement among respondents supporting seat reservations as a means to improve women's participation in politics. The majority contends that reserved seats offer essential assistance to competent women, enabling them to surmount obstacles that may otherwise restrict their involvement in a historically male-dominated domain. Consequently, reservations are predominantly seen as a crucial need, enabling women to not only participate in but also possibly influence the political arena

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	201	31	232
Percentage	86.6	13.3	100

Table-4.41 Shows the responses of elected women regarding reservation benefit women entering into the mainstream of politics.

Q.43 Do you think that the social outlook towards women has altered after they participated in PRIs?

Table 4.42 displays the comments of elected women concerning the influence of their involvement in the Panchayati system on societal perceptions of women. A substantial majority (80.1%) of the elected women claim that their participation in PRIs has altered the societal perception of women. This indicates a firm conviction that their involvement has enhanced societal perceptions of women and their duties. Merely 19.8% of respondents perceived no alteration in the societal perspective about women. This viewpoint suggests that although some advancement has occurred, entrenched cultural attitudes and obstacles persist. These respondents may recognize persistent problems like gender discrimination, cultural norms, or insufficient support for women's leadership that continue to impact women's societal standing. The data

indicate that most respondents perceive women's participation in PRIs favourably, suggesting a transformation in societal perspectives that may foster enhanced gender equality and empowerment over time. The existence of a substantial minority that observes no change indicates the need for continued lobbying and efforts to tackle persistent difficulties.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	186	46	232
Percentage	80.1	19.8	100

Table- 4.42 Shows responses of elected women regarding their thinking that the social outlook towards women has changed after they participated in PRIs.

Q.44 Do you think that male members dominate the women in the decision-making process?

A substantial majority (81.4%) of the elected women have a feeling that male members predominate in the decision-making process. This suggests a robust belief that gender inequity continues to exist within governance frameworks, notwithstanding the inclusion of women in elected roles. Merely 18.5% of respondents do not recognize male dominance in decision-making. This smaller group may have had distinct experiences or may perceive that their involvement has been sufficiently acknowledged and valued in the decision-making process. The pervasive notion of male supremacy underscores the persistent obstacles women have in attaining genuine equality in government. It indicates that although women have achieved progress in representation, systemic obstacles persist. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial for empowering women and guaranteeing that their perspectives are equally acknowledged and included in decision-making. The data indicate a troubling trend concerning the predominance of male members in decision-making roles among elected women. This impression of inequality indicates that further measures are required to advance gender equity in governance, bolster women's assertiveness in dialogues, and confront conventional power relations that obstruct effective involvement.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	189	43	232
Percentage	81.4	18.5	100

Table-4.43 shows the responses of elected women regarding the domination of male members in the decision-making process.

Q.45 Do the women members of Panchayati Raj involve themselves in the working of PRIs?

A majority of respondents (192 out of 232) reported their involvement in the operations of PRIs. This signifies a favourable trend for women in Panchayat and decision-making processes. It indicates that several elected women are assuming active positions in their communities, perhaps resulting in enhanced involvement of women's interests in local administration. A lesser proportion (40 women) indicated that they do not participate in the operations of PRIs. Social, cultural, or institutional obstacles inhibit women's full participation in their responsibilities. Factors such as insufficient confidence, poor support structures, or dominant gender norms may lead to this disengagement. Certain elected women may lack the requisite understanding, skills, or resources to engage effectively in PRIs. Table 4.44 indicates that a substantial majority of elected women members of PRIs are engaged in governance, signifying a positive trend in women's political engagement. Nonetheless, it is imperative to focus on the minority who are not participating, since resolving their difficulties may enhance the representation and involvement of women in local administration.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	192	40	232
Percentage	82.7	17.2	100

Table-4.44 shows the responses of elected women regarding the women members of Panchayati Raj involving themselves in the working of PRIs

Q.46 Have you ever faced a situation where you had to withdraw from a contest?

This signifies that a substantial majority of elected women (83.1%) had encountered circumstances in which they considered retracting from a competition. This may indicate several underlying issues, including pressures they encounter, obstacles in their professions, or other situational stresses prompting them to contemplate departure. A mere 16.8% of respondents said that they did not contemplate withdrawal. This suggests that the majority of elected women encounter uncertainties or obstacles during their campaigns. The statistics may indicate the challenges and pressures women encounter in competitive settings, especially in political or leadership positions.

Comprehending the rationale underlying these concerns should assist organizations and support systems in more effectively addressing the issues encountered by women in these circumstances. The research indicates a considerable degree of contemplation over withdrawal among elected women, highlighting the necessity for enhanced assistance and resources to assist them in effectively managing these problems.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	193	39	232
Percentage	83.1	16.8	100

Table-4.45 Shows the responses of elected women regarding situations where they had thought of withdrawing from the contest

Q.47 Do you think that there is high interference of bureaucracy in the working of PRIs?

Table 4.46 presents the perspectives of elected women concerning the extent of bureaucratic influence in the operations of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). A substantial majority (84.9%) of elected women regard bureaucratic meddling as a critical concern. This indicates a prevalent apprehension that bureaucratic procedures, regulations, or staff may obstruct the efficient operation and independence of PRIs, thereby affecting decision-making, resource distribution, and responsiveness to local requirements. In contrast, just a tiny minority (15%) argue that such intervention is not an issue. This signifies a discrepancy in perspectives, maybe shaped by personal experiences, local government frameworks, or varying degrees of involvement with bureaucratic procedures. Comprehending these impressions is essential for policymakers seeking to improve the efficacy of PRIs. This may signify the necessity for changes aimed at diminishing bureaucratic obstacles, enhancing the training of elected officials, and promoting improved coordination between elected representatives and bureaucratic entities.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	197	35	232
Percentage	84.9	15.0	100

Table 4.46 Shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that there is high interference of bureaucracy in the working of PRIs.

Q.48 Do you favour the minimum educational qualification of the PRI candidates?

The views of elected women about the need for a minimum educational level for candidates seeking to be elected to the Panchayats are summarized in Table 4.47. The vast majority of elected women (79.3%) support requiring PRI candidates to have a minimum level of education. This shows that respondents have a strong belief that education is necessary for effective local governance and decision-making. However, a small minority (20.6%) disagrees, suggesting that there is minimal disagreement among the people under study about the idea of educational qualifications. The strong support for minimal educational requirements shows that the importance of knowledgeable leadership is recognized, as is the need for candidates to have the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively represent their constituents and manage local affairs. This would suggest that there is a general belief in the community that education improves governance, which could lead to better results for local development initiatives. According to the research, elected women are overwhelmingly in favour of establishing minimum educational requirements for PRI candidates, which might have a big influence on the standard of local administration

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	184	48	232
Percentage	79.3	20.6	100

Table-4.47 shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that there should be a minimum educational qualification for the PRI candidates.

Q.49 Are you satisfied with your efforts to encourage women to attend the Gram Sabha meetings?

Table 4.48 summarizes elected women's satisfaction ratings regarding their efforts to increase women's attendance in Gram Sabha meetings. An overwhelming 88.7% of respondents reported satisfaction, reflecting a strong sense of efficacy in their roles. This indicates that their initiatives—whether through outreach, education, or community engagement—have been effective in encouraging women's participation in Gram Sabha sessions. On the other hand, only 11.2% of elected women expressed dissatisfaction, a relatively low proportion. This suggests that, despite certain challenges or areas requiring improvement, the majority believe they are making a positive impact. Overall, Table 4.48 highlights a notable sense of achievement among

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elected women in fostering greater involvement of women in Gram Sabha meetings, while also acknowledging a smaller group that feels additional efforts are needed

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	206	26	232
Percentage	88.7	11.2	100

Table-4.48 Shows the responses of the elected women regarding their thinking that they are satisfied with their efforts to boost women to attend the Gram Sabha meetings

Q.50 Do you believe that enhancing women's political engagement can be achieved through education?

A total of 226 women (97.3%) responded with "Yes." This vast majority suggests that elected women have a strong conviction that education is essential for enhancing women's political engagement. This implies that they regard education as a critical factor that can empower women, increase their understanding of political processes, improve their abilities, and foster the confidence required to engage in politics. Education can equip women with the necessary knowledge to comprehend their rights, participate in civic activities, and seek office. Seven women (2.6%) responded with "No." This modest quantity represents a minority perspective that may have been influenced by a variety of factors: They may believe that other factors (e.g., social, cultural, and economic) are more significant barriers to political participation than education. They may believe that education alone is insufficient to effect meaningful change without confronting systemic issues that impede women's participation. The data firmly indicates that elected women generally endorse the notion that improving educational opportunities for women is essential for fostering their engagement in politics.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	226	06	232
Percentage	97.3	2.6	100

Table-4.49 shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that women's political engagement can be improved by providing education to them

Q.50 Do you think that there is party politics in the Panchayat Elections?

Of the elected women, a sizable majority (75.8%) believe that party politics had an impact on the Panchayat elections. This implies that most of these women have confidence political parties have a significant impact on local elections, perhaps influencing candidates, campaigns, and voter choices. Merely 24.1% of those surveyed do not believe that party politics play a role. This lower proportion can be a sign of either a preference for local problems and candidates over party connections or a belief in the fairness of the electoral process. According to the vast majority opinion, party dynamics are probably influencing how Panchayat elections are conducted and turned out, which may have consequences for grassroots representation, governance, and policymaking. This view of party politics could call for more research on how party affiliations impact resource allocation, decision-making, and the general efficacy of elected women in their positions. All things considered, the results show that elected women strongly believe that party politics play a role in Panchayat elections, underscoring a crucial topic for discussion about local government and electoral integrity.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	176	56	232
Percentage	75.8	24.1	100

Table-4.50 Shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that there is party politics in the Panchayat Elections

Q.51 Do you think that electoral politics corrupts women?

The responses of elected women to the question of whether they think electoral politics corrupts women are displayed in Table 4.51. Of the elected women who responded, a slim majority (51.2%) think that women are corrupted by electoral politics. This suggests that over 50% of those surveyed had a critical opinion of how political politics affect women. On the other hand, 48.7% of the participants do not think that women are corrupted by electoral politics. This demonstrates that a sizable percentage of elected women either may not perceive the drawbacks of electoral politics or may have had favourable experiences with it. The narrow response gap (51.2% Yes vs. 48.7% No) points to a nuanced perspective on the impact of electoral politics among elected women. It draws attention to the necessity for more research on the elements of electoral politics that are thought to be corrupt as well as the experiences that give rise to these views. This query may also be a reflection of wider political and gender attitudes in

society. Their opinions may be influenced by elements including the difficulties they encounter, the political climate in their areas, and the individual experiences of elected women.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	119	113	232
Percentage	51.2	48.7	100

Table-4.51 shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that electoral politics corrupts women

Q.52 Are you aware of the government schemes for Panchayats?

Table 4.52 highlights elected women's awareness of government initiatives for Panchayats. A majority (69.8%) demonstrate knowledge of these programs, reflecting strong engagement with local governance efforts. However, 30.1% lack awareness, pointing to gaps in communication or outreach, potentially due to geographical, educational, or socio-economic factors. Awareness of government initiatives is crucial for elected officials to advocate effectively, access resources, and drive community development. While the high awareness level suggests effective communication or training programs, the uninformed minority underscores the need for improved outreach, such as workshops or educational campaigns. Addressing these gaps can ensure all elected women are equipped to serve their communities effectively

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	162	70	232
Percentage	69.8	30.1	100

Table-4.52 Shows the responses of elected women regarding their awareness of the government schemes for Panchayats

Q.53 Have you participated in any protest or rally and led such rallies?

Table 4.53 outlines survey results on elected women's involvement in demonstrations or rallies and their experience organizing such events. Only 37.0% reported participating in or leading protests, indicating some level of activism but falling below half of respondents. Conversely, 62.9% have not engaged in such activities, highlighting a significant lack of participation. This low engagement may reflect societal factors such as cultural norms, perceived barriers to activism, or competing

priorities. Limited opportunities or visibility for participation could also hinder elected women's involvement in public advocacy, which is vital for advancing gender equality and addressing social issues. Active participation in demonstrations can inspire others and strengthen the legitimacy of the causes supported. However, barriers like time constraints, safety concerns, or lack of support might contribute to the high rate of non-participation. Further qualitative research could provide insights into these obstacles and assess the impact of those who do participate. The findings underscore a disparity in activism among elected women, with a minority actively engaged and the majority abstaining. Addressing these challenges and encouraging greater participation could enhance their representation and influence in driving social change.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	86	146	232
Percentage	37.0	62.9	100

Table-4.53 Shows the responses of elected women regarding participation in any protest or rally and led such rallies

Q.54 Do you think that males accept the reservation for women?

Table 4.54 displays the comments of elected women concerning their perceptions of male acceptance of reservations for women. A substantial majority (78.8%) of the elected women feel that males endorse the reserve for women. This signifies a favourable attitude among women of men's perspectives on this topic, implying that they believe male counterparts recognize the significance and necessity of gender reservations. Only 21.1% of respondents felt that males do not accept women's reservations. This reduced proportion may suggest that, although some guys exhibit doubt or dissent, the prevailing tendency is toward acceptance. The results indicate a consensus among elected women that males endorse women's reservation policies. This acceptance is vital for cultivating a more inclusive political landscape and guaranteeing women's representation in decision-making processes. The research indicates a predominantly favourable stance among males on women's reservations, as reported by the polled elected women.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	183	49	232
Percentage	78.8	21.1	100

Table-4.54 shows the responses of elected women regarding their thinking that males accept the reservation for women

Q.55 Do you think that the MGNREGA scheme has been beneficial for the economic betterment of rural women?

Table 4.55 highlights elected women's perspectives on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and its impact on rural women's economic advancement. A significant majority (76.7%) believe the program positively influences rural women's economic conditions, reflecting its perceived benefits. MGNREGA's guaranteed wage employment likely enhances women's financial autonomy, alleviates poverty, boosts household incomes, and enables greater contributions to their families and communities. However, 23.2% of respondents do not view MGNREGA as beneficial. This minority might face challenges such as limited awareness of the program's benefits, bureaucratic barriers, or socio-cultural constraints restricting women's participation in the labour market. The largely favourable response underscores MGNREGA's role in empowering rural women economically, providing valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders. Nonetheless, concerns raised by the minority highlight the need for ongoing evaluations and improvements to ensure the program meets the diverse needs of all rural women effectively

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	178	54	232
Percentage	76.7	23.2	100

Table-4.55 Shows responses of elected women regarding thinking that the MGNREGA scheme has been beneficial for the economic betterment of rural women.

Q.56 Have you helped Panchayat in eradicating social evils in your village?

The comments of elected women on their role in assisting the Panchayat (local self-government) in eliminating social problems in their village are summarized in Table 4.56. In their village, the vast majority of elected women (97.4%) stated that they had actively assisted the Panchayat in eliminating societal problems. This suggests that the women in their communities are very committed and actively involved. The percentage of respondents who said they had not assisted in this area was just 2.5%. This low number indicates that social ills are acknowledged as a problem in the society and that efforts are being made to solve them

collectively, especially by women in leadership roles. The substantial backing given to the Panchayat in its fight against social ills demonstrates the possibility of constructive social transformation spearheaded by women. Their participation might increase the efficacy of programs meant to combat social inequities, violence, and prejudice while also enhancing community welfare. The research reinforces the significance of women in local administration and community leadership by showing a positive attitude toward collective action and indicating that elected women view themselves as essential contributors to social justice and community betterment.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	226	06	232
Percentage	97.4	2.5	100

Table 4.56 Shows responses of elected women on whether they helped Panchayats in eradicating social evils in their village

Q.57 Are you able to discharge your PRI duties effectively?

Table 4.57 presents elected women's responses regarding their ability to fulfil responsibilities within the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI). A significant majority (90.0%) express confidence in their capacity to perform their duties effectively, suggesting they feel equipped with the necessary skills, resources, and support. However, 9.9% of respondents indicated challenges, highlighting areas for improvement, training, or additional support within the PRI framework. The high level of confidence among the majority indicates positive progress in the empowerment of women in local governance, reflecting the success of initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in decision-making processes. Policymakers and stakeholders should focus on understanding the concerns of the 9.9% who feel less prepared, as their feedback could uncover key areas where further support or training is needed. These findings underline the strong confidence of elected women in their roles within the PRI, while also emphasizing the importance of addressing the challenges faced by the minority to enhance overall effectiveness and participation in local governance.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	209	23	232
Percentage	90.0	9.9	100

Table-4.57 Shows responses of elected women on whether they can discharge their PRI duties effectively

Q.58 Are you satisfied with your present position?

The responses of elected women about their level of satisfaction with their current roles are shown in Table 4.58. According to the research, a vast majority of elected women (95.2%) are content with their present roles. This shows that these respondents have a good view of their duties and responsibilities. Few elected women feel dissatisfied or unfulfilled in their roles, as seen by the 4.7% of respondents who voiced discontent. The high degree of satisfaction could be the result of efforts, supportive settings, or policies that advance the efficacy and well-being of women in leadership positions. Despite the low level of discontent, knowing the causes of the 11 "No" answers may help develop new initiatives or support networks for elected women.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	221	11	232
Percentage	95.2	4.7	100

Table-4.58 Shows responses of elected women on whether they are satisfied with their present position

Q.59 Are you satisfied with the electoral system under the existing Panchayati Raj Act?

Table 4.59 reveals a high degree of satisfaction among elected women over the electoral mechanism established by the current Panchayati Raj Act. A significant majority (96.1%) of the elected women conveyed contentment with the election system. This indicates that they probably view the system as efficient, equitable, and supportive of their functions within the Panchayati Raj institutions. Merely 3.8% of the respondents expressed displeasure, representing a minimal amount. This may suggest that the challenges encountered by these few women may not reflect the overall opinion of their colleagues, or they may possess particular concerns that are not prevalent. The elevated satisfaction levels may favourably signify the electoral structure instituted by the Panchayati Raj Act, suggesting its efficacy for the majority of elected women. This may also indicate that initiatives to empower women through this system have been successful. Although overall satisfaction is elevated, it may be advantageous to explore the factors contributing to the discontent expressed by the minority. Comprehending their issues may facilitate the rectification of deficiencies in the election system and enhance it further. In conclusion, the data reveals that the election system established by the current Panchayati Raj Act is predominantly seen favourably by elected women,

with a substantial majority indicating satisfaction. Nonetheless, it underscores the necessity of acknowledging the viewpoints of the discontented to cultivate a more inclusive and efficient voting process.

Respondents	Types of Responses		
Elected Women	Yes	No	Total
	223	09	232
Percentage	96.1	3.8	100

Table 4.59 Shows responses of elected women on whether they are satisfied with the electoral system under the existing Panchayati Raj Act

Conclusion

The findings of the present study reveal a complex and layered picture of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Rajouri district. On the one hand, the results confirm what has been widely observed in earlier studies that reservation of seats has significantly increased women's numerical presence in local governance. Many elected women representatives (EWRs) reported enhanced confidence, greater public visibility, and an improved sense of agency, especially in decision-making processes related to community development. This aligns with the broader discourse on political empowerment through institutional reforms (Buch, 2000; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). At the same time, several contradictions and unexpected trends emerged. While awareness of rights and responsibilities among EWRs was relatively high, their actual participation in agenda-setting and resource allocation remained constrained. A considerable proportion of women representatives acknowledged that male family members often influenced or even dictated their decisions, a finding that contradicts the normative assumption that political reservation automatically leads to autonomy and empowerment. This reflects the "proxy representative" phenomenon identified in feminist literature (Kumari, 2014; Rai, 2011). The persistence of this dynamic, even after years of reservation, points to deeper structural barriers within the social fabric of rural Jammu and Kashmir.

Another unexpected outcome was that younger women leaders who were assumed to be more digitally literate and socially mobile did not necessarily exhibit higher levels of political efficacy compared to older representatives. This contradicts conventional expectations that digital literacy and youth are straightforward enablers of empowerment. Studies elsewhere have also shown that younger women often face sharper patriarchal resistance and community scrutiny, limiting their ability to exercise autonomy despite higher education or exposure (Basu, 2016; Kumar, 2020).

Similarly, while respondents widely acknowledged improvements in service delivery through PRIs after 2019 particularly due to the direct devolution of funds and greater institutional support many

women also reported that bureaucratic hurdles and lack of administrative training limited their ability to translate authority into tangible outcomes. This indicates a disconnect between structural reforms and actual grassroots capacities, echoing earlier critiques that institutional reforms without capacity-building can reproduce gendered inequalities in governance (Jain, 1996; Baviskar, 2005).

These contradictions underscore that empowerment through PRIs is not a linear process. The findings reveal a tension between policy intentions and lived realities, between formal inclusion and substantive participation. Women representatives are negotiating empowerment within overlapping structures of patriarchy, community norms, and institutional limitations, which at times produces progress, and at other times results in frustration or co-option.

Overall, the results suggest that while PRIs have opened important avenues for women's leadership in Rajouri, empowerment remains partial, contested, and uneven. Future strategies must therefore move beyond reservation and focus on sustained capacity-building, gender-sensitive institutional mechanisms, and community-level attitudinal shifts (Mukherjee, 2017; Jayal, 2006).

Chapter-5

Challenges And Barriers to Women's Empowerment in PRI's

Various challenges and barriers in the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, namely throughout the Rajouri district significantly impact women's empowerment in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Rajouri district being a border district faces multiple challenges related to women empowerment. The interplay of patriarchy, caste, religion, and socio-economic factors influences these barriers:

A. Structural Barriers

1. Patriarchy: Within the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) located in the Rajouri district, patriarchy continues to be one of the most severe challenges that women confront in their pursuit of empowerment. Majority of power is held by men, and women are marginalized in positions of authority to a significant degree. As a result of conventional ways of thinking and traditional beliefs, the majority of women are compelled to do domestic duties. Not only does this cultural framework restrict the participation of women in administration, but it has also contributed to the formation of social views that promote the notion that males are better capable of leading than women. The economic fabric of the region has also been greatly impacted as a result of this. The Rajouri district, which is the most patriarchal in the country, is seeing a situation that is quite similar to this one.

Dominance of Male Authority: The majority of communities in the research region held the belief that males are naturally better leaders because of the lack of educational understanding. This has significant ramifications since women are deterred from pursuing leadership roles out of concern that their efforts will be underappreciated or will not be taken seriously. Furthermore, Women often require to take charge of a workplace that is dominated by male co-workers even when they are successful in achieving top positions in PRIs. Cultural narratives, educational institutions, and media depictions that frequently place males in positions of leadership while relegating women to supporting or subservient roles serve to further this idea. From overt animosity to more covert kinds of exclusion, such as being cut off in meetings or having

their opinions disregarded, this domination can take many different shapes. Women may feel excluded or uncomfortable in an atmosphere where their perspectives are not respected, which deters them from participating even more.

Proxy Representation: A notable element of patriarchal Institutions belonging to the Panchayati Raj make usage of proxy representation. Females elected to municipal bodies do not authentically engage in decision-making. They serve as a proxy for their male relatives—husbands, dads, or brothers—who maintain authority over political choices. This subverts the objective of women's reservation in PRIs, as it reinforces male supremacy instead of promoting genuine female leadership. Proxy representation diminishes the efficacy of women's involvement and perpetuates patriarchal systems, as decision-making power stays predominantly with males. Women are frequently regarded as simply placeholders, which undermines their visibility and power inside the institution. Thus, the empowerment of women via PRIs is markedly undermined, resulting in the forfeiture of potential advantages associated with their participation in government.

Cultural and Social Norms: Cultural and societal conventions significantly contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchy. In the research region, women are conditioned to emphasize familial duties over civic involvement, internalizing the notion that their principal job is as caregivers. This expectation can result in internalized sexism, causing women to doubt their talents or feel undeserving of seeking leadership positions.

2. Caste Dynamics

The dynamics of caste introduce an additional degree of complexity to the issues encountered by women in PRIs within the Rajouri area. The caste system has divided society into hierarchical groupings, leading to increased discrimination against women from underprivileged populations.

Caste-Based Hierarchies: In addition to being marginalized as women, lower-caste women are also marginalized as members of oppressed castes. As a result, they face structural obstacles that restrict their access to political representation, education, and resources. Women from lower castes are having a difficult time rallying support and getting beyond the prejudices of upper-caste members who control local administration, even with reservations in PRIs.

Social Exclusion: For women from low castes, social isolation is a persistent problem. Women are not given access to the same support systems and opportunities as women from higher castes. This exclusion can take many different forms, such as being excluded from community meetings or being rejected for particular positions in local government due to caste bias. To guarantee that these women can participate in PRIs successfully, a specific set of problems brought about by the confluence of caste and gender need solutions.

Limited Access to Resources: The assets that are accessible, including education as well as training programs, are often limited for women from lower castes. Financial constraints are preventing them from seeking education or political training, which further marginalizes them within the political landscape. Consequently, even when they are elected to PRIs, their lack of preparedness and support hinders their ability to advocate for their communities effectively.

3. Religious Factors:

Religion has a substantial effect on the empowerment of women in PRIs or greatly affects societal dynamics. Gender roles and expectations are dictated by a variety of religious rituals and beliefs, which frequently restrict Women's participation in politics. Majority of people in Rajouri are Muslims, and women's positions in society are greatly influenced by Islamic customs and conventions. The notion that women should prioritize taking care of the home is supported by several interpretations of religious teachings. These interpretations frequently support the notion that females are involved in public affairs—including political participation and leadership roles in PRIs—is improper or undesirable. Because they feel under pressure to live up to social norms that are ingrained in their religious convictions, women are deterred from obtaining leadership positions in this cultural context. The dominant discourse frequently highlights how crucial it is for women to put their families and domestic responsibilities ahead of public participation. Many women in Rajouri therefore absorb these messages, which make them reluctant to use their rights or take part in political activities. These standards are further reinforced by the influence of elders and community leaders, who may maintain traditional beliefs. Women who want to deviate from the expected household responsibilities may be afraid of social rejection or condemnation from their

relatives and peers. Women's ambitions for leadership and active involvement in governance are suppressed as a result, which limits their capacity to successfully advocate for their needs and participate in communal decision-making. To enable women in Rajouri to participate more completely in local administration, these religious and cultural impediments must be addressed.

B. Social and cultural barriers

Several social and cultural barriers impede the effective participation and leadership of women in these local bodies:

Traditional Gender Roles:

Traditional gender norms in studied regions, particularly rural ones, require women to concentrate mostly on home management and caregiving duties. Deeply embedded in cultural norms and behaviours, these conventional roles are frequently upheld by religious teachings, family structures, and educational institutions. Girls are indoctrinated to value marriage and family over school and professional goals from an early age. Women's ambitions are constrained by this cultural conditioning, which also poses a serious obstacle to their participation in PRIs. Women who internalize these roles are reluctant to actively participate in government or to stand out for their rights. In addition to restricting their personal development, this denies the community access to the variety of viewpoints and solutions that women may contribute to local administration. Women's underrepresentation in PRIs hinders community development and maintains gender inequality. The notion that females are involved in public affairs is inappropriate or secondary is frequently the result of this cultural expectation. Women could be deterred from pursuing political careers or taking part in government as a result.

Community Resistance:

In study areas, women seeking to participate in PRIs are facing resistance from their families and communities. This resistance manifests in various forms, including verbal discouragement, social ostracism, or even threats of violence. Community leaders also propagate the idea that women's involvement in governance undermines traditional values, further discouraging participation. The resistance is rooted in cultural norms

that view women as caretakers rather than decision-makers. In societies where patriarchal values are prevalent, women's public engagement may be seen as a challenge to established hierarchies. This cultural backdrop creates an environment where women are reluctant to step into political roles due to fear of backlash or societal disapproval. Community resistance leads to significant psychological barriers for women. When women perceive that their ambitions are met with hostility, they may withdraw from political activities altogether. This withdrawal inevitably has an impact on women on a personal level yet promotes narrative that women should remain in the background, perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation.

Lack of Support Networks:

Another obstacle that makes it hard for women in Rajouri to feel empowered and to understand and manage the intricacies of local politics is the absence of support networks. Fewer women will run for office or participate in communal decision-making if they are not supported and encouraged to do so. There aren't many chances for women in Rajouri to meet other women in political arenas because they're primarily for the purpose of taking responsibility for the house. When this occurs, women's marginalization in governance is further solidified and knowledge on how to overcome obstacles remains siloed. You need strong support networks that can give you resources, advice, and encouragement if you want to be an effective participant in PRIs. Yet, many Rajouri women encounter difficulties in creating or gaining access to these networks, which impedes their involvement in politics. Isolation and a lack of motivation to participate result from women not having role models to look up to and standing together.

Limited Awareness of Rights:

When women in Rajouri lack awareness of their rights, they may refrain from participating in political processes or may be unable to utilize existing resources to their benefit. This misunderstanding sustains a cycle of disempowerment, preventing women from engaging in decision-making and obtaining necessary assistance. A significant number of women in rural and marginalized areas in Rajouri lack comprehensive knowledge of their rights, the legal framework that underpins women's empowerment, and the processes for participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This

deficiency in awareness considerably restricts their capacity to advocate for themselves and their communities proficiently. Awareness campaigns are crucial to bridging the knowledge gap. These initiatives emphasize the dissemination of information to women on their privileges, the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and the resources available for assistance. Partnering with NGOs and community groups to facilitate seminars and educational sessions empowers women in Rajouri to participate boldly in local administration.

Internalized Oppression:

As a result of internalized oppression, women in Rajouri's PRIs are unable to reach their full potential as individuals and as a group. When women stop becoming involved in politics because they are afraid of what others may think, it means their voices won't be heard when decisions are made. When women in Rajouri adopt these ideas, it might cause them to question themselves and their abilities, which in turn makes them reluctant to stand up for what they believe in or to take an active role in government. They are unable to successfully advocate for their communities or seek leadership roles because of this inner conflict. Women and other oppressed groups experience internalized oppression when they come to terms with and actively seek out ways to maintain their subordination. Within the framework of PRIs in Rajouri, women could absorb cultural signals that suggest they aren't competent or worthy of positions of leadership. Their inclination to participate in political processes is greatly affected by this psychological obstacle.

C. Administrative and Institutional barriers:

Insufficient Development of Capacity and Learning to Meet Needs:

There is a significant barrier to empowering women in Rajouri Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and that barrier is the lack of adequate training and capacity-building efforts. Women may be elected to these municipal governments through reservation rules, but they frequently assume their positions unable to handle the intricacies of governing. Ineffectiveness and dissatisfaction result from this divide, which discourages continued engagement. Without the right education, women have a harder time standing up for what they believe in, having productive conversations, and fighting for their communities. The circumstance hurts their self-assurance and the

inclusion of diverse viewpoints in decision-making, which in turn reduces the overall efficacy of PRIs in Rajouri. In place of teaching students, the practical skills necessary for effective leadership, many current training programs place a heavy emphasis on the academic components of governance, including the administrative processes and legal framework. Inadequate coverage is common in crucial areas such as financial management, public speaking, and negotiating. Furthermore, training programs could not be tailored to women's requirements, disregarding their distinct obstacles, such as juggling family duties. We must build comprehensive training programs that address these gaps if we want to empower women in Rajouri. Improving women's ability to engage in governance and advocate for their communities may be achieved by providing them with practical skills training, fostering learning settings that are supportive and designing programs that address their unique needs.

Bureaucratic Resistance

When women in Rajouri's Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) experience bureaucratic pushback, it can make them feel alone. Underrepresentation and inefficiency in local governance persist because individuals do not feel encouraged by the bureaucratic system, which discourages them from aggressively pursuing their positions. The empowerment of women in Rajouri's PRIs faces substantial obstacles due to bureaucratic reluctance. Females don't get sufficient assistance as well as honor in culture. in leadership roles in many local administrations because of the prevalence of male dominance in these institutions. When dealing with female representatives, men officials frequently display prejudices that diminish their authority and the value they bring to the table. This opposition takes many forms, including a general lack of interest in or support for women's efforts and an outright rejection of women's views. It is common for female representatives in Rajouri to face significant barriers when trying to acquire the information, resources, and support they need to do their jobs well. It is already difficult for women to deal with bureaucracy, and the processes are sometimes very complicated. Further discouraging their involvement in governance may be the long approval processes, ambiguous norms, or lack of communication. A more welcoming bureaucratic climate that recognizes and appreciates women's efforts is crucial to overcoming these obstacles. Rajouri women can be better equipped to take

part in local administration and community advocacy through the implementation of gender sensitivity training programs for male officials, the development of female mentorship programs, and the streamlining of administrative procedures.

Limited Access to Resources

In Rajouri, women who work in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have a difficult time effectively advocating for their communities since they do not have access to sufficient resources. Because of this lack of support, individuals get disengaged from the political process, which in turn perpetuates gender inequities in terms of representation and leadership. Because the resources that are designated for gender-specific initiatives are frequently either insufficient or mismanaged, women are frequently deprived of the tools that are essential to have a real effect. Women in Rajouri typically experience challenges when attempting to acquire money for programs that are designed to meet their particular needs, such as providing support for their livelihoods, education, or healthcare. Not only does this lack of access restrict their capacity to carry out vital community efforts, but it also serves to perpetuate their marginalization within the framework of government. In the absence of adequate financial means, the voices of women are not heard, and the contributions that they make to the development of the community are disregarded. A significant barrier to empowering women in PRIs is the restricted availability of resources. When it comes to the general running of PRIs, financial restrictions frequently have an impact, which makes it difficult to prioritize programs that are focused on women. When there is a lack of funding, programs that may be of tremendous service to the relationships between women along the community at large are put on the back burner. In addition, even when resources are available, access is made more difficult by bureaucratic impediments, which disproportionately affect women. They may experience lengthy procedures, an excessive amount of paperwork, or a lack of assistance, all of which will make it difficult for them to obtain the support that they want. It is imperative to guarantee that women possess sufficient utilization of assets and assistance to successfully cultivate a governance structure in Rajouri that is more inclusive. It is possible to enable women to successfully advocate for their communities and to expand their involvement in local

governance by streamlining financing procedures, boosting financial allocations for programs that are centred on women, and giving training on resource management.

Insufficient Political Support

Women in Rajouri get disillusioned and disengaged when they do not see political support for them. When women sense that political systems do not support them, they are deterred from seeking leadership posts or becoming involved in government. As a consequence of this, the perspectives of women in local administration continue to be severely neglected and forced higher to the sidelines. The advancement of women in Rajouri's PRIs cannot be achieved without political backing. But many political groups don't put women's problems first or back female candidates, so they don't have a chance to win or even be effective in office. Pervasive patriarchal attitudes and practices that devalue women's leadership are a common cause of this political will gap. Women are underrepresented in positions of power because political parties marginalize them owing to the absence of support from society. Political leaders in Rajouri are complicit in perpetuating gender inequality when they do nothing to advance gender parity. This gives the message that the views as well as input of women are unimportant. It is critical to create a political climate that encourages and facilitates women's empowerment to alter this dynamic so that women's opinions are valued and acknowledged in positions of authority.

Legal and Policy Framework Gaps

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Rajouri become places of terror and disappointment for women because laws meant to safeguard them are either not implemented or are insufficient. They are discouraged from becoming involved in government due to a lack of security, which further perpetuates gender inequities. Furthermore, grassroots initiatives in Rajouri are frequently not adequately informed on or able to put into action policies that aim to empower women. Because of this chasm, many women do not participate in PRIs because they do not know about their rights or the assets that are accessible to them. Legislation exists to advance the rights of women and gender parity in leadership roles, but enforcement and implementation gaps inevitably sabotage these gains. When it comes to discrimination among PRIs, women in Rajouri have a hard time getting their complaints heard or getting justice.

Because of the pervasive culture of impunity that this environment fosters, women face even greater obstacles when trying to speak out or get assistance for violations of their rights. This further discourages and marginalizes women, reducing their ability to take part in group decisions. Enhancing the implementation of laws that foster women's participation in politics, bolstering legal safeguards, and making sure rights are communicated effectively are all crucial steps in empowering women in Rajouri.

Short-Term and Long-Term Constraints: Relative Severity

The barriers to women's empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Rajouri district emerge at both immediate and structural levels. These can broadly be classified as short-term constraints and long-term constraints, each varying in severity and impact.

Short-Term Constraints

In the immediate term, women representatives face hurdles such as limited training, inadequate knowledge of rules and procedures, bureaucratic delays, and lack of technical support in implementing schemes. Many elected women representatives (EWRs) struggle with navigating official documentation, accessing digital platforms, and coordinating with higher administrative offices. These constraints are relatively high in intensity but low in permanence, as they can be overcome through systematic training, exposure visits, digital literacy drives, and timely institutional support (Jammu & Kashmir Rural Development Department, 2021).

Long-Term Constraints

By contrast, long-term constraints are structural and deeply entrenched, rooted in patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and community-level resistance to women's leadership. The persistence of proxy representation where husbands or male family members dominate decision-making remains one of the most severe challenges. Similarly, restrictions on women's mobility, community skepticism about their leadership, and the burden of domestic responsibilities continue to hinder their effective participation. These constraints are high in severity and enduring in nature, as they cannot be resolved by technical interventions alone; rather, they require gradual social transformation, gender-sensitive education, and collective attitudinal change (Kumari, 2014; Rai, 2011).

While short-term constraints immediately impact performance, they are remediable through institutional measures. Long-term constraints, however, are more severe as they fundamentally shape women's autonomy, voice, and agency in governance. Without addressing these structural barriers, short-term improvements risk being superficial, as the underlying patriarchal framework continues to undermine substantive empowerment.

Suggestions for Women Empowerment in Rural Areas through PRIs in District Rajouri

To further empower women in rural Rajouri; here are some concrete suggestions for how the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) might play a larger function:

1. Strengthening Women's Political Participation

- **Enhanced Representation**: Mandate rigorous implementation of the quota system for female officials in Panchayati Raj institutions (33-50%) and promote their candidacy for leadership positions, including Sarpanch.

- **Leadership Training**: Implement consistent capacity-building initiatives centred on governance, dispute resolution, and resource management.

- **Mentorship Programs**: Pair experienced women leaders with new representatives for guidance and confidence-building.

2. Economic Empowerment Initiatives

- **Skill Development Programs**: Conduct vocational training in tailoring, handicrafts, organic farming, and other locally relevant skills.

- **Promotion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**: To encourage women to start their own businesses and give them the benefit of microfinance, it is important to establish self-help groups (SHGs).

- **Market Linkages**: Facilitate connections between women entrepreneurs and regional markets to sell their products.

3. Awareness and Education

- **Awareness Campaigns**: Organize workshops to inform women about their rights, entitlements, and the functioning of PRIs.

- **Digital Literacy**: Train women representatives to use digital tools for governance, accessing schemes, and communication.

- **Adult Education Programs**: Launch literacy initiatives to empower women with basic education and numeracy skills.

4. Enhancing Social Empowerment

- **Health and Nutrition Awareness**: Conduct health camps focusing on maternal health, child nutrition, and hygiene.

- **Support for Women's Issues**: Establish women's grievance cells within PRIs to address issues like domestic violence and harassment.

- **Community Mobilization**: The society at large, including males, should rally around women's involvement and administration in PRIs.

5. Improving Governance and Accountability

- **Transparent Processes**: To guarantee that their opinions are taken into account, include women in the preparation and decision-making stages.
- **Monitoring Participation**: Install mechanisms to track female participation in Panchayat discussions and decision-making.

- **Regular Interaction**: Facilitate interactions between women representatives and higher administrative officials to resolve governance challenges.

6. Infrastructure Development for Women

- **Women-Centric Projects**: Use PRI resources to prioritize projects like girls' schools, healthcare facilities, and safe drinking water.

- **Workplace Facilities**: Develop separate spaces in Panchayat offices for women representatives to work and hold meetings comfortably.

7. Collaboration and Networking

- **NGO Partnerships**: Work with NGOs to conduct training and advocacy programs for women's empowerment.

- **Support Groups**: Create platforms for women representatives across Panchayats to share experiences and best practices.

- **CSR Engagement**: Encourage corporate entities to support initiatives targeting women's economic and social empowerment.

8. Financial Inclusion

- **Microcredit Facilities**: Facilitate access to low-interest loans for women through SHGs and government schemes.

- **Bank Accounts**: Promote financial literacy and ensure all women in PRIs have access to bank accounts for direct benefit transfers.

9. Leveraging Technology

- **Digital Platforms**: Introduce e-governance tools to streamline women's participation in Panchayat activities.

- **Online Resources**: Provide digital libraries and video tutorials on PRI functions, rights, and successful case studies of women leaders.

10. Specific Recommendations for Rajouri

- **Cultural Sensitivity**: Design initiatives that align with the cultural and social norms of Rajouri to ensure community acceptance.

- **Access to Schemes**: Actively involve women in implementing and monitoring centrally-sponsored schemes Such as the MGNREGA and Poshan Abhiyaan programs designed to help rural areas find work.

- **Focus on Tribal and Marginalized Women**: Target initiatives towards tribal communities in Rajouri to ensure inclusivity.

These suggestions aim to harness the potential of PRIs to make a sustainable environment for empowering women in Rajouri, contributing to overall rural development.

Empowerment of women in Jammu & Kashmir

To promote the empowerment of women in a variety of areas of life in the Jammu and Kashmir region, the federal government and the state legislature have implemented several strategies. An overview of these several projects is provided below:

1. **Initiatives for Raising Awareness Among Rural and Underprivileged Women**

By giving them the necessary information on important topics that have an immediate influence on their lives and communities, the awareness-raising program plan aims to empower rural and economically disadvantaged women. These initiatives aim to increase public knowledge of several social concerns, such as the place of women in society, the practice of female feticide, and the widespread problems of human trafficking and domestic abuse. Through partnerships with nonprofits that have demonstrated success in promoting the liberties guaranteed to women and children, these programs seek to establish a nurturing atmosphere for education and discussion. These groups can successfully involve women who may otherwise feel alone or ostracized because of their invaluable experience and the community's trust. Sensitive subjects that are

frequently ignored in conventional training frameworks, such as drug addiction and the abuse of women in low-sex camps, are covered in the sessions. Participants get essential knowledge through workshops, seminars, and community events that enable them to comprehend their unique rights, the legal safeguards that are accessible to them, and the resources that can support them during emergencies. Additionally, by encouraging women to help one another and share their stories, these awareness-raising initiatives aim to create a feeling of community among them. Women are given the confidence to speak out against injustices and seek assistance, when necessary, by increasing understanding of their rights and the many types of abuse and discrimination they may encounter. In the end, these programs seek to empower women by educating them, boosting their self-esteem, and promoting active involvement in their communities and local government. The awareness-raising initiatives aim to improve the lives of impoverished and rural women by tackling these urgent problems, opening the door for greater social justice and gender equality in society.

2. Condensed Educational Course Scheme for Adult Women

The condensed course program was introduced in 1958 to meet the requirements of adult women and girls who have either dropped out of school or are unable to attend the regular educational system. Its main objective is to give women and females who are fifteen years aged and above the opportunity to school, while also integrating the development of skills and vocational training to increase their employment opportunities. This program highlights how crucial it is to modify course material to fit the unique requirements of regional communities. The program successfully addresses a range of learning levels, including elementary, middle, high school, and secondary (matric) courses, by modifying the curriculum to conform to regional needs. This kind of personalization guarantees that the instruction is applicable and useful, which eventually improves participant engagement and results. The goal of the initiative is to help women in their 30s and 40s become active, contributing positively to their surroundings by increasing their confidence in addition to educating them. A committee including members from the local government schools and the implementing institution conducts the candidate selection procedure. The individuals selected for the program are more likely to be

truly in need and ready to take advantage of the educational possibilities offered thanks to this cooperative approach. Partnerships with nonprofits and academic institutions that have the requisite resources and know-how in women's and social development are used to carry out the program. The initiative seeks to provide a nurturing learning environment that may reach women nationwide, especially in underprivileged regions, by utilizing the capabilities of these organizations. In addition to educating women, this program aims to empower them so they may follow their dreams and make valuable contributions to society.

3. Family Counseling Center Scheme

The Family Counselling Centre Scheme provides crucial counselling, referral, and rehabilitation services to women facing moral peril within their homes or the wider society. This effort specifically targets individuals facing disagreements, marital problems, or other maladjustments that adversely affect their well-being. This program provides essential services to female victims at no cost, guaranteeing that financial limitations do not obstruct their access to vital assistance. The therapy offered aims to tackle many challenges that women encounter, assisting them in managing intricate family dynamics and cultural pressures. The program prioritizes a comprehensive approach to recovery, including immediate therapy as well as avenues for long-term support and resources. This encompasses recommendations to pertinent resources, including legal assistance, healthcare, and secure housing, which are essential for women endeavouring to reconstruct their lives following traumatic experiences. The Family Counselling Centre Scheme is essential in allowing women to take back their lives by dealing with the unique problems they face in difficult familial situations. The effort's overarching goal is to improve women's and families' quality of life by responding to pressing needs, strengthening adaptability, and encouraging healthy family relationships.

4. Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)

To significantly reduce the incidence of maternal and infant fatalities, the Jnani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) was designed within the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). It is an essential protective mothering endeavor; Institutional births are encouraged among pregnant women who are financially disadvantaged through this

initiative. This program ensures that these women receive the required medical assistance for the safe delivery of their child. The Just Society Year (JSY) was initiated by the Honorable Prime Minister, on April 12, 2005. Each of the states and territories of the union are now implementing it, with the states mentioned receiving particular attention and territories that are not performing well in terms of health outcomes. Cash aid is integrated with comprehensive delivery and post-delivery care as part of the JSY program, which is a program that is supported entirely by the central government. This program works to encourage women to give birth at health facilities by giving financial help. This method not only seeks to promote maternal health but also strengthens the whole healthcare infrastructure by promoting births that take place in hospitals or other medical facilities. One of the most important aspects of the JSY program is the participation of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), who act as critical connectors between the government and marginalized pregnant women. These ASHAs play a significant role in promoting access to these services in ten states that are considered to be low-performing. These states include the eight states that are part of the Empowered Action Group (EAG), as well as Assam and Jammu and Kashmir. It is also possible for Anganwadi professionals (AWWs), Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), and other community health professionals to be involved in supporting this effort in more union territory and states which qualify for the scheme. A joint effort to address maternal health concerns in India, particularly in rural and neglected regions, is exemplified by the JSY program, which is an example of collaborative efforts. This program intends to encourage women to make safe delivery choices by combining monetary incentives with community-based outreach and assistance. The ultimate goal of the program is to contribute to improved health outcomes for mothers and their newborn children.

5. Scheme for Working Women Hostels in Jammu and Kashmir

Women in the workforce should be able to find secure and easily accessible housing, and the Scheme for Working Women Hostels is making strides in this direction, especially in rural, semi-urban, and metropolitan regions where jobs are available. Because of societal and economic constraints, women in Jammu and Kashmir may

find it difficult to work outside the house; this program aims to address these issues. With the help of the scheme's day care centres, working mothers would have an easier time juggling their career and familial lives. To accomplish its goals, the plan provides funding for both the purchase and renovation of existing hostel buildings, as well as the opening of new hostels in rented spaces. Because of this adaptability, we can make available to the unique requirements of effective women in different parts of Jammu and Kashmir. In keeping with the program's standards, the hostels that get funding from this initiative are made to be welcoming to all working women, irrespective of their caste, religion, or marital status. Women in Jammu and Kashmir, a culturally diverse region, can benefit greatly from increased social cohesiveness, which in turn strengthens their feeling of community and their support system. Not only does the programme take into account women who are now working, but it also takes into account those who are currently undergoing job training. Women participating in vocational training are welcome to stay in these hostels, however they are capped at 30% of the overall capacity. While still providing a route for trainees, this provision guarantees that assisting working women will continue to be the major priority. Furthermore, the scheme considers the needs of employed mothers. by letting their children remain in the hostels with them. The institution offers a safe haven for girls and boys up to the age of 18, creating a nurturing atmosphere that helps working mothers juggle their careers and families. When it comes to meeting the housing and child care requirements of working women in Jammu and Kashmir, the Scheme for Working Women Hostels is an essential program. In addition to promoting economic independence and gender equality in the area, the initiative helps women pursue their professions by creating a safe and supportive living environment.

6. Swayamsidha Scheme: A Holistic Strategy for Women's Empowerment

In 2001, the Swayamsidha approach was launched is a crucial program that uses a self-help group (SHG) approach to empower women. In order to guarantee that women have coordinated and this program emphasizes the importance of convergence activities and provides extensive accessibility to a variety of assets and amenities. The Swayamsidha scheme's main goal is to establish a setting in which

self-help group members may take full use of all government programs and services. The program increases women's ability to better their socioeconomic circumstances by encouraging integration across several projects. In addition to offering financial assistance, this strategy promotes access to education, health awareness, and skill development. Women are encouraged to start self-help groups under the Swayamsidha system, which provides forums for group support and action. These organizations help women become financially independent by facilitating credit, income-generating, and savings activities. The program also funds capacity-building and training programs, giving women the tools they need to run their companies and take part in decision-making. Through the integration of health, education, and social welfare services, the Swayamsidha plan guarantees women a comprehensive network of assistance. This all-encompassing strategy takes into account women's and their families' general well-being in addition to economic empowerment. In conclusion, the Swayamsidha program is a big step in the right direction for women's empowerment and gender equality. The program helps women create a feeling of belonging and team work through self-help groups and planned events, enabling them to take an active role in both their personal and their communities' growth.

7. Umeed: Empowering Women in Conflict-Affected Jammu and Kashmir

The Umeed project is a flagship program that was launched in June 2013 by Rahul Gandhi. It is supported by the Indian government, with the primary goal of empowering women throughout the district of Rajouri of Jammu and Kashmir that is impacted by war. During their trip to Ameeti in Uttar Pradesh, a group of students from Jammu and Kashmir University witnessed successful models and drew inspiration for this ambitious program from those models. They spent their time there studying the successful implementation of projects that were comparable to the one being proposed. The Umeed scheme's major purpose is to empower women in India's various regions, including the state of Jammu and Kashmir, by fostering financial autonomy and self-sufficiency. This is accomplished through the provision of financial assistance. As part of the initiative, the need to encourage rural women to save money is emphasized. This is because saving money is a crucial step in the

procedure of developing their ability to create self-help groups (SHGs). By encouraging a culture of saving, the program intends to make certain that these organizations will eventually become financially viable and bankable, which will allow them to have access to loans at interest rates that are lower than the market average. This program's goal is to give women the knowledge and resources they need to effectively manage their money so they may participate actively in the economy. Not only does the Umeed initiative concentrate on empowering women financially, but it also aims to improve the whole social standing of women in their communities. This will give them the capacity to decide according to accurate information and contribute to the growth of their communities accordingly. Umeed is a program that tries to address the unique issues that women in District Rajouri of Jammu and Kashmir confront in an environment that is plagued by violence. This is accomplished by focusing on the special needs of females in the Rajouri District of Jammu and Kashmir. Females are encouraged to take responsibility for their financial destinies and to work together within their communities as part of the initiative, which fosters a feeling of agency among the female population. In a nutshell, the Umeed program is a substantial endeavour to empower women in district Rajouri of Jammu and Kashmir by cultivating financial independence through the formation of self-help organizations and saving accounts. The initiative fosters women's participation in the economy, therefore advancing the goals of equality between men and women and ecological preservation in the surrounding area.

8.   National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation (NMDFC)

Women who are members of minority communities, which include Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, and Zoroastrians, are eligible to receive financial assistance from the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC), which is dedicated to providing such assistance. This initiative provides women with the opportunity to obtain loans at a nominal interest rate of only 6 percent per annum, rendering it an affordable alternative for those in need of financial assistance. The loans are structured to be user-friendly, enabling beneficiaries to repay the amount over a five-year period. Because of this versatility, women are motivated to participate in a range of activities that provide cash without

experiencing additional forms of financial stress. A maximum loan amount of Rs. 1 lakh is available to each individual beneficiary, which can be used to invest in small enterprises, education, or other ventures that can enhance their socio-economic status. The NMDFC initiative is of particular importance because it is designed to empower women in minority communities by equipping them with the requisite resources to achieve financial independence. The initiative promotes the overall participation of women in the economic landscape by facilitating access to credit, which not only assists women in starting or expanding their enterprises. The NMDFC endeavours to cultivate an environment that encourages the fostering the growth of talents and entrepreneurial endeavours among females who come from diverse backgrounds, in addition to providing financial support. Through the integration of monetary assistance with building capacities initiatives, the business works toward the goal of providing these females with the assets that are essential for them to flourish in their different positions of employment. Generally speaking, the NMDFC project is an essential step in the procedure of building economic independence among women who come from organizations that are considered to be minority groups. The program ultimately subsidizes the broader objective of gender equivalence in society by supplying accessible financing and concentrating on their specific needs, thereby paving the way for greater financial independence and social inclusion.

9. Sher-I-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Programme (SKEWP)

One significant project started by the social welfare department in order to support several government-sponsored initiatives meant to encourage economic development in the region is the Sher-I-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Programme (SKEWP). The "Empowering Skilled Young Women, 2009" plan is a key component of this initiative since it promotes self-employment alternatives for educated but jobless youngsters. The major goal of SKEWP is to promote chances for self-employment, particularly for young women who have abilities but encounter difficulty obtaining acceptable career prospects. The program makes it simpler for ambitious entrepreneurs to obtain the financial backing they require to launch their enterprises by offering financing at a low interest rate of only 6%. This low lending rate is especially enticing to young women, who frequently experience

financial difficulties while starting their businesses. The reaction to SKEWP has been very positive, with women across the state exhibiting significant interest in the opportunities it offers. The initiative not only meets the urgent need for work, but it also empowers women by increasing their economic independence and fostering entrepreneurship. By emphasizing self-employment, SKEWP encourages a feeling of ownership and confidence in young women, allowing them to make important contributions to their communities and the local economy. In addition to financial assistance, SKEWP seeks to provide training and tools that will enable women to excel in their chosen areas. This comprehensive strategy guarantees that recipients not only have access to loans but also receive expert advice on how to maintain and expand their enterprises efficiently. Overall, the Sheri-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Programme is an important step towards empowering young women in the region. By supporting self-employment possibilities and providing financial help, SKEWP contributes significantly to female equality and expansion of the Jammu and Kashmir economy.

10. Jammu and Kashmir Social Welfare Department

The Jammu and Kashmir social welfare department takes part in a number of initiatives aimed at promoting the development and emancipation of women. Among the most important projects are those about the "development of vocational skills" and the creation of "lady vocational training centres." These programs are intended to provide women with useful skills that improve their employability and allow them to make contributions to their communities and homes. Training programs give women between the ages of 15 and 35 useful training in a variety of vocations and industries. This goal is being carried out by around 150 social welfare canters, each of which can accommodate about 25 people. These institutions usually offer instruction for 11 months, which gives women enough time to acquire thorough abilities in the trades they have chosen. A stipend of ₹100 per month is given to participants in these training programs, which acts as a minor financial incentive and helps defray some of their learning-related costs. More women participate in skill development as a result of this assistance, which eventually promotes self-reliance and independence. In an area like Jammu and Kashmir, where conventional gender norms sometimes restrict women's access to economic

prospects, the emphasis on vocational skills is essential. The Social Welfare Department supports women economically and advances gender equality in society by offering focused training. Additionally, acquiring occupational skills may benefit communities and families in a cascading manner. Women raise the level of life for their families, contribute to family income, and set an example for other women and girls in their communities as they gain skills and begin to earn a living. All things considered; the work done by the Jammu and Kashmir Social Welfare Department is crucial to improving the lot of women in the area. These initiatives assist close the gap between women and economic prospects by emphasizing skill development and vocational training, opening the door for increased social and economic empowerment.

11. Laws and Legislations for the Protection of Women in Kashmir

The government of Jammu and Kashmir implemented several legislations that protect the rights and welfare of women. By addressing social discrimination, assault, and abuse, these laws establish a framework for safeguarding women against crimes based on their gender. The state's dedication to creating a safer environment for women is shown in the important acts that have been adopted to address problems like sexual harassment and domestic abuse. These laws are used to change public perceptions toward more equality and respect as well as to discourage gender-based violence. These laws frequently incorporate support mechanisms, such access to legal assistance and rehabilitation programs for survivors, in addition to punitive penalties. These laws are accompanied by public awareness initiatives that inform communities about women's rights and safeguards, which is crucial in an area where cultural norms might impede advancement. All things considered, these legal initiatives mark important advancements for gender equality in Jammu and Kashmir, enabling urge women to defend their fundamental liberties and engage fully in society.

12. Equal Remuneration Act of 1976

By ensuring that men and women are compensated similarly for equivalent labour, the equivalent Remuneration Act of 1976 represents an essential component of legislation that aims to advance gender equality in the workplace throughout India, particularly the area of the Jammu and Kashmir region. This regulation applies to a

variety of industries, requiring companies to pay equal wages regardless of gender for employment of the same sort or similar tasks. It forbids wage discrimination and requires companies to keep wage records, giving labour regulators the authority to inspect compliance and impose penalties for noncompliance. While the Act has considerably increased awareness of pay equity and provided women in Jammu and Kashmir with a legal framework to fight for fair pay, obstacles remain in its implementation. Many women continue to experience salary discrepancies due to social norms and limited enforcement mechanisms in the region. Furthermore, while the Act covers equal pay, it does not include all elements of equal treatment for men and women in the workplace, such job security as well as promotions. Although the Equal Remuneration Act is a significant step in the right direction, more work is needed to address the broader issue of bias against women in the workplace, especially in India's Jammu and Kashmir.

13. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005

By ensuring that men and women receive equal compensation for equivalent effort, the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 is a significant piece of legislation in India, including Jammu and Kashmir, that attempts to advance equality between men and women in employment. This rule applies to a variety of industries, requiring businesses to give equal pay regardless of gender for employment of the same sort or similar tasks. It forbids wage discrimination and requires companies to keep wage records, allowing labour regulators to examine compliance and impose penalties for infractions. While the Act has considerably raised awareness about pay equity and provided women in Jammu and Kashmir with a legal framework to advocate for equitable salaries, obstacles remain in its implementation. Many women continue to experience salary discrepancies as a result of social norms and ineffective enforcement mechanisms in the region. Furthermore, while the Act covers equal pay, it doesn't include every facet of equal treatment for men and women in employment, such as job security and advancements. Therefore, even while the Equal Remuneration Act is a big step in the right direction, more work is needed to tackle the broader issue of bias against women in the workplace, especially in Jammu and Kashmir.

14. Sexual Harassment of women at workplace Act 2013

One of the most important pieces of law in the country is the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, which was enacted with the intention of preventing gender-based assault against women in the workplace and the protection of women from such harassment. The Indian Constitution recognizes a breach of the fundamental rights that are guaranteed by the constitution of the country, including the right to equality (Articles 14 and 15) and the right to live with dignity (Article 21). This Act acknowledges that the violation has occurred. It is not only a violation of the dignity of the individual, but it is also a violation of the fundamental rights that are provided by the Constitution of India. Sexual discrimination includes both of these violations. In addition to establishing a clear legal framework to confront and prevent sexual harassment, it mandates that every employer maintain a safe working environment that is free from such misconduct. Under this legislation, businesses are required to form an Internal complaints Committee (ICC) to resolve accusations of sexual assault. This is done to ensure that women have a protected space in which they may report events without fear of reprisal and in complete confidentiality. Unwelcome physical contact, approaches, or verbal and non-verbal communication of a sexual character are all examples of examples that fall under the wide definition of sexual harassment that is provided under the Act. Additionally, it highlights the need for awareness and training programs that are designed to educate employees about the rights and obligations that are in their possession. The legislation not only gives women the ability to express their rights, but it also makes employers accountable for ensuring that their workplaces are safe and respectful to all employees regardless of their gender. In addition, the Act makes it easier for women who have been harassed to seek legal remedy by creating channels for investigations and redress. Creating a work environment that is equitable and decent is the goal of this Act, which also seeks to promote active involvement of women in all sectors of the economy. Approaching the serious problem of sexual assault in employment settings will be the means by which this objective will be realized. In order to bring about a change

in the cultures of businesses and to make progress toward gender equality across the country, it is necessary that this project be successfully carried out.

15. Medical Termination Pregnancy Act of 1971

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 is a significant piece of regulation that was passed by the Indian government in 1971. This act is responsible for legalizing abortion in certain circumstances. This law enables women to terminate their pregnancies in a manner that is both safe and legal. Initially enacted to address issues related to public health and protect women from the potential hazards of unsafe abortions, the Act allows qualified medical professionals to perform abortions on humanitarian in nature or legitimate medical reasons. Instances in which the pregnancy constitutes a threat to the life or wellness of the woman, as well as instances in which the foetus is abnormal, are examples of the circumstances considered to be grounds for termination of pregnancy. Several strict provisions have been placed into the legislation in order to ensure that women are protected from harm and that they are able to maintain their health. The criteria under which abortions are authorized to be performed are outlined in this document. It does this by providing clarification and legal validation for medical professionals. The definition of certified experts who are permitted to perform abortions has been enlarged as a result of amendments to the Act. Additionally, the facilities where such operations can take place have been specified, ensuring that they take place in conditions that are safe and sanitary. The MTP Act places a major focus on punitive penalties, which is one of the key components of the act. In addition, it provides harsh repercussions for persons who are not allowed to conduct abortions, which can entail severe fines and even life imprisonment in extraordinary circumstances. Both the significance of professional monitoring in reproductive health care and the fact that this serves as a deterrent against illicit procedures are highlighted by this particular aspect. The Act has undergone changes in recent years to meet the needs of modern sexual medical care and to provide access to safe abortion services. These changes are a result of a growing awareness of women's rights and health care, which highlights the need to give women the freedom to make decisions about their bodies independently and based on factual knowledge. By upholding the rights of women to reproduce the MTP Act aims to improve gender equality, reduce mortality

among mothers, and safeguard women's health. The decriminalization of abortion under strict guidelines does this. Its adoption significantly improves women's overall health and well-being and is essential to guarantee that women have access to legitimate and dependable abortion services.

16. Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976

One important piece of Indian legislation, the Child Marriage Restriction Act of 1976, aims to lower the country's high rate of marriage between children, an activity that has serious negative social and health effects on young girls and boys. This Act raises the legal marriage age to 18 for girls and 21 for boys in order to protect minors' rights and promote their general well-being. The Act aims to mitigate the numerous adverse consequences of early marriages, such as educational disruptions, adverse health outcomes for young mothers, and restricted opportunities for personal and professional growth, by implementing these age restrictions. A pattern of poverty and the persistence of inequalities between genders are typically the outcomes of marriages that take place at a young age as young brides are typically expected to assume domestic responsibilities and forsake their own education and career aspirations. The Act designates offenses related to child marriage as cognizable, which means that law enforcement authorities have the authority to apprehend offenders without a subpoena. This provision provides the police with the authority to take immediate action against individuals who facilitate or conduct minor marriages, thereby serving as an obstruction to such practices. The legal framework also ensures that societal attitudes toward early marriage are challenged by holding parents, guardians, and others involved in arranging child marriages accountable. In addition, the Act places an emphasis on the value of awareness-raising and education initiatives, with the goal of educating communities about the negative impacts of child marriage as well as the benefits of delaying marriage until one is an adult. The financial independence of women and the development of girls' education are both vital components in the fight against marriages between children, and this initiative helps to nurture both of these aspects. It is generally agreed that the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976 represents a significant step forward in terms of the protection of children's rights, the promotion

of gender equality, and the cultivation of a future generation that is both better educated and healthier. Its successful implementation is crucial for the transformation of societal norms and the guarantee that every child has the opportunity to develop, learn, and flourish without the shackles of early marriage.

17. The Immoral traffic (prevention) Act of 1956

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956, which was renamed and updated in 1986, is a significant piece of legislation that was created in India with the purpose of preventing sexual assault and trafficking in people. The Sexual Exploitation of Males and Females Act define the sexual exploitation of both males and females as a cognizable criminal. This implies that law enforcement officials have the authority to hold offenders without a warrant. This provision is necessary to assist in the facilitation of rapid action against those who are involved in exploitation and trafficking. A more comprehensive commitment to tackling the difficulties of sex work and trafficking is reflected in the revisions that have been made to the Act. It is important to note that the legislation intends to decriminalize sex workers. This decision is made in recognition of the fact that many people pursue this line of work as a result of situations that are beyond their control, such as poverty and compulsion. The legislation strives to safeguard vulnerable populations while imposing stiffer punishments on those who exploit them. This is accomplished by changing the focus of enforcement away from the sex workers themselves and instead targeting traffickers. In addition, the Act is of fundamental relevance in the greater context of protecting women from violence and ensuring that women have the liberties to which they are entitled. As a consequence of the amendments that were made to the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961 in 1984, the act of cruelly treating women became a cognizable violation. This became possible as a result of the changes that were made. It is the intention of this revision to recognize the necessity of providing legal assistance for women who are victims of domestic violence and to ensure that those who perpetrate such actions are able to be punished in a more effective manner. The legislation was further tightened by an amendment that was passed in 1986. As long as it could be proven that the woman had been subjected to cruelty, this modification made it permissible for husbands and in-laws to be penalized in the event that a woman attempted suicide during seven years of their

marriages. To address the terrible problem of dowry deaths, which occurs when women are subjected to excessive pressure and violence as a result of dowry demands, this provision of the legislation has been enacted. By incorporating the accusation of dowry killing in the Indian Penal Code, the law not only confirms the seriousness of this crime but also offers a legal framework for holding offenders accountable for their acts. This is because the law recognizes the grave nature of the transgression. Taking everything into consideration, the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and the revisions that have been made to it constitute a substantial legal framework that is designed to safeguard persons, particularly women, from being exploited. By establishing the act of traffickers an illegal crime and enhancing the consequences for brutality and violations related to dowry payments, the law aims to produce a society that is both more just and safer. This will be accomplished by increasing the penalties applicable to both of these crimes. To empower women and promote their rights, its implementation is important. This will ultimately contribute to a larger movement in India that is fighting against gender-based violence and discrimination.

18. Jammu and Kashmir Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2018

Regulations have been passed in Jammu and Kashmir that expressly prohibits the sexual assault of women by individuals that are in situations of authority, who are in situations of trust, or who are employed by the public sector. This legislative action demonstrates an effective dedication to tackling the grave problem of sexual exploitation within the state. The legislation modifies the Ranbir Penal Code (RPC), the criminal code for Jammu and Kashmir, by including a distinct provision in Section 354E that delineates and criminalizes the crime of "sextortion." This word denotes the act of coercing someone into providing money or sexual favours by threatening to reveal proof of their sexual conduct. The modifications not only introduce this new felony but also modify Sections 154 and 161 of the Criminal Procedure Code and Section 35A of the Evidence Act. These modifications seek to guarantee that "sextortion" is addressed comparably to other acknowledged offenses under the RPC, thus strengthening the legal framework to safeguard women from diverse types of exploitation and abuse. The establishment of such laws is necessary; nevertheless, it is equally imperative to concentrate on the proper

application of current legislation rather than only enacting further laws. Comprehensive enforcement is essential for enabling women to pursue justice and safeguard themselves against as well as exploitation and mistreatment. There are many different manifestations of assault toward women, which makes it one of the most widespread violations of fundamental rights occurring all over the globe. It includes physical, mental, and sexual abuse, impacting women from various socio-economic situations. Recognizing these challenges is essential for establishing a supportive legal and social framework that empowers women and safeguards their rights. Jammu and Kashmir has the potential to make significant headway in the protection of women's dignity and constitutional rights in the region if it strengthens the legislative framework and ensures that effective implementation is carried out.

19. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) – meaning "Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child" – is a centrally sponsored scheme launched by the Government of India. The primary objective of this initiative is to raise awareness and improve the effectiveness of welfare services aimed at women and girls. It seeks to celebrate the girl child and promote her right to education. The scheme was introduced to tackle the issue of the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and is implemented through a national campaign involving targeted multi-sectoral actions in 100 districts identified as having a low CSR, across all States and Union Territories. BBBP is a collaborative effort by three key ministries: the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The programme was officially launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 22, 2015, in Panipat, Haryana. On the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child, the Prime Minister emphasized the urgent need to eliminate female foeticide.

20. Scheme for Setting Up One Stop Centres (OSC)
The Ministry approved the Scheme for establishing One Stop Centres (OSCs) on March 4, 2015, with the aim of providing comprehensive support to women affected by violence. These centres are designed to offer an integrated range of services, including medical assistance, police intervention, legal aid and case management, psychosocial counseling, and temporary shelter. One Stop Centres serve as safe spaces for women experiencing violence in any form—whether in private or public

settings, including within the family, community, or workplace. The scheme supports women who are victims of physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or economic abuse, regardless of their age, caste, class, educational background, marital status, race, or cultural identity. Women who are survivors of attempted sexual harassment or assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honour-based crimes, acid attacks, or witch-hunting can access OSCs for specialized services. These centres are being established in every State and Union Territory to ensure accessibility across the country. The OSCs are linked with the national Helpline 181 and other existing helplines, enabling women in distress to be referred and connected to the necessary services. The key objectives of the scheme are:

a. To provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, whether in private or public spaces.
b. To ensure immediate, emergency, and non-emergency access to medical, legal, psychological, and counseling services.
c. To create a coordinated response system for addressing various forms of violence against women effectively.

21. Shaadi Shagun Yojana

Launched on August 6, 2017, by the Government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Shaadi Shagun Yojana aims to encourage higher education among Muslim girls. Under this scheme, Muslim women who complete their graduation in any discipline before marriage are eligible for financial benefits. The initiative is designed to promote educational attainment among girls from minority communities, thereby empowering them through academic and economic advancement.

22. Central Victim Compensation Fund

The Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF) was established as part of the Nirbhaya initiative. This corpus fund provides financial support to States and Union Territories for implementing their respective Victim Compensation Schemes. The

objective of the fund is to ensure timely and adequate financial assistance to women survivors of crime and violence, aiding their recovery and rehabilitation.

23. Mahila E-Haat

The Ministry of Women and Child Development launched Mahila E-Haat on March 7, 2016. This bilingual online platform serves as a direct digital marketplace to empower women entrepreneurs, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). It allows them to showcase and market their products and services directly to consumers, thus leveraging digital technology to enhance business opportunities for women.

Mahila E-Haat was conceptualized to meet the entrepreneurial aspirations and economic needs of women by making digital commerce accessible and inclusive. Since its inception, the platform has recorded over 1.7 million visitors. Women across all states have been using this portal to display a wide range of products and services across 18 categories, including clothing (for men, women, and children), bags, fashion accessories and jewelry, decorative and gift items, home décor, carpets and rugs, baskets, linens and cushion cover, boxes, pottery, groceries and organic staples, natural and industrial products, educational aids, and various miscellaneous items.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the journey of women's empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Jammu and Kashmir is far from straightforward. Despite constitutional guarantees and the promise of decentralization, many elected women representatives continue to struggle with overlapping barriers that limit their ability to lead effectively. Deep-rooted patriarchy, restricted mobility, and limited educational opportunities often prevent women from emerging as independent decision-makers. On the other hand, administrative and institutional challenges such as inadequate training, bureaucratic rigidity, and restricted financial authority further dilute their potential to translate representation into real influence.

The lived realities of women also remain heavily shaped by social and cultural expectations. Traditional norms that prioritize household responsibilities over public participation continue to cast doubt on women's roles in governance. In many cases, this has led to proxy representation, were male family members control decision-making on behalf of women. Yet,

it is equally important to recognize that government initiatives such as *Umeed*, *Tejaswini*, and women-focused livelihood and training programs are gradually opening new doors. These schemes, though limited in reach, have started to provide women with skills, confidence, and opportunities that were previously inaccessible.

What emerges, then, is a picture of empowerment that is partial, uneven, and deeply contested. Short-term constraints like lack of exposure, training, and digital literacy can be relatively easier to overcome with focused interventions. But long-term challenges particularly those rooted in patriarchal culture and institutional weakness require not only policy support but also sustained shifts in mindsets and community practices. Empowerment, therefore, cannot be measured simply by the number of women elected or by the introduction of new schemes. It must be understood as a deeper transformation that strengthens women's agency, reshapes social attitudes, and ensures that institutions genuinely support their leadership.

Chapter-6
FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The investigation into the political empowerment of women in village panchayats district Rajouri opens avenues for future research and exploration. The following points outline the potential areas of future study:

Longitudinal Analysis: In order to monitor the progression of the political representation of women over time, long-term investigations are being carried out. Having this information would be beneficial in gaining an understanding of the long-lasting effects and long-lasting nature of a variety of policies and projects.

In-depth Qualitative Inquiry: A more in-depth and all-encompassing comprehension of the viewpoints of women representatives may be achieved through the collection of qualitative data, which is more extensive and comprehensive. There are a few instances of qualitative study approaches, including extensive interviews and focus group talks with participants that have the potential to uncover previously concealed difficulties and collect complex opinions.

Policy Impact Assessment: Determining the degree to which certain policies and actions that are designed to encourage the political empowerment of women are successful may be evaluated. A better understanding of the influence of programs that create the ability, activities that raise awareness about gender issues, and support networks can help guide the improvement of policies that are already in place.

Regional and Cultural Comparisons: Increase the geographical scope of the study so that it encompasses a wider variety of places and cultural situations. To provide light on how regional differences impact women's political engagement, comparative studies between nations and states might be conducted.

Intersectionality: Exploring the intersectionality of various identity markers such as caste, religion, and socio-economic status with gender. Understanding how multiple identities intersect and influence women's experiences in local governance can provide a more comprehensive picture.

Technological Interventions: This study aims to investigate the effect that technology plays in increasing the political engagement of women. The evaluation of the impact of digital platforms, the implementation of training programs that make use of online resources, and the utilization of social media for advocacy are all potential areas of investigation that may be important.

Impact of Educational Initiatives: For the most part, the focus of this investigation will be on the impact that educational programs have on the political representation of women. An area of investigation that has an opportunity to provide beneficial results would be to explore the connection between the educational qualifications about the number of women who hold positions of authority within local government entities and the efficiency of those women who hold those positions.

Community Perception Studies: Researching to comprehend community attitudes regarding female leaders. Investigating the impact of preconceptions and conventional gender roles on public perception and acceptance of women in leadership positions might inform community involvement tactics.

Comparative Analysis of Support Networks: A study is being conducted to investigate the differences in support networks for women legislators that exist across various locations. It is possible to get insight into the development of community-based initiatives by gaining an understanding of the components that contribute to effective support structures.

Global Perspectives: Increasing the scope of the discussion to include perspectives on the political leadership of women from all across the globe has been proposed. Comparative research with nations that have successfully enacted gender-inclusive laws can provide insightful insights and best practices.

Psycho-social Well-being: This study looks into the social and mental wellness of women in government positions of authority. It is possible to shed light on the overall impact of political engagement by doing research that focuses on the mental health, stresses, and coping methods of women legislators.

Role of Men in Gender Equality: It's essential to look into what men can do to help make sure that men and women have similar rights in local government. By analysing the perspectives, behaviours, and perspectives of male counterparts, one can get valuable insights into the process of constructing political settings that are more welcoming to everybody.

By looking into these possible future paths, researchers may be able to add to our richer and more complete understanding of how women can gain political power. It will then be possible to make focused changes and changes that will last.

Emerging Thematic Areas: Digital Governance, Social Media, and the Legal Landscape Post-2019

The story of women's empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Jammu and Kashmir cannot be told only through the lens of barriers. Equally important are the new and emerging shifts that are reshaping governance and participation in the region. Three interrelated dynamics digital governance, the rise of social media, and legal changes after 2019 are gradually altering the opportunities and challenges for elected women representatives.

Digital Governance.

Over the last few years, the introduction of digital platforms under initiatives such as *Digital India* has transformed how government services are delivered. From online grievance portals to direct benefit transfers and e-tendering, these reforms have the potential to make governance more transparent and less dependent on middlemen (Government of India, 2020). For women representatives, digital governance can reduce delays, provide easier access to information, and open up new spaces for participation. Yet, the reality on the ground is uneven. Low digital literacy, patchy internet connectivity in remote areas, and gendered access to technology continue to create a digital divide, which often leaves women struggling to fully benefit from these reforms (Kumar & Shah, 2021).

Social Media Influence.

Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook are no longer just for social interaction; they have become informal spaces of political debate and governance. Many women leaders

now use WhatsApp groups to coordinate meetings, share updates, and connect with their communities. Social media has, in some ways, amplified their visibility in spaces where their voices were once muted (Sharma, 2022). At the same time, these platforms carry risks women often encounter online harassment, trolling, or exclusion from male-dominated digital networks. In this sense, the digital world mirrors the same patriarchal structures women navigate offline, but with new forms of vulnerability.

Legal and Political Shifts Post-2019.

The abrogation of Article 370 and the subsequent restructuring of Jammu and Kashmir into Union Territories in 2019 brought significant changes to local governance. The adoption of a three-tier Panchayati Raj system and the extension of constitutional provisions for reservation and funding mechanisms were seen as steps to strengthen grassroots democracy (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020). For women, these changes have expanded the formal guarantees of representation and provided new avenues for leadership. However, translating legal reforms into real empowerment is a long journey, as social hierarchies and political uncertainty continue to shape how policies are actually implemented.

Towards a Broader Understanding.

These developments remind us that empowerment today is not only about overcoming traditional barriers of patriarchy and mobility but also about learning to navigate a rapidly changing governance landscape. Digital governance and social media offer new possibilities for agency, while legal reforms provide stronger foundations for participation. Yet, each of these comes with its own set of challenges that women leaders must negotiate. In this sense, the journey of empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir is both forward-looking and unfinished rooted in old struggles, but also shaped by new opportunities that are still unfolding.

Findings

- According to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), a substantial percentage of women are employed who are chosen to serve as members have significant support from their husbands. This support not only serves to improve their political status but also to offer them emotional and practical aid. These women are frequently able to utilize their political standing thanks to the influence of their spouses, which helps them manage the complexity of local politics more effectively. On the other hand, this dependence carries with it the potential to raise concerns over their autonomy and their capacity to make autonomous decisions.

- In the course of Panchayat meetings, a significant number of women choose to remain silent, frequently opting not to speak or present their votes. There is an occurrence that is cause for worry in which the opinions of women are not taken into consideration during significant decision-making procedures, and the absence of engagement in these procedures brings the problem to light. Another possible explanation for this quiet is a lack of self-assurance, a fear of being judged by male equivalents, or the impression that their thoughts are not given sufficient weight. In light of this passive engagement, it is clear that there is a pressing need for efforts that encourage women to actively contribute and express their opinions. There is a substantial information gap that exists across society with regard to the institutions that are part of the Panchayati Raj system. As a consequence of these regulatory frameworks, a significant percentage of women are unaware of the rights and responsibilities that are extended to them, as well as the opportunities that are available to them. Their capacity to successfully participate in community activities and advocate for their communities is greatly hindered as a result of this information deficiency. Efforts must be made to bridge this gap through focused awareness campaigns and educational programs that educate women about the operations of PRIs as well as the significance of these devices themselves.

- It is common for women to ascribe their lack of active engagement to several different issues, such as their apathy, a lack of knowledge, and the non-cooperation of members of their family. This self-acknowledgment of those obstacles is extremely important because it demonstrates that women are aware

of the need for change but may feel confined by the circumstances in which they find themselves. A multidimensional strategy that involves community support, family encouragement, and personal empowerment activities is required to address these difficulties.

- There is a shift occurring in the demographics of women who take part in policy research initiatives (PRIs), with younger women and women with higher levels of educational attainment emerging increasingly involved. There is a greater movement toward empowerment, and this activity is a reflection of that bigger trend. Additionally, there is the prospect of employing fresh perspectives in the area of local authority. Their education and youth would probably result in the generation of novel ideas and approaches, which will lead to an increase in the effectiveness of decision-making within the institutions that are part of the Panchayat Government.

- When contrasted to the years that preceded it, there has been a clear increase in the number of women who have participated in PRIs. Based on this tendency, there is advancement being made in achieving equal treatment of women under the control of local governments. Through increased participation, it is possible to guarantee that the thoughts and concerns of women are reflected in the making of decisions of community members, so supporting the formation of a political environment that remains more accessible. This may be accomplished by ensuring that women have sufficient representation in communities.

- The women who are taking part in PRIs are gaining more knowledge and capabilities than they had in the past. It is possible to attribute this advancement to the implementation of educational initiatives, the raising of understanding, and the growing recognition of the important role of female representation in government. All of those components have been contributing to this advancement. As these women enhance their self-confidence and learn new skills, they will be better positioned to contribute meaningfully to their communities and support essential services and initiatives.

- Female involvement in local governance has been significantly enhanced by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, a landmark legislative measure since its enactment. Consequently, it has made it possible for women to have the ability to voice their thoughts and have an impact on decision-making by providing a legal framework for the reservation of seats in PRIs. The

implementation of this legal measure has been extremely helpful in advancing gender equality in political arenas.

- Although they were elected, many female members frequently serve as "dummy representatives," which means that they may not do their jobs to the fullest extent possible. The circumstance is brought about when male family members or community leaders exercise control over their behavior, thus marginalizing the women who have been elected to positions of power. Because of these dynamics, true representation is hampered, and the efficacy of women's involvement in government is undermined.

- It is typical for male relatives of elected women to attend meetings on their behalf, which further restricts women's autonomy in PRIs. It is possible that this interference could prevent women from taking initiative or exerting their authority, which will ultimately result in a situation in which they are not seen to be genuine decision-makers.

- Many people have the misconception that women are born with certain attributes, such as honesty and the ability to successfully juggle the obligations of family and finances. When it comes to efficiently handling the finances of Panchayati Raj entities, these characteristics are very necessary. Women can bring openness and accountability to the government of local communities when they are given the authority to take on these positions.

- Women frequently enter politics not of their own free will but rather as a result of the influence of their spouses, other members of their families, neighbours, or even a leader of their caste. The occurrence of this phenomenon raises issues regarding the true agency of women in their political careers since their participation may be more about satisfying the expectations of their families than it is about achieving their own desired outcomes.

- When elected women participate in activities that are regarded as undesirable, such as working late or meeting with other men, they frequently worry that males in their communities would spread vicious stories about them. This is a phobia that is especially prominent among elected women. This fear can discourage women from fully engaging in public life, stressing the need for cultural transformations that promote women's autonomy and independence in governance.

- The Indian culture continues to be generally conservative concerning the roles

that women should play, which presents obstacles on both the political and social levels. When women make an effort to establish themselves in public areas, they frequently encounter rejection and shame from society, which can restrict their ability to participate in government.

- According to the findings of the research, male intervention is a key obstacle that prevents women from functionally effectively operating inside PRIs. Women's ability to govern effectively gets worse by this interference, which can take many forms, such as limiting their involvement in decision-making procedures and undermining their position of power in gatherings. Illiteracy, a lack of understanding, limited exposure to political processes, and reluctance to engage publicly, the main obstacles faced by women who participate in politics in PRIs are the concurrent demands of work in the field and at home, as well as their financial reliance on their male counterparts. To enable women to participate effectively in community management, these impediments must be removed.

Recommendations for the Effective Engagement of Women in the Indian Panchayati Raj Institution

➤ **Raise the level of Political consciousness:** In Rajouri, political awareness among women is minimal. The state government and local administration should prioritize educating women about political issues. Awareness programs can empower women to understand their rights and responsibilities, fostering greater political engagement. Use local media, social media, and community radio to disseminate information about political processes. Conduct workshops and training programs to aware women of their rights, roles, and responsibilities in the Panchayati Raj system.

➤ **Offer Training and Refresher Courses:** Women representatives in PRIs should receive special training and periodic refresher courses. Such initiatives help build their confidence and enhance their political knowledge, enabling them to advocate effectively for their communities.

➤ **Provide Special Facilities for Women**: The state government should establish special facilities and support systems for women members of PRIs. By informing them about their powers and rights, these measures can enhance their effectiveness in governance and promote gender equality within local bodies.

➤ **Ensure Fair Elections**: Political parties often interfere with the election and functioning of Panchayats, creating a hostile environment for female candidates. The government must take strict action against such interference, ensuring that elections are

conducted fairly and transparently.

- ➢ **Rotate Reserved Seats**: Every ten years, reserved seats for women in PRIs should be rotated. This practice helps women contestants establish their presence and build networks within local governance, facilitating their long-term involvement.

- ➢ **Honor Women Representatives**: There should be a system to recognize and reward women members for their commendable work in PRIs. Monetary rewards and public recognition can motivate women to strive for excellence in their roles.

- ➢ **Generate Awareness in Rural Areas**: It is important to raise awareness among rural communities about the new political system and the rights and responsibilities of women. This can help dismantle misconceptions and promote active participation.

- ➢ **Organize Seminars and Training Camps**: The state government conducts conferences and training sessions to raise consciousness about the benefits of the Panchayat system. Such programs can encourage more women to participate actively in PRIs.

- ➢ **Focus on Practical Skill Development**: Training should emphasize practical skills such as negotiation, public speaking, and financial management. By developing these skills, women can enhance their confidence and effectiveness in public interactions.

- ➢ **Set Minimum Educational Qualifications**: Establishing minimum educational qualifications for candidates contesting elections can guarantee that women have the necessary acquaintance and skills to serve effectively in PRIs.

- ➢ **Change Mindsets Regarding Women in Politics**: Despite constitutional provisions for women, societal mindsets must shift to support their participation in politics. Promoting positive attitudes toward women's roles in governance is crucial.

- ➢ **Enhance Coordination Between Bureaucrats and Women Representatives**: There should be improved collaboration between bureaucrats and elected women members. This can facilitate better communication and support for women in their governance roles.

- ➢ **Inspire Rural Women through Leaders:** State and national women political leaders should engage with rural women to inspire them to participate in politics. Their visibility can encourage grassroots involvement.

- ➢ **Encourage Exchange Programs for Women Representatives**: Exchange programs among women representatives across the country can foster collaboration and knowledge sharing, enhancing their effectiveness in local governance.

- ➢ **Increase Awareness Among Students**: Educational institutions should incorporate knowledge about female roles in the political process at the grassroots, State, and National levels. This can cultivate a supportive environment for future generations.

- ➢ **Mandate Representation for Women in Political Parties of the Country**: The

Election Commission should require political parties to ensure women's representation within their organizational structures. This can create more opportunities for women to participate in politics.

➢ **Transform Attitudes Toward Gender-specific Roles**: Both genders must shift their attitudes toward the traditional view that women are solely responsible for household duties. Promoting the idea of equal partnership is essential for fostering a supportive environment.

➢ **Improve Women's Literacy Rates:** Low education levels among women hinder their political participation. Efforts must focus on increasing literacy rates among women to empower them to engage effectively in the political system.

➢ **Support Women's Groups**: Mahila Mandals can play a vital role in encouraging women to contest elections. Participation in these groups can help women gain economic independence and self-confidence.

➢ **Create Supportive Family and Community Environments**: Family members and the community should provide encouragement and support for the participation of females in politics. A supportive environment is vital for effective engagement.

➢ **Prevent Proxy Participation:** Steps must be taken to prevent male relatives from proxy participating in meetings on behalf of elected women representatives. Ensuring that women speak and act for themselves is vital.

➢ **Check Male Interference**: There should be measures to prevent male members from interfering in the work of elected women. Establishing separate electorates for women, based on their population ratio, can empower them to contest elections and vote.

➢ **Change Cultural Mindsets**: The prevailing mindset and culture regarding women in politics must evolve. Challenging stereotypes and promoting women's leadership is crucial for effective participation.

➢ **Strengthen Local Government:** Strengthening local governance should be a top priority for the government. Regular, fair elections are essential for a successful local government system.

➢ **Encourage Women to Advocate for Their Rights:** It is vital to motivate every woman to speak out for her rights and demands. Providing motivation and awareness can help women build confidence and strive for their political space.

➢ **Engage Religious Leaders in Advocacy:** Religious leaders should emphasize women's empowerment in their addresses. Their influence can help change perceptions and encourage participation.

➢ **Promote Economic Empowerment**: Women must handle economic activities within their families. Economic empowerment is a crucial step toward achieving political empowerment.

- ➢ **Establish Women Panchayats:** Creating women-only Panchayats can address women-related issues effectively. This approach provides recognition and encourages women to tackle their concerns.

- ➢ **Organize Advocacy Campaigns:** NGOs should arrange seminars, workshops, and campaigns to advocate for women's rights. These initiatives can raise awareness and mobilize support for women in politics.

- ➢ **Improve Education for Elected Women:** Many elected women have limited education, often only up to primary levels. Providing educational opportunities for these women can enhance their effectiveness in governance.

- ➢ **Encourage Decision-Making Independence**: Although women participate in politics, they often rely on men for decision-making. It is essential to promote independent decision-making among women.

- ➢ **Personal Insights on Local Dynamics**: As a researcher with knowledge of Rajouri, I find it vital to analyze the local political landscape. My understanding of the area's geographical, economic, social, and political aspects informs my perspective on improving women's participation.

- ➢ **Address Societal Biases:** The biased attitudes of society toward women present a significant hurdle in their participation in PRIs. Changing these perceptions is critical for advancing women's empowerment in local governance.

- ➢ **Address Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Promote gender sensitization campaigns to change societal attitudes toward women in leadership roles. Engage with community leaders, families, and local influencers to build support for women's participation. Address issues of harassment and discrimination to create a safe and empowering environment.

- ➢ **Leverage Technology:** Use mobile apps and online platforms to train and update women representatives about governance processes. Facilitate virtual meetings and discussions to overcome geographic and logistic barriers.

- ➢ **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Set up systems to monitor the performance and participation of women representatives regularly. Identify challenges faced by women and create feedback loops for continuous improvement in policies and practices.

These measures, collectively, can empower women and ensure their effective participation in the Panchayati Raj system, driving grassroots development.

Conclusion

The notion or investigation of the empowerment of women is not novel. Gender issues have been occasionally discussed and brought to the forefront. Nevertheless, the ultimate resolution to the plight of women has not been achieved. At present, this half of the global population is grappling with discrimination, domination, exploitation,

marginalization, and harassment. It is not that their socio-political status has remained unchanged; rather, they are still denied the rights that are truly theirs as human beings. The position of females in India has been evolving. They are provided with substantial legal protection by constitutional provisions that guarantee equal opportunities and dignity. They have also demonstrated an astonishing increase in their involvement in various aspects of life over the past two years. Several laws have also been enacted to strengthen women in the areas of social, economic, legal, and political spheres. Nevertheless, this concept of empowerment has been exclusively debated in terms of "power to" rather than "power within" up until this point. Consequently, the provisions that were established to empower women were incorporated into the institutional programs and provisions. They have never been in favour of acknowledging, promoting, and incorporating them into decision-making platforms. The government has implemented numerous plans to fortify the Panchayati system, which serves as the backbone of the country in terms of population and economy, in recognition of the significance of rural India. PRIs were granted constitutional status through the 73rd Amendment. This act also guaranteed women's active involvement by providing them with a reservation. Through this provision, administrative sincerity toward women's empowerment is most effectively demonstrated. Significantly, the percentage of vacancies reserved for women in the Panchayats has now risen to approximately 33%. The strength of women representatives in the central and state assemblies was increased as a result of this endeavour, which also had a positive impact on local governance. The concept and belief in the potential and possibility of women's emancipation through political involvement have been significantly enhanced by these changes. Rural women are confronted with an even more daunting circumstance than their urban counterparts. They are subjected to a greater extent to a variety of inequalities and discriminatory practices. However, they are perceived as being indifferent and unaware of these atrocities and discriminatory practices. Additionally, they are deprived of the fundamental rights of remunerations, landholding, and making decisions at both the familial and social levels. Consequently, it is imperative to educate them regarding their circumstances and entitlements and to subsequently implement institutional measures to promote their advancement. Panchayats have been in existence for an extended period as the bodies of the people. Nevertheless, women were not a fundamental component of the system until the reservation provision was implemented. This led to an institutional transformation by increasing the strength of women in decision-making

roles from 2 to 4 percent to approximately 33-40 percent (8-10 lakh). Because so many women are now running for political office., the investigation of their social and economic profiles, political interests, aspirations, awareness, and experiences over more than a decade, as well as the factors that influence their involvement in the political arena, has emerged as an intriguing area of research. At the local level, the Panchayats in India is a distinctive decentralized administrative system. The people's political consciousness, education, and participation are facilitated by these institutions. They serve as a critical mechanism for their engagement and growth. Consequently, PRIs provide the necessary substance for the democratic system to operate in the public interest. Although the Indian democracy has been in existence for over fifty years, the common Indian woman continues to fantasize about political empowerment. In terms of both equality and progress, women's participation in the political process is very crucial. The 33 percent quota for women in panchayat institutions has made a significant first step even if a similar clause for women in Lok Sabha and state assembly is still waiting. Women who have been elected as delegates in the PRIs have had both encouraging and depressing experience. One million women first entered the public domain and are expected to bring about significant changes in a society firmly anchored in legacy. For the minority that has been ruled for ages, their level of involvement in the panchayat bodies was not especially remarkable, hence their behaviour might be illogical. Most elected women have no idea about the consequences of holding political office.

They simply comply with the directives of their male counterparts (father, sibling, father-in-law, and spouse). Illiterate women are unable to make decisions and are primarily influenced by the dominating and cunning male members who operate behind the scenes. It is crucial to consider the representation of females in the milieu of redressing gender-specific issues. The majority of the female members appear to be indifferent and oblivious to their responsibilities. They do not seem to recognize that they have been predominantly recruited into the system to represent women. In the sense that they must advocate for and support women, there is a necessity for the development of feminist consciousness. The system has confidence in the women's capabilities; however, the men may not be prepared to liberate them, as they have played a significant role in their downfall. They have been observed to demotivate and discourage others, and they frequently decline to recognize them as their leaders. The

panchayats, which are rural institutions, are undoubtedly a means of achieving the common welfare. The most effective way to plan for the development and welfare of individuals is for them to take the initiative. This is why women and minorities have been granted reserved political opportunities. Nevertheless, to achieve this, we must guarantee all individuals' full and authentic engagement. They must possess political comprehension and abilities in conjunction with the appropriate administrative environment. The current study examines the empowerment of females through the involvement of women representatives in the PRIs in the Rajouri district. The study begins with the hypothesis that the inclusion of more women in the PRIs is of no significant benefit. It was perceived as such since the majority of these new entrants to the system are illiterate, oblivious, and come from non-political backgrounds. Consequently, it was presumed that their existence was of no value to the system and to them. Above all, the age-old male-dominating system, self-constructed beliefs, and shackles of society will not provide them with the necessary courage and space to operate independently. Consequently, this investigation aims to enquire about the impact of Panchayats on women in their capacity as representatives. It also examined the character and efficacy of women's involvement in the PRIs, and the subsequent self-empowerment that resulted from this. It has investigated the degree to which the male members and the general public accept the women's operatives. The research considers women's involvement on the system and society as well as on themselves. The information for this study was gathered using both primary and secondary sources. Studies gleaned from government gazettes, conceptual books, magazines, the internet, linked research projects, newspapers, and subject-specific publications were used in data collecting. The studies also include data collected from the interview schedule of primarily randomly selected elected women members; however, their availability was a limiting factor. The interviewees consisted of prominent academicians, particularly those in the humanities and political science fields, as well as representatives of the state and central assemblies from the districts. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the village electorates to investigate the public's perceptions and comprehension of the issue of empowerment, and their reactions to women's involvement in panchayats. The data that was gathered was further corroborated by the observations of the panchayat meetings. Research has been conducted on the involvement of women in both female-headed and male-headed panchayats to determine whether the gender of the chief influences the performance and participation of the elected members. The

study examines the social, political, and economic environment as the antecedent factors that affect the participation of women in panchayats. Uniformities regarding representatives were observed throughout the study universe.

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