

**A Minor Research Project on
“EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN
GRAM PANCHAYATS – A CASE STUDY OF UDUPI
DISTRICT”**

Submitted by

Ms. NAYANA

Lecturer in Political Science

Mulki Sunder Ram Shetty College

Shirva – 574 116

Udupi, Karnataka



Submitted to

The Deputy Secretary

University Grants Commission

South Western Regional Office

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NAYANA

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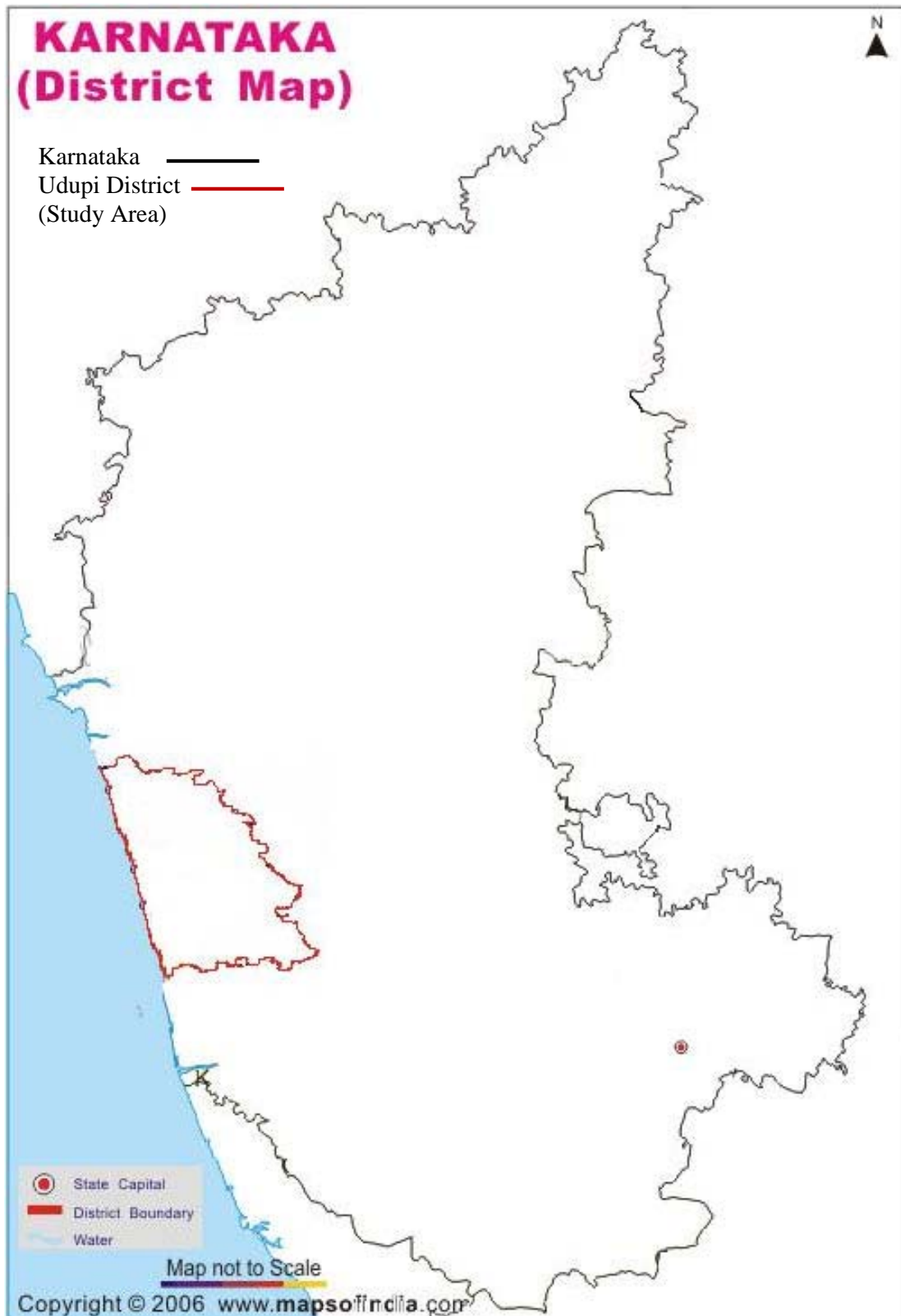
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INTRODUCTION

Since independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women in India. In this context, the constitution guarantees socio-economic and political equality and the provision of equal rights for availing different opportunities to all social groups of population, especially women. Increasing emphasis has also been placed on initiating variety of development schemes and welfare programmes for maximizing the participation of women in different activities. Various legal reforms and resolutions in the form of social Acts have also been introduced to improve the social status and empowerment of women in the Indian social system.¹ However, little progress has been visualized in the participation of women in different activities.

Recognizing the unsatisfactory progress, that has been achieved in improving the socio-economic status of women, it has increasingly been felt desirable that involving rural women in any political system and ensuring their participation in the activities of such institutions, including in matters related to certain decision-making process, would be instrumental in improving the socio-economic status and political empowerment of women.² In view of these assumptions, the introduction of reservation policy is in favour of women

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1. Mehta, G.S., Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj System, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 2002, p. 7.
 2. Government of India, Report of the Status of Women, Government of India, New Delhi, 1975, p. 4.

in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. This has been an important Government intervention for maximizing the participation of women in different activities at village Panchayat levels.

This study relates to Panchayat Raj Institutions with particular reference to the 'Empowerment of elected women representatives of Gram Panchayat' in rural local self government. Though in Karnataka the Panchayati Raj System is based on three tier system, this study is focused on the basic tier i.e., Gram Panchayat. This is done with a view to explain the basic units of Local Government in Karnataka. Here there is scope for people's participation and particularly for women's representation. It is very difficult to study in detail the whole system of Panchayat Raj, as the subject covers vast area. In this study an attempt is made to analyse the empowerment of women representatives in Gram Panchayat – A case study of thirty two Gram Panchayats in Udupi district.

The Problem:

India is known as the land of villages and even now majority of her population live in the villages. In India, women have been deprived of various kinds of opportunities and advantages by our traditional society for the past several centuries. Discrimination against women is commonly observed in providing opportunities of socio-economic development, participation in different activities and development programmes and availing the opportunities of various facilities, which are directly or indirectly linked with

bringing improvements in the life style and the quality of life, because of prevailing several social and cultural backwardness.³ Besides this, women are also denied the rights in the decision making process of their family affairs on account of several social and cultural constraints imposed by their family and the continuation of traditional system of the society. Restrictions are also imposed on participation of women in certain social and cultural programmes and even in moving outside the households for certain purposes. Due to these underlined problems imposed by our traditional form of society against women their participation in different economic activities like education, employment, political system etc. has remained very poor even after six decades of independence. The socio-economic conditions of women in rural areas have been found to be even more serious and unsatisfactory in urban areas on account of the social and cultural backwardness of the society.⁴ The traditional form of society has a distinct male bias while women are generally marginalized. In fact, the women are seriously exploited by men for certain purposes although most household related activities are only performed by women in rural areas.

Similarly, disadvantages in employment and other activities linked with the betterment of life are commonly observed in the case of women on account of the socio-cultural constraints imposed by their family.⁵ At the same

3. Altekhar, A.S., *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Motilal Banarasi Das, Delhi, 1977, pp. 28-32.

4. Mehta G.S., *Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj System*, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 1962, p. 1

5. Bhagavati, P.N., "Family Courts needs more Powers"., *Hindustan Times*, August 11, 1985, p.8.

time, restrictions imposed on women in utilizing their rights independently and restrictions on their movements are further imposing limitations in availing the opportunities of gainful employment of women. The discrimination against women in employment which is largely practiced as a result of social values tends to place women in a secondary position and under the subjugation of men.

Recognizing the unsatisfactory progress that has been achieved in improving the socio-economic status of women in the past it has increasingly been felt desirable that involving rural women in the political system and ensuring their participation in the activities of its institutions, including in matters related to decision making process would be instrumental in improving the socio-economic status and political empowerment of women. In view of these assumptions, the introduction of reservation policy in favour of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has therefore, been an important government intervention for maximizing the participation of women in different activities at Gram Panchayat levels and thereby to improve their socio-economic status.⁶

Gender inequality which the society has inherited as an age-old malpractice is not likely to vanish only by enacting a law or issuing a whip.⁷

Sexual inequality has much deeper roots traditionally, socio-economically,

6. Mehta G.S., Education, Employment and Earnings, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p. 132.

7. Pandey, Rekha and Upadhyay, N., Women in India; Past and Present, Chug Publication, Allahabad, 1990, p. 83.

educationally and psychologically which make it as a man made complex problem that needs effective measures for its early redressal.⁸

Therefore, it is imperative to study all aspects of the social problems being faced by the women while discharging their responsibilities as a participant (representative) or a chairperson in newly constituted Gram Panchayat. With new scenario of providing recent administrative and financial backup and co-ordination, women's present mode of working as shown by their initiative, administrative acumen, leadership strengths and weaknesses, decision making and ability etc. need to be investigated in detail so as to make recommendations to ameliorate the existing impasse and to facilitate empowerment of women as a whole.

In this light, the present study has attempted to examine various issues related to the implementation pattern of reservation policy and its awareness among women, the nature of participation of women members in different meetings, activities and various development programmes of Gram Panchayats, social reform and welfare activities.

8. Prasad, Hemalatha, C., Empowerment of Women in PRIs, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, March-2005, p.3.

Main Objectives of the study:

It is with a view to making an in-depth study of the Empowerment of Women Representatives in Gram Panchayats, that this study was undertaken. Among other objectives, the specific objectives of the study are as under:

1. To understand and report the socio-economic, educational background of the elected women representatives to Gram Panchayats of the area under study.
2. To study and assess the level of awareness of the elected women members about their roles and responsibilities and various development programmes.
3. To study the involvement of elected women members in decision making.
4. To study the problems and difficulties faced by the elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats.
5. To suggest suitable measures for the empowerment of women in Gram Panchayats.

Methodology:

In the completion of the dissertation, historical as well as empirical methods have been adopted. Chapter I deals with Introduction, drawn from primary and secondary sources and data relating to Chapter II Panchayati Raj Institutions in India has been mainly drawn from secondary sources.

Descriptive element is included. An unstructured questionnaire had been administered by way of interview to the elected women representatives of thirty two selected Gram Panchayats in Udupi District. The data thus gathered through this interview technique has been analyzed in Chapter III and IV which deal with Socio, Economic and Political Profile of the Respondents and Women Empowerment through Panchayats. Besides, observation of the Gram Panchayat meetings and discussions with officers and elected women representatives at various levels have been made along with collection of data from Primary Sources. Detailed interview schedule was formulated to elicit information about the participation of women representatives in Gram Panchayats. The women representatives were interviewed to understand their motivation in entering politics, participation, role in the decision making and constraints faced by them as representatives of Gram Panchayat. The elected male representatives and officials of the thirty two selected Gram Panchayats have also been interviewed.

The selection of respondents was through random sampling. The sample covered a cross-section of the elected male representatives and officials aimed at collecting information on their knowledge, experiences and views about the functioning of the women representatives in the Gram Panchayats.

Besides the interviews and discussions, observation of the functioning of the women representatives both in Gram Panchayat and their

constituencies was made. This was done by personally attending the meetings of the Gram Panchayat and through visiting the offices and residences of the respective women members of Gram Panchayat.

While the schedule for elected women representatives could be regarded as the main tool in gathering their responses regarding various aspects covered by this study, a separate schedule was used to know the opinion of the officials and the elected male representatives of Gram Panchayat. In addition to these methods, all recorded data relevant to the study were collected. The Panchayat office records have supplied information on the Gram Panchayat administration.

Lastly, Chapter V has a concluding part, which offers implications, suggestions for improvement and change.

Hypotheses:

H₁ The Socio-economic status of the individual and the family influences the empowering process; within this, the social status might have more positive bearing than the economic status, while a higher economic status alone may not have much impact, better social and economic status definitely leads to higher degree of participation.

H₂ An external environment that is conducive in terms of providing better opportunities, freedom of expression, mobility and access to information and resources etc., gives more scope for women representation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A review of the previous studies on this topic is quite essential to understand what the other research scholars have already explored through their research studies, books and articles. Prominent among them are:

- ❖ Sangeetha Purushothaman – The empowerment of women in India, Sage Publications New Delhi of women in India, Sage Publications New Delhi, 2003 p.34 – mentions that the vast literature on women and development provides the tools to analyse the social and economic status of women in Panchayats.
- ❖ G.S. Mehta – Participation of women in the Panchayathi Raj system Kanishka publishers, New Delhi, 2002, p.150 reveals that proportion of women members in Panchayats had visualized at least some degree of improvements in their social standings.
- ❖ Bidyut Mohanty, Joy Roy and Smita Gupta – Women and Political empowerment – Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, 1997 p.53 – narrates that in order to make our democracy legitimate, women will have to make their full contribution in the political main stream.
- ❖ V. Prabhavathi – Perceptions, Motivations and performance of Women Representatives Classical publishing company, New Delhi, 1991, p.121 – states that lady members found immense satisfaction of their role as elected representatives in Panchayats.

- ❖ Ashok Celly, The Pioneer - April, 1997, p.11 informs that women's participation in politics is necessary for holistic development.
- ❖ Soni Kaur Jasprit – Women empowerment – New Delhi, 2006, p.24 – points out that the women are very much responsible for their condition and status they get in society.
- ❖ Ishwar C. Dhingra – The Indian Economy. Environment and policy – Sultan Chand and Sons, New Delhi 2003, p.38 – have stated that the Panchayati Raj or local self Government is an exercise in decentralisation of administrative authority.
- ❖ Dr. Seema Singh – Panchayati Raj and Women empowerment – Ocean Books Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2003, p.230 – elaborates that the women representatives hesitate to recognize themselves as able and useful organ of the society. The feeling of inferiority complex drags their feet back to their homes.
- ❖ N. Lalith – Rural women empowerment - Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p.3 – mentions that economic empowerment is not an automatic consequence of the provision of financial resources to women.
- ❖ C. Hemalatha Prasad – Empowerment of women in PRIS – National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, 2005, p.102 – emphasizes that elected women members need to be capacitated to understand their roles, so that they can function effectively.

- ❖ S Srinivasan – Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, 2000, p.41 – cites that Panchayats at all the three levels operate through the standing committees to perform the functions assigned to them. Each committee is responsible for a number of functions.
- ❖ Anveshi Hyderabad – “Reworking Gender relations Redefining politics : Nellore village women against Redefining politics : Nellore village Women against arrack”, in Economic and Political Weekly, 1995, Jan 16-23 – illustrates that women have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources, officials and most of all, by challenging men.
- ❖ Naryanan – “Women in Panchayati Raj : Experiences from Karnataka”, in SEARCH NEWS, news letter of SEARCH, Bangalore, June 1993 p.24 – emphasizes that women are beginning to change not only the issues and values of governance but are also adopting different methods to those of men. They do not let official protocol stand in their way.
- ❖ Mukhtarun Nisa – Reforms for women, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt.. Ltd., 1992, p.39 – emphasizes that the improvements in the socio-economic status of women would remain to a large extent dependent on the social change in the values, attitudes and social structure prevailing in the country.

- ❖ F. Stephen – Women’s Political empowerment SEARCH BULLETIN, Volume xiii, issue No.4, Oct-Dec, 1998; p.44- The Case Studies of Gram Panchayat Women members – Karnataka, manifest that the political empowerment of Women through the 73rd Amendment coupled with upward political mobility of the marginalized women have encouraged them to negotiate with traditional power circles.
- ❖ M.S. Usha and Bharati. Mahapatra – Women’s Link, Women’s Empowerment Vol.8, No.2, April-June-2002, p.44 – concluded that there has been empowerment of women in certain fields. The primary goals for the participation of women in grassroots politics for participatory development will help them to increase their empowerment.
- ❖ Shiv Kumar Saini – Development of education in India, Cosmo publications, New Delhi, 1980, p-11 – elaborates that empowerment has multiple and interdependent dimensions: economic, social, cultural and political. The political situation in the country has its inevitable reaction on its educational system.
- ❖ Surat Singh and Ranbir Singh – Women’s Link in Local Governance, Vol. 10, No.3, July-Sept. 2004 p.6 – have stated that there is an urgent need for capacity building of the elected women representatives by imparting them training.

- ❖ Dr. M. Venkat Reddy – An overview of the Panchayati Raj system, Kurushetra, April 1995, p. 120 – have stated that the new Panchayati Raj Act is a revolutionary concept to build democracy at the grass roots level.
- ❖ Dr. M. Pargunan – Political empowerment of women – An illusion, Kurukshetra March – 2007, p.14 – visualize that the need of the hour to empower women folk is to provide necessary political education and proper orientation.

Study Area:

Historical Background:

This study is based on the thirty two Gram Panchayats in Udupi District. Udupi is one of the coastal districts of the Karnataka State. The various inscriptions available in the district confirm that the district was being ruled by Alupas during 7th century A.D. During the 10th and 11th centuries, Barkur of Udupi district was a central place of politics during the reign of Shantharas. Subsequently, Barkur became the capital of Alupa king Aluvendra. After Alupas the district was under Hoysalas for a short period. It came under Vijayanagar Empire later. From 1554 the Nayaks of Keladi ruled this place for nearly two centuries and it came under the spell of Mysore Sultan after the war of bidanoor during 1763 A.D. After the death of Tippu Sultan in 1799 A.D., with the fall of Srirangapattana, the place came under the rule of British and was a part of Madras province until the reorganization of States in 1956.⁹

Udupi district has the district of Uttara Kannada to its north, Shimoga and Chickmagalore to its east, Dakshina Kannada district to its south and Arabian Sea to its west.

Geographical Features:

The district has a total geographical area of 3575 kms. The district is divided into 3 taluks viz Udupi, Kundapur, Karkala and 9 hoblies. As per the 2001 census, the district has 244 habitual villages. The district has 1 town municipality, 3 municipalities and 146 Gram Panchayats.

Udupi is a newly carved district from out of the erstwhile Dakshina Kannada district. The district is geographically divided into 3 areas namely coastal belt, interior area and areas of Western Ghats. The coastal area is having very good transport and communication system with well developed infrastructural facilities. Hence the population in this area is quite thick. The important crops grown in this area include paddy, pulses, sugar cane, ground nut, coconut etc. The interiors have more of undulating territories.

9. Kothai, Krishna, Report of the Action Research on the Management of Panchayats in Udupi District, Karnataka, Ministry of Rural Development Government of India, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 11-13.

Udupi and Karkala taluks are included in this area. Important crops grown here are conconut and arecanut, The area falling under Western Ghats is covered by thick forest and mountains. Parts of Kundapur and Karkala fall in this area.¹⁰

The important rivers of the district include Seeta, Swarna, Varahi, Gangolli which originate from Western Ghats and flow west-wise to join Arabian Sea.

Population:

According to 2001 census, the district recorded a total population of 1112243 comprising of 522231 males and 590012 females. Udupi taluk had maximum of population of 529225 and Karkala minimum of 205598, Kundapur falling in between has a population of 377420. The female male proportion was 1130: 1000. The increase in population between 1991 and 2001 in the district was 7.14%.¹¹

Literacy:

According to 2001 census there was 810584 literates in the district of which 409135 were men and 401449 women. Of the total literate population 642903 live in villages, where as 167681 in towns. This is the third most literate district in the state.¹²

10. Government of Karnataka, Udupi District at a Glance, 2005-2006, District Statistical Officer, Udupi District, Udupi, p. 84.

11. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

12. Government of Karnataka, Udupi District at a Glance, 2005-2006, District Statistical Officer, Udupi District, Udupi, p. 84.

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Population:

As per the 2001 census, district comprised of 67689 Scheduled Caste population and 41613 Scheduled Tribe population. Out of the Scheduled Caste population 33345 were male and 34344 were female. Of the total Scheduled Tribe population 20572 were men and 21041 women.¹³

Income of the District (at fixed prices):

During 1995-96 the district income (at fixed prices) was Rs. 760.18 crores which in the previous year was Rs. 716.16 crores thereby recording an increase by 6.15 %. The income of the state during 1995-96 was recorded at Rs. 12302.89 crores which was Rs.11728.46 crores in previous year, recording an increase of 4.9%.¹⁴

The study region has been selected keeping in view the socio-economic and demographic considerations. With high degree of literacy particularly female literacy and higher level of per-capita household income, the study area is one of the progressive regions of the state.

The extent of political awareness is perceived to be higher in the study region with mass-media playing an active role. Demographically, the study area reveals trends which are typical of a developed region. A study of the political empowerment of women in a progressive region is considered more appropriate because participation of women in political processes in backward regions is perceived to be very low.

13. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

14. Ibid., p. 11.

Importance of the Study:

Since independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women in India. In this context, the Constitution guarantees socio-economic, cultural and political equality and the provision of providing equal rights for availing different opportunities to all social groups of population, especially women. Increasing emphasis has also been provided for initiating variety of development schemes and welfare programmes with maximizing the participation of women in different activities during the past plans.

After independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for bringing improvements in the socio-economic status and empowerment of women. Provisions were made in the Indian Constitution to provide equal rights and opportunities of socio-economic development and betterment of living for men and women; including different disadvantaged segment of population so as to establish an egalitarian and prosperous society.¹⁵

The Constitution also guarantees freedom to speech, personal liberty to participate in every kind of welfare, social economic and political activities to all Indian Citizens.

The Constitution in its article 14 ensures equality before law and article 15 prohibits any discriminatory practices. Article 15(3) empowers states for making special provisions for favour of women and children, Article 16 (1)

15. Ibid., p. 9.

guarantees equalities in matters relating to employment and appointment to any public office for all the citizens and Article 16 (2) forbids discrimination practices on account of religion, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them in providing employment under any Government or public department is concerned.¹⁶

In view of bringing improvements in the socio-economic condition of women, provisions have also been made to maximize the participation of women in different levels of education. With this notion that education is the most important instrument to bring awareness about their rights, duties, social standing and as a prime element to maximize their participation in different categories of remunerative employment etc.¹⁷

The Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution has a special bearing on the status and empowerment of women. The Constitution guarantees political equality to women through the provision of adult franchise. This reorganization was certainly a radical departure from socio-cultural norms of traditional Indian society. In addition to this, the state policy in its Article 38 also directs to states to ensure justice, socio-economic and political order and to speed up and guarantee the welfare of the people.

16. Singh, Dr Seema, Panchayati Raj and Women empowerment, Ocean Books (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2003, pp. 35-36

17. Saini, Shiv Kumar, Development of Education in India, Cosma Publications, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 11

Similarly Article 39 directly focuses on ensuring equality among men and women in providing opportunities of employment and livelihood, equal pay for similar category of work and protection of every segment of work force.¹⁸

In all, our Constitution has provided increasing initiatives for minimizing the discriminatory practices which were deeply developed before independence against women and other socially disadvantaged communities. In this manner these were the initial initiatives as brought out in the form of constitutional measures approaching towards radical departure from the persisting socio-cultural backwardness and social evils disfavoring women's interests for past several centuries of foreign rule in India.

Further, in view of providing a concrete and actual shape to the initiatives and measures underlined in the constitutional provisions for social and economic upliftment of women the economic development planning introduced in 1951 had also initiated several schemes and programmes for the development and improving the socio-economic status of women.

The outcome of the constitutional and legal measures and the initiatives undertaken under the various plans in the past for bringing improvements in the socio-economic status of women and thus achieving overall equality among men and women have certainly provided an opportunity to women to associate themselves and maximize their participation in Panchayats.

18. Report of the committee on the status of women in India, towards equality, Govt of India, December 1974, pp. 1-2.

Thus it revealed that in spite of the introduction of various development programmes and different categories of legal reforms and social Acts, there has been a little progress in improving the participation of women in different social, economic, cultural and political activities due to the existence of several social and cultural foundations restricting them for availing certain facilities, which can directly or indirectly improve their socio-economic status. The biased attitude of society which is openly disfavours women for availing certain opportunities had also deeply distorted their social status in rural areas.

However, it has to be kept in consideration that for achieving goal of bringing improvements in the socio-economic status and strengthening empowerment of women through introducing reservation policy, in each of the three tiers of Panchayats for women would mainly depend upon its pattern of implementation process and the extent of flexibilities maintained in its implementation.

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CHAPTER – II

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

Introduction

In India the focus on rural development started with the realization of the fact that the rural sector was underdeveloped. Adoption of the policy of 'Development' through planning was an apt and rational choice. The phase started precisely in 1951, with the inauguration of the First Five Year Plan.

In the year 1952 is significant as it ushered in community development projects and programmes for developing the rural sector.¹ Community development was conceived as basically a programme of the people with reasonable amount of technical and financial assistance from government.

In 1957, it was felt that people's participation was not coming forth to a desirable extent and because of that reason community development programmes and schemes could not make a satisfactory progress. In order to generate more enthusiasm and evoke more participation from the people in the process of rural reconstruction, a committee was appointed by the Planning Commission of India headed by Balwant Rai Mehta to study the working of the Community Development Programme in India and suggest how best the community development programme could be implemented and

1. Ghosh, Ratna, Alok Kumar, Panchayat System in India, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 172-173.

maintained with vigour. The committee suggested a number of reforms among which democratic decentralization was significant. This institutional arrangement, later on came to be known as the panchayati raj. The committee gave the blue print of a three tier panchayati raj system which was to be introduced in all the states and union territories of the Indian union. This provided for the village panchayat to be made statutorily responsible for a good deal of the development programme at the village level.²

Panchayat Raj System was an innovation in the field of institution building. They are basically political institutions and are seats of power and authority. Most of the development activities of the rural areas are channeled through these institutions.

Thus Panchayati Raj movement started with all fan-fare, enthusiasm, laudable objectives and hopes as the result of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee's historical report of 1957. It was widely thought that panchayati raj would bring democracy at the door of the rural people, that it would evoke people's participation in the decision making and implementing programmes and schemes which, by and large, determine their destiny. It would also accelerate the process of social and economic development and encourage development oriented leadership in the rural areas. The committee recommended the

2. Reddy, Venkat, M., An Overview of the Panchayati Raj System, Grass-roots Democracy; Challenges ahead, Kurukshetra Vol. 33, April, 1995, pp. 117-120.

creation of three tier system as the institutional arrangement to make people's participation meaningful and effective.³ Necessary legislation was to be enacted by every state to implement the panchayati raj system as a form of local self government to perform developmental administrative and political tasks. Rajasthan was the first state to implement Panchayati Raj system. Late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated it in Rajasthan on 2nd October, 1959 and in his inaugural address called Panchayati Raj as a revolutionary and historical step. Other states were supposed to follow suit. Some states such as Andhra Pradesh, Uttarparadesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Orissa and Gujarath showed serious concern by enacting necessary legislation and thereby implementing democratic decentralization scheme, while others took it easy and some showed implied reluctance. It may be recalled here that Panchayati Raj was the outcome of national consensus⁴. The committee made several recommendations in its report which was published in 1957. But revolutionary recommendation of three tier system of democratic decentralization was most significant. The three-tier system would be made of popular bodies at three levels, viz; village, block and district. The name for this scheme of democratic decentralization in rural India is Panchayati Raj. Though Panchayats in rural India have been functioning since time immemorial the way the committee envisaged their structuring and functioning make them altogether different

3. The Crucial Part of the Mehta team Report is a chapter entitled "Democratic Decentralisation".

4. B.S. Bhargava; Panchayat Raj Institutions an analysis of issues problems and recommendations of a sole Mehta committee, Artish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, p.13.

from their counterparts in the past. So, as they have to suit to the new perspectives and demand of the modern times. Thus the committee ushered in a new era of rural local government in India. Five principles were however emphasized⁵.

- a) There should be a three-tier structure of local self governing bodies from village to district levels, with an organic link from the lower to the higher ones.
- b) There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies.
- c) Adequate financial resources should be transferred to these bodies to enable them to discharge these responsibilities.
- d) All developmental programmes at these levels should be channeled through these bodies.
- e) The system evolved should be such as to facilitate further decentralization of power and responsibility in the future.

Based on these broad suggestions of the study team, the country was covered with panchayati raj institutions in the succeeding decades. The centre issued only general directions about the broad pattern of the system. In some states like Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh three-tier system

5. Agarwal, R.C., Modern Indian Constitution and Administration, S. Chand and Co., Ltd., New Delhi, 1984, p. 438.

was established in some other states like Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir one tier system was adopted and in some other States like Assam, Himachal Pradesh only two tier system was constituted. However, village panchayats are now responsible for implementing the schemes and plans and to mobilize the people's participation for the implementation of developmental schemes and projects, which form a programme for the development of the nation. The Panchayati Raj institutions appear to have been successful in the beginning. However, there was a definite decline in their functioning after 1969.⁶ The development schemes did not flow through panchayat samities. Panchayati Raj institutions were by-passed; administrative will was lacking and bureaucracy had its role in dis-associating the Panchayati Raj institutions from development programmes. There was complete lack of political will. State government postponed their elections for long durations; some states suspended them and some states replaced them by ad-hoc nominated bodies. There was perceptible non cooperation of members of parliament and members of legislative assemblies towards panchayati raj because they perceived a threat to their position from the emerging panchayati raj leadership in their respective constituencies. Thus panchayati raj institutions were not given a chance to grow themselves as effective local governments.

6. Gosh Ratna, Panchayat System in India; Historical and Constitutional Perspective, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 207-215.

Panchayati raj institutions had their own failings also. They were dominated by the rich and influenced by the high caste and local leaders. Their performance had been vitiated by political factionalism, political interference in day-to-day administration; parochial loyalties, motivated action and power consciousness instead of service consciousness.

The government of India therefore in 1977 appointed Ashok Mehta Committee to enquire into the working of Panchayati Raj Institutions and to suggest measures to strengthen them. The committee reviewed the working of various panchayati raj institutions and made significant recommendations to activate these institutions. As rightly observed by the committee," the story of panchayat has been a story of ups and downs. It seems to have passed through two phases, the phase of ascendancy 1959-69; and the phase of decline 1969-77".

The Ashok Mehta Committee in the 132 recommendations stated to give due status to panchayat raj. Some provisions in the Constitution of India deserve careful considerations in this context. It recommended two tier system of panchayat raj. Zilla Parishad at District level and mandal panchayat samiti at Block level was to be converted into the executive wing of zilla parishad. The role of grama sabha was emphasized. It recommended the separation of Nyaya Panchayats from village panchayats and also desired that the panchayat elections should be conducted on party lines and by the chief election commissioner of the state government. But only some states like

Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have accepted some of its recommendations. So it seems that between 1977 and 1987 the panchayati raj passed through a phase of neglect.⁷

The panchayat raj institutions have become ineffective bodies shattering the dream of our national leaders of the freedom struggle. After that, the former prime minister Sri Rajiv Gandhi, was trying his best to revitalize these grass root institutions which had been forgotten or utilized according to the convenience of power wielding politicians or the power brokers. To resort some respect and full blooded strength to the grass roots institutions the prime minister has mounted a big campaign. In 1985, he appointed G.V.K. Rao committee to study about panchayati raj institutions. It pointed out that the decline in the status and authority of panchayati raj institutions may be attributed to the reluctance of political leadership at state level to share power with district leadership. It suggested to entrust planning, plan implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes to panchayati raj institutions at the district and lower levels. It also emphasized to hold local elections regularly. Due to the failure of the above committees in achieving the desired results, the government of Rajiv Gandhi set up a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. L.M. Singhvi in 1986.⁸ It recommended that these institutions should be given a constitutional status. In order to do so, the 64th

7. Dubey, A.K., Panchayati Raj; The Constitutional Perspective, Kurukshetra, Vol. 43 – 44, April 1995, pp. 108-112.

8. Joshi, Uma, Panchayati Raj Institutions : need for time bound tackling, Kurukshetra, Vol.43-44, April 1995, pp. 22-24.

Constitutional Amendment Bills were moved which were passed by the Lok Sabha, on August 1989, but not approved by the Rajya Sabha. The government of P.V. Narashimha Rao took up the matter once again with the same motive. Hence, the 72 Amendment bill became the 73rd Amendment Act 1992 and was placed in part IX of the constitution. This provides for the establishment of Rural local self government at three levels. a) the village panchayat at the village level b) the district panchayat at the district level and c) the intermediate panchayat which stands between the village and district levels in the states. This was effective from 1-6-1993 and provides for the local self governments at various levels. The 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 added a new part relating to panchayats in the Constitution and provide for the following, among other things.⁹

- I. A gram sabha in a village or a group of villages.
- II. Direct election to all seats in panchayats at the village and intermediate level.
- III. Reservation of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their population for membership and office of chairpersons.
- IV. Reservation of not less than one-third of seats for women.
- V. Fixing term of five years for panchayats and holding elections within a period of six months in the event of supersession of any panchayat.

9. Sharma, K. C., Leadership in Panchayati Raj, Print well, Jaipur, 1996, p.69.

- VI. Devolution of powers and responsibility by the state legislature upon the panchayats with respect to the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice, as also for the implementation of development schemes.
- VII. Setting up of a Finance Commission within one year of the Amendment and thereafter every five years to review the financial position of panchayats and powers of state legislatures to make provisions with respect to elections to panchayats under the superintendence, direction and control of the chief electoral officer of the state.
- VIII. Local body elections are to be conducted by the state election commission.
- IX. Inclusion of the eleventh schedule to the constitution dealing with detail the items over which panchayat institutions have their jurisdiction.

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act endowing PRIs with constitutional status constitutes a significant landmark in the evolution of grass roots democratic institutions in India. The ground for panchayati raj must be prepared by giving special training and facilities to the local poor. The larger society is now left with no alibi to shirk its own range and level of responsibilities. A massive programme of political education of the rural people

and the rural political elite must be maintained for this. The new panchayati raj Act is a revolutionary concept to build democracy at the grass roots level.

PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN KARNATAKA

The state of Mysore (renamed Karnataka in 1973) was formed in 1956 by bringing together the erstwhile princely state of Mysore, four districts of Bombay, three districts of Hyderabad, two districts of Madras and the centrally administered territory of Coorg. Prior to the reorganization of states, development of local government institutions in these five areas had proceeded independently, the devolution of powers and functions having been faster in the British provinces than in the native states.

The attainment of independence introduced an important dimension of democracy. The demand for strong local self-government had been voiced during the freedom struggle. This called for substantial changes in the statutes.¹⁰ These changes were made in 1950 in Madras and Bombay and in 1953 and 1956 in Hyderabad. In the old state of Mysore, two committees, namely, the Venkatappa committee (1950) and the D.H. Chandrasekharaiah committee (1954) recommended major changes in the structure and functions of local government, but no action was taken because of the impending reorganization of states. Thus, in 1956 the new state of Mysore inherited varying patterns of local government from its five integrating areas.

10. Bhargava, B.S., 'Panchayati Raj and the Janatha', Panchayat Sandesh, Delhi, Vol. 1, Nos.

5-6, September 1977, pp. 13-15.

Consequently, in 1959, the Government passed the Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act 1959.¹¹

Post-1956 Period:

The District Development Council visualized as a coordinating body, its only substantive function being approval of the budgets of the taluk development boards. Village panchayats performed limited local municipal functions. They had the power to levy some local taxes, but these fetched only limited revenue. The taluk development boards and village panchayats had limited fiscal independence and most of their funds came from the government. The decline of interest in panchayati raj at the nation level after the passing away of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was reflected in the state also. Elections, due in 1964, were postponed till 1968 when fresh elections were held. Meanwhile, the state government set up the Kondaji Basappa committee which submitted its report in 1963, recommending the setting up of elected zilla parishads, and exclusion of MPs and MLAs from Panchayati Raj institutions and establishment of nyaya panchayats.¹² A bill based on the recommendations of the committee was introduced in the state legislature, but as the Congress Legislature party was not in favour, it was allowed to lapse. Elections, due again in 1972, were postponed and in 1975 the taluk development boards and many village panchayats were superseded and

11. With the remaining of the State as 'Karnataka' on November 1973, the Act is now called the Karnataka Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act.

12. Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India – Published by Institute of Social Sciences, Bangalore, 2000, pp. 133 – 135.

placed under administrators. Elections were held in 1978 but these bodies were dissolved once again in 1983.

Second Phase: 1987-93:

The Janata Party government in power at the Centre had set up the Ashok Mehta committee. Its report was made public in 1978. When the Janata Party came to power in Karnataka in 1983, there was a revival of interest in establishing Panchayati Raj with genuine devolution of powers and functions. This was, in fact, an electoral commitment of the party and the new government steered the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Bill through the legislature within the first year in office. But the president's assent to the bill was given only in July 1985, a delay which reflected the attitude of the Congress party which held power at the Centre.¹³ Elections under the new law were held in January 1987 and the elected Panchayati Raj institutions started functioning from April of the same year. Elections to both the newly constituted zilla parishads and mandal panchayats, it should be noted, were fought on party lines.

The Act of 1983:

The Karnataka Act of 1983 could be regarded as a landmark in the history of local government in India, as it demonstrated for the first time the willingness of a state government to divest itself of substantial powers and

13. The Government of Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act 1985, Government Press, Bangalore, p. 134.

functions in favour of sub-state institutions. The new set up was modeled on the suggestions made in the Asoka Mehta committee report, with a two-tier structure-zilla parishads at the district level, and mandal panchayats for groups of villages-with direct elections to both bodies.

Zilla Parishad:

In the process of devolution of powers, the zilla parishad enjoyed primacy as it was recognized that the district was a unit large enough to be nearly sufficient in administrative and technical capabilities-a prerequisite for real decentralization. The zilla parishad was to be fully responsible for planning and implementation of all the development programmes in the district. The mandal panchayats, on the other hand, were seen primarily as implementing agencies even though they were to have plenary powers in some matters. Zilla parishad members were directly elected, with 25 per cent of the seats earmarked for women and reservation of seats for the SCs and STs in proportion to their population (with a minimum of 18 per cent of seats for them). The MPs and MLAs belonging to the district were entitled to take part in the proceedings and had voting rights, but could not hold office. The adhyaksha and upadhyaksha were given the status and salary of minister of state and deputy minister of the state government respectively.

The official machinery of the zilla parishad was headed by its chief executive who was called the chief secretary, drawn from the Indian Administrative Service. As a deliberate policy, a person senior in service to the

deputy commissioner of the district held this post. Besides having an elaborate accounts staff under the chief accounts officer, the zilla parishad had a planning unit under the chief planning officer with four or five subject specialists. All the district level officers and the staff of development departments functioned under the zilla parishad. In effect, there was a segregation of the development and regulatory administration in the district, the deputy commissioner being kept out of the Panchayati Raj set up. A wide range of functions were entrusted to the zilla parishad, the general approach being that any activity whose area of benefit did not extend beyond the district should come under it. Besides the overall coordination and integration of development schemes and preparation of the plan for the development of the district, the zilla parishads were assigned specific responsibilities in the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, welfare of the SCs and STs and the backward classes, buildings and communication, education, public health, irrigation and ground water resources, industries, horticulture, cooperation, fisheries, rural electrification and distribution of essential commodities.

Mandal Panchayat:

A mandal panchayat was constituted for a population of eight to twelve thousand (a lower limit of four thousand was imposed for the hilly areas). It consisted of elected members, with one member for a population of four hundred, reservation for women, the SCs and the STs being provided on the same lines as at the district level. Each mandal panchayat had a whole time

secretary, appointed and paid for by the zilla parishad. Other employees (such as the sanitation staff) were paid out of its own funds. From 1987, nearly 2,500 mandal panchayats had started functioning. Mandal Panchayats were also given considerable powers. Besides the usual municipal function and provision of local amenities.¹⁴

Taluk Panchayat Samiti:

While the zilla parishads and mandal panchayats constituted the main framework of the Panchayati Raj system, a coordinating and monitoring body called the taluk panchayat samiti operated at the taluk level. It was headed by a local MLA and had all the mandal pradhans as members. The samiti had, however, no executive powers. Except for providing a position for the MLA in the structure, it did not serve any substantive purpose.

Gram Sabha:

Another institution which was given statutory recognition was the gram sabha comprising all the adults of the village. The gram sabha was expected to meet at least twice a year and at each meeting the mandal panchayat was required to present a report of its activities.¹⁵

14. Ibid., p. 135.

15. Ibid., p. 136.

Post-73rd Amendment Developments:

Towards the end of 1992, a new Congress government which had affirmed its commitment to revive Panchayati Raj institutions took office in Karnataka. As it happened, this synchronized with the passing of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992 by Parliament. As the two-tier structure which had operated in the state had to be replaced by a three-tier structure calling for a rearrangement of devolution of powers to different levels, the government decided to enact an altogether fresh piece of legislation. Indeed, Karnataka was the first state to do so after the 73rd Amendment. Thus, the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 came into force on 10 May, 1993. As could be expected, the state act conforms to mandatory constitutional requirements. Since its enactment, it has been amended on six occasions. While some of the modifications are of routine nature, there have been a few important changes.

The Act of 1993:

The State of Karnataka was one of the first states in the country which revised its Panchayati Raj Act in consonance of the provision of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Karnataka has enacted the Karnataka Panchayat Act, 1993 in April, to establish a three-tier Panchayat Raj System in the state with elected bodies at the village, taluk and district level, in keeping with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment relating to panchayat for greater participation of the people and more effective implementation of rural development

programmes. In Karnataka state, there are 20 zilla panchayats, 175 taluk panchayats and 5640 gram panchayats.¹⁶ This, the Karnataka model of Panchayat Raj System is characterized by proper devolution of powers and functions at each level.

There are a total of 914 ZP seats, out of which 325 are reserved for women members (one-third); 165 SC seats out of which 63 are for women; 47 ST seats, out of which 23 are for women; under other backward classes, category-A (80 per cent) – 243 seats out of which 89 are reserved for women and other backward classes – category B (20 per cent), 63 seats out of which 19 seats are reserved for women.¹⁷

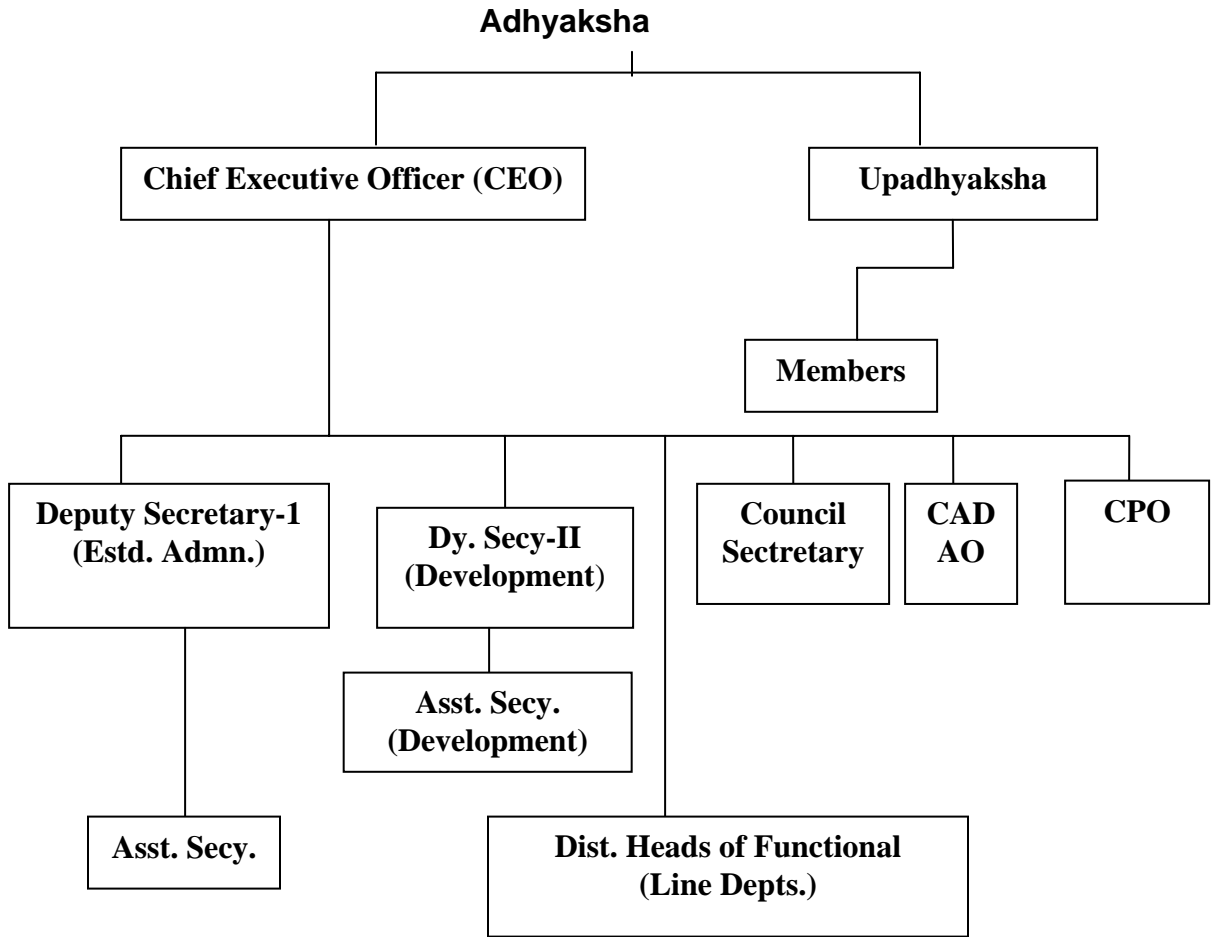
As per the new Panchayati Raj Act, Karnataka 1993, the powers of ZPs have diluted by devolving more powers to taluk panchayats. The role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has been strengthened by bestowing limited veto power over the resolutions of elected bodies with a power to refer them to government for confirmation. The Zilla panchayats are the government implementing agency at the district level through which all development programmes are executed.

16. Srinivasan, S, Role of PRIs in management of rural health, research report series – 1, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, 2000, p. 13.

17. Ibid., p. 13.

Chart No: 2.1

Organisational set-up of Zilla Panchayat¹⁸



Note:

- CAD : Chief Account Officer
- AO : Accounts Officer
- CPO : Chief Planning Officer

18. ibid, pp. 14-15

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the District Panchayat is an IAS Officer of status of the Deputy Commissioner. He is the head of the entire administrative organization of the Zilla panchayat. With the transfer of many departmental schemes to the Panchayati Raj Bodies, a large number of district level functionaries have been transferred to the district panchayat. The CEO is responsible for implementation of all development activities in the district.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the ex-officio Secretary of the General Standing Committee, finance and audit and planning committee. He nominates one of the Deputy Secretaries as the ex-officio Secretary for each of the remaining standing committees. The CEO is entitled to attend the meetings of all the standing committees.

Standing Committees of Zilla Panchayat

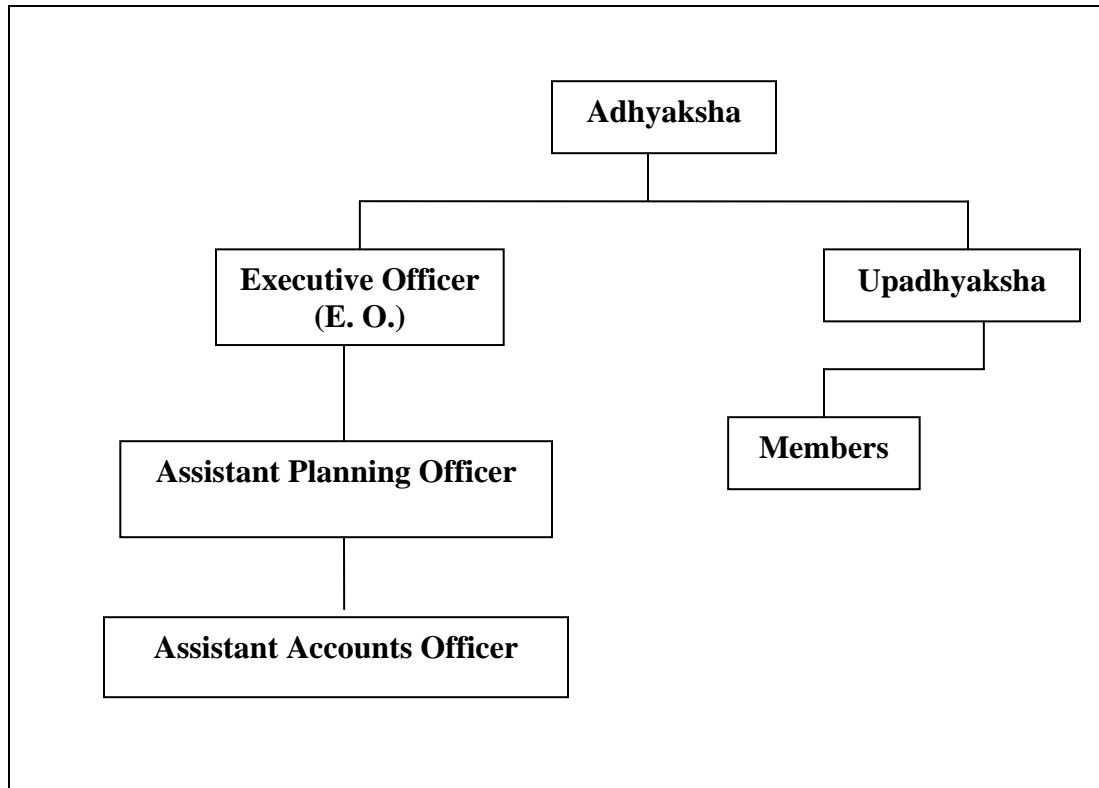
There are five standing committees functioning at the zilla panchayat (Z.P.) level. They are i) General Standing Committee; ii) Finance, Audit and Planning Committee; (iii) Social Justice Committee (iv) Education and Health Committee and (v) Agriculture and Industries Committee. Each Standing Committee shall consist of such number of members not exceeding five including the chairman. The Adhyaksha shall be the ex-officio member and the chairman of the General Standing Committee, Finance, Audit and Planning. Each other Standing Committee shall elect the chairman from among their members. The Upadhyaksha shall be the ex-officio member and chairman of Social Justice Committee.

Taluk Panchayat:

The taluk panchayats are the second-tier of Panchayat Raj System at the middle level. The total number of seats under taluk panchayats is 3340, out of which 678 are reserved for SCs (277 women reserved seats): 248 for STs (183 are reserved for women) and 1117 for Backward classes (441 for women). As per the new Act, the power of taluk panchayat is strengthened by bestowing more powers to the same. In fact, nearly 55 per cent of the scheme-wise allocations go to taluk panchayats against 45 per cent to zilla panchayat. Planning and Financing mechanism is strengthened by creating the post of Assistant Planning Officer (APO) and Assistant Accounts officer (AAO). The taluk panchayats are implementing agencies for government programmes at taluk and gram panchayat level. However, funds for taluk panchayats are routed through zilla panchayats, which leads to delay in releasing the funds.¹⁹

19. Ibid., p. 15.

Chart No: 2.2
Organisational Set-up of Taluk Panchayat²⁰



The Executive Officer (EO) at the taluk level is like the CEO at the Zilla panchayat level. He is a class-I officer with full administrative control on all the line department staff at taluk level. The appointment of a class-I officer as executive officer of the taluk panchayat helps in the improvement of the officer of taluk panchayat. He is assisted by the assistant planning officer and assistant accounts officer. The taluk panchayat is the implementing agency for

20. Ibid., p. 17.

development programmes of the government at taluk and gram panchayat level. The planning and finance staff has been provided at the taluk panchayat level to strengthen the planning mechanism. This would enable the taluk panchayat to plan and implement an integrated development of the taluks.

In the Panchayat Raj System, the taluk panchayats have been given a prime place. It has been strengthened both financially and administratively, as a result, it has assumed an ideal profitable unit of planning and implementation of the development programmes.

Standing Committee at Taluk Panchayat

There are three standing committees functioning at the taluk panchayat level. They are : (i) General Standing Committee; (ii) Finance, Audit and Planning Committee and (iii) Social Justice Committee. These committees function at taluk level to execute various development programmes. Each committee consists of such number of members not exceeding six including the chairperson as specified by the taluk panchayat elected by the members of taluk panchayat from among them.

The Executive Officer is the ex-officio Secretary of every Standing Committee. Functioning of Standing Committee relates to the establishment matters, communication, buildings, extension, water supply, health etc.

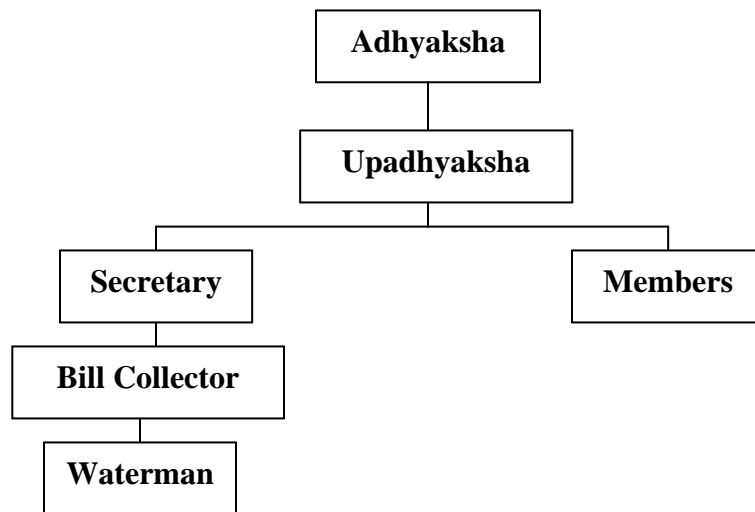
Gram Panchayat:

The gram panchayat (GP) is the grassroot level Panchayati Raj body under the three-tier PR System. The total gram panchayats in the state are

5640 with their total number of 80,631 seats, out of which seats reserved for SCs are 17,912 for STs 7571, for BCs 26,827 and others 28.321 are reserved. The main function of the GP is identification and selection of beneficiaries and spending money. In addition to this, the main resource is grant-in-aid of Rs.1.25 lakh. Financial powers are restricted to Rs. 5,000 being on any work. At present, two per cent of the stamp duty is going to taluk panchayat instead of gram panchayat. All the GPs are having secretaries to look after the administrative aspects of the village panchayat.²¹

Chart No: 2.3

Organisational Set-up of Gram Panchayat²²



21. Ibid., p. 18

22. Ibid., p. 19

Standing Committee at Gram Panchayat Level

There are three standing committees for executing the developmental programmes at the gram panchayat level such as (i) Production Committee; (ii) Social Justice Committee and (iii) Amenities Committee. Amenities committee performs functions in respect of education, public health, public works and other functions of the GP. Each committee consists of not less than three and not more than five members including the Adhyaksha and Upadhyaksha as the case may be. An Adhyaksha is the ex-officio member and chairman of Production and Amenities Committees. The Standing Committees perform the functions referred to above to the extent the powers are delegated to them by the gram panchayat.

Structure:

At the base of the Panchayati Raj structure is the Gram sabha, consisting of all the registered voters in the village. The sabha is expected to meet at least twice a year and make recommendations. Every village or group of villages having a population in the range of 5,000 to 7,000 (minimum of 2,500 in hill area) will have a gram panchayat with one member for every four hundred population. The gram panchayat will have three standing committees, which can coopt members of farmers' clubs, mahila mandals, Yuvak mandals, and so on. Every taluk will have a taluk panchayat, one member being elected for a population of ten thousand. Members of the Lok Sabha and the state Legislative Assembly representing the whole or part of the taluk and members

of the Rajya Sabha and the state Legislative Council registered as voters in the taluk will be members of the TP. One-fifth of the adhyakshas of the GPs in the taluk will also be members by rotation for a period of one year each. At the district level, there will be an elected member of the zilla panchayat for a population of 40,000 (30,000 in three hill districts)²³. Members of Parliament and the state legislature and all adhyakshas of the taluk panchayats will be members of the ZP by the virtue of office. In both TPs and ZPs, the ex-officio members will have the right to vote but not to hold office.

Reservation:

Reservations apply to both membership and offices at all three levels. The reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes will be proportional to their population with a minimum reservation of 15 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. One-third of the total number of seats and offices are reserved for the backward classes. There will be a one-third reservation for women under all categories, reserved or unreserved.

Functions:

The act spells out in three separate schedules the functions to be performed by panchayats at the different levels. These cover all the subjects included in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Interestingly, under the

23. Subha, K., "Panchayati Raj in Karnataka; Some significant development", Gandhian Perspective, Vol. vii, No. 2, Varanasi, 1994, p. 5.

act, the government may by notification withdraw, amend or add any activity covered by the entries in the schedules.

Criticism of the Act:

The act attracted considerable criticism on the grounds that it was not designed to establish Panchayati Raj institutions truly as units of self-government. In comparison with the earlier legislation of 1983, it was argued the new law marked a step backward in terms of democratic decentralization and had once again brought in local bodies which were closely controlled by the state government and functions virtually as its agency. When the new bill was being considered by the legislature, opposition parties in the Upper House has pointed out that even the preamble to the ,Act did not make a reference to the concept of self-government. The government had to give an assurance at that time that the preamble and certain other provisions would be amended later.

The elaborate provisions in the 1993 act for inspection and control of panchayats stood out conspicuously in contrast to the autonomy allowed under the earlier act. The adhyaksha and upadhyaksha of the ZP who were earlier statutorily given the status of Minister of Sate and Deputy Minister respectively, no longer enjoyed that privilege. Under the 1983 act, the adhyaksha of the ZP had been declared to be its executive head; there was no corresponding provision in the new act. Even the designation of its Chief Executive as 'Chief Secretary' had been replaced by the more conventional

'Chief Executive Officer'. In case the chief executive officer of a ZP felt that a resolution was inconsistent with law or rules, he could withhold its implementation and seek the instructions of the government. The power given to certain officials (and not to elected bodies) to remove the adhyaksha or upadhyaksha of a GP or even dissolve a GP also came in for adverse comment. These, it was felt, reflected a visible trend in the new law of strengthening the bureaucracy at different levels, with a corresponding weakening of the stature of elected bodies.

Amendments to the Act:

In the general elections to the state Legislative Assembly towards the end of 1994, the Janata Dal party was swept to power and one of the first announcements of the new government was the intention to revamp the act of 1993 so as to restore autonomy of the kind obtaining under the earlier 1983 act. With this end in view, an expert committee (the Nayak Committee) was constituted in February 1995, which submitted its report in March 1996, recommending wide ranging changes in the act of 1993.

In the light of the recommendations of the Nayak Committee, comprehensive changes were effected in 1997. The more significant among these are:

- The objective of enabling panchayats 'to function as units of local self-government' was made explicit in the preamble.

- A variety of functions relating to the electoral process such as delimitation of constituencies, determination of the number of elected members, reservation of seats for different categories, disqualification of members and publication of the names of elected members, were entrusted to the state election commission. Earlier, these were with the government or designated officials.
- The powers which had been entrusted to the divisional commissioner, deputy commissioner and assistant commissioner (hearing appeals acceptance of resignation, removal of office bearers of GPs dissolution of GPs suspension of resolutions, and so on) were withdrawn and they ceased to have any role in Panchayati Raj. While some routine functions were transferred to the executive officer of the TP and chief executive officer the ZP, the more important powers were vested in the ZPs (in respect of GPs) and the government (in case of ZPs and TPs).
- From the supervisory angle, a hierarchical relationship was established between the three tiers. The ZP has been given the power to enquire into complaints of non-performance of duty by the TP and give directions for due performance. The TP has a similar role vis-à-vis the GPs. Obligatory functions were prescribed for the first time. These amendments have gone a long way in restoring the true spirit of Panchayati Raj in Karnataka, though it is still somewhat short of what was attempted under the 1983 act. A feature which stands out by its absence is that there is no provision for

establishing own cadres of personnel in panchayats. As the position stands, panchayats have no powers of recruitment, transfer and discipline over their staff.

Recent Developments:

The question of carving out new districts from the large districts of the state had been raised from time to time and also looked into by more than one high level committee. The Janata Dal government finally decided in 1997 to go ahead. In this direction, the amendments to the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 effected during that year incorporated provisions for consequential arrangements with regard to the position of the new bodies, division of funds and liabilities, and the like. With the formation of seven new districts in 1998, the number of ZPs has gone up from twenty to twenty seven. The creation of three more districts has been shelved for the time being on account of local controversies.²⁴

Unlike the earlier set up in which the ZP played a key role, the allocation of programmes and activities in the government notification of July 1994 virtually shifted the primacy to the TP, leaving ZP primarily as a coordinating, planning and monitoring body. Naturally, the ZPs were unhappy with his situation. The Nayak Committee recommended a review of allocation of functions between the different levels of Panchayat Raj institutions.

24. Status of Panchayat Raj Institutions in the States and Union Territories of India, Institute of Social Sciences, 2000, pp. 133-144.

The need for the review was buttressed by the recommendations of the State Finance Commission. This exercise was carried out by an official committee and based on its recommendations; the government notified in September 1998 substantial changes in the inter-tier distribution and transferred a few more activities from the state sector to the panchayats. Apart from rectifying some anomalies which existed earlier, the new dispensation makes for a better balance in the distribution of power and harmonization of activities at the different levels.

A more significant development has been the issue of an ordinance in February 1999 reducing the number of GPs in the state to roughly half the present number. Under the ordinance, the population limits of a GP will be raised to 10,000-16,000 as against the present 5,000-7,000. For the hilly areas, the minimum population will be 6,000 instead of 2,500. The reason advanced by the government for this change is that under the earlier pattern the GPs were too small to be viable. They had limited financial resources and manpower and were not capable of becoming effective instruments of development. Apart from the general issue of the right balance between the accountability of the local body and consideration of administrative capability, the timing of the ordinance generated considerable controversy, some opposition parties accusing the government resorting to devious means to put off fresh elections to GPs.

A Summing Up:

It is legitimate to ask whether, judging from the experience so far, Panchayati Raj institutions in Karnataka can be considered to be really functioning as units of local self-government. Has participatory governance been established, in which the voice of the underprivileged is also heard? Has the local administration become more transparent and accountable? Has there been any change in the quality and pace of socio-economic development? Clearly, a transformation cannot occur overnight and has to evolve in a graduated manner. For this to happen, on its part, there must be sustained commitment of the state government, in particular, the political leadership, to encourage the process of devolution, to nurture local government institutions until they gain strength, to protect their autonomy and to treat them not as subordinate agencies but as partners in governance. Equally, on their part, the local bodies must demonstrate their ability to provide efficient and responsive administration and to ensure social justice in the distribution of the benefits of development.

Panchayati raj has given opportunity to a large number of people's representatives to participate actively, in local governance, including substantial numbers from SC, ST and backward classes. The representation of women has gone up sharply at all levels.²⁵

25. Uma Joshi, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Kurukshetra, April, 1995, Vol. 43-44, pp. 22-26.

There are, however, some negative features in the panchayat scene. Men from the dominant castes continue to play a major role in decision-making. Participation of SC and ST and in general, women, remains disproportionately low. The gram sabha, which is expected to be a forum for wider participation by the electorate, to secure greater accountability of the GP and to articulate the views and demands of the people, is non-functional in most places. Transparency and accountability are yet to reach a satisfactory level in local administration; there is lack of hard evidence of a decline in corruption. Indeed, it is disturbing that often there is collusive action of some elected members and officials to siphon off public funds. That the panchayats have fallen considerably short of the mandatory 20 per cent in the provision of funds for programmes benefiting the SCs and STs is a matter of serious concern; it raises doubts as to whether the cause of social justice is safe in the hands of local bodies. GPs have shown a reluctance to exploit their powers of taxation and have generally failed to mobilize local resources. Resource transfers by government mostly comprise tied funds, leaving little room to the panchayats to respond to local needs. Where panchayats have discretionary space in the choice of development activities, services and amenities have been the areas of priority; they do not evince much interest in productive activities such as agriculture, rural industry, and so on.

Decentralised planning is yet to become a reality. Panchayats at the lower levels do not have staff support needed for meaningful planning.

Planning continues to be essentially a top down process. The political commitment to decentralization remains weak - a feature which cuts across all parties. The issuing of an ordinance to reduce the number of panchayats on the eve of elections to those bodies is not healthy sign. Members of the state legislature are still not reconciled to the emergence of new centres of power. Under the Karnataka law, they are not only members of ZPs and TPs, but have the right to vote. They tend to exert an overbearing influence on these bodies, to the dislike of the elected members of panchayats. Members of the higher tier panchayats often seek to interfere in the working of their lower level counterparts. There is as yet a lack of understanding by the elected representatives of the irrespective roles and responsibilities.

Viewed overall, Panchayati Raj in Karnataka is still evolving and one cannot clearly see how it will shape in future. The Seventy-third Amendment undoubtedly marks a significant advance but its limitations are also apparent. Without question, the state law under which the Panchayati Raj bodies are constituted should be so designed as to make participatory local governance possible. But though the law can ensure the form of local government, it cannot guarantee its content. In the ultimate analysis, it is the commitment of the political parties, the elected representatives and leadership at the national and state levels to devolution of political and administrative power which will determine the character of these institutions.

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CHAPTER – III

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Socio-economic and political status of women depend much upon their basic background, characteristics pertaining to their own personality and the society in which they live. The Socio-economic profile is vital to any study as it helps in building a comprehensive and complete picture of the respondents. Several socio-economic factors have been taken into account, in this study that give a good idea about the background and the profile of the women gram panchayat members under study. For drawing up a coherent picture of the participation of women in political activities, a sample of 255 women members of gram panchayats was randomly drawn from the members list of 32 gram panchayats. Another sample of 40 male members and 30 officials was also randomly drawn from the same member's list to study the attitude of men towards women. The individual profile is derived by looking at factors such as age, caste, religion, marital status, type of the family, educational level, occupation and annual income of the respondents. The education and occupation level of the respondent's husband is also taken into account to gauge the economic status of the family.

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

The profile of background characteristics of respondents covered by this study is presented here under:

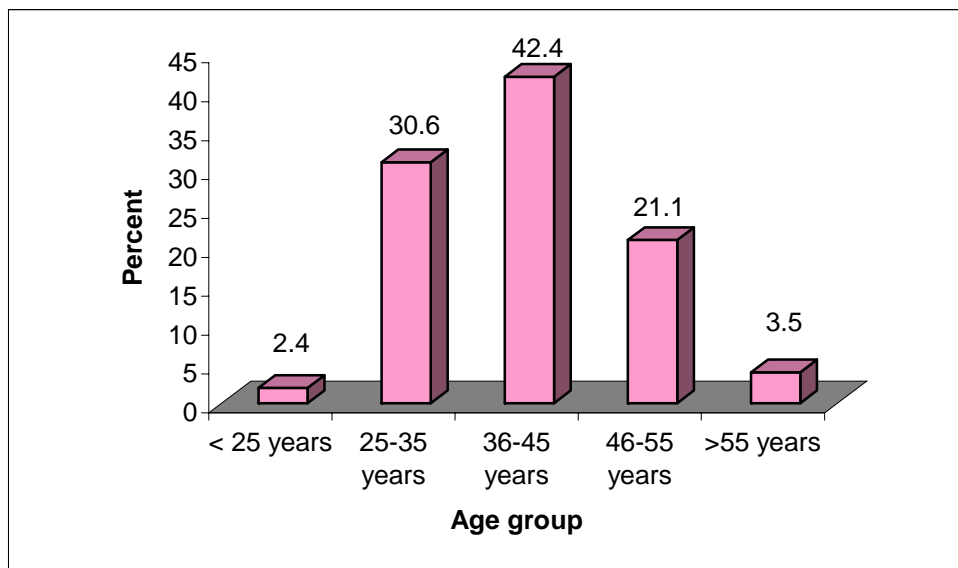
Table: 3.1

Age-wise Distribution of the Respondents

Age group	Number	Percent
< 25 years	06	2.4
25-35 years	78	30.6
36-45 years	108	42.4
46-55 years	54	21.1
>55 years	09	3.5
Total	255	100

$$\bar{X} = 37$$

Figure No. 3.1: Age-wise Distribution of the Respondents



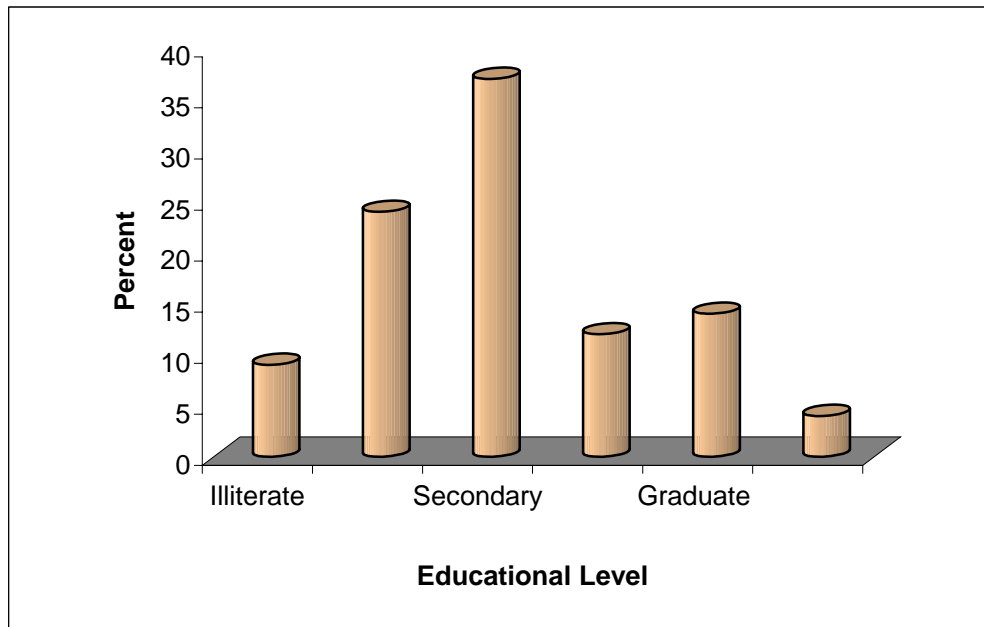
An analysis of the present age of women members as presented in Table 3.1 and figures 3.1 reveals that about 42.4 per cent of women were below 45 years of age, 21.1 per cent of women were above 45 years and 3.5 per cent of women were above 55 years of age. About 30.6 per cent of women were below 35 years of age, and 2.4 per cent of women were less than 25 years of age. This shows that marriage and motherhood do not seem to inhibit women from seeking a political career. The mean age of women in gram panchayat is 37 years, which indicates that the younger generations of women have realized the value of political participation. They are more mobile in comparison with the older generation and have broken the traditional barriers.

Table No: 3.2

Educational Status of Respondents

Educational Level	Number	Percent
Illiterate	24	9.4
Primary	60	23.5
Secondary	96	37.7
Pre university	30	11.8
Graduate	36	14.1
Post graduate	09	3.5
Total	255	100

Figure No. 3.2: Educational Status of Respondents



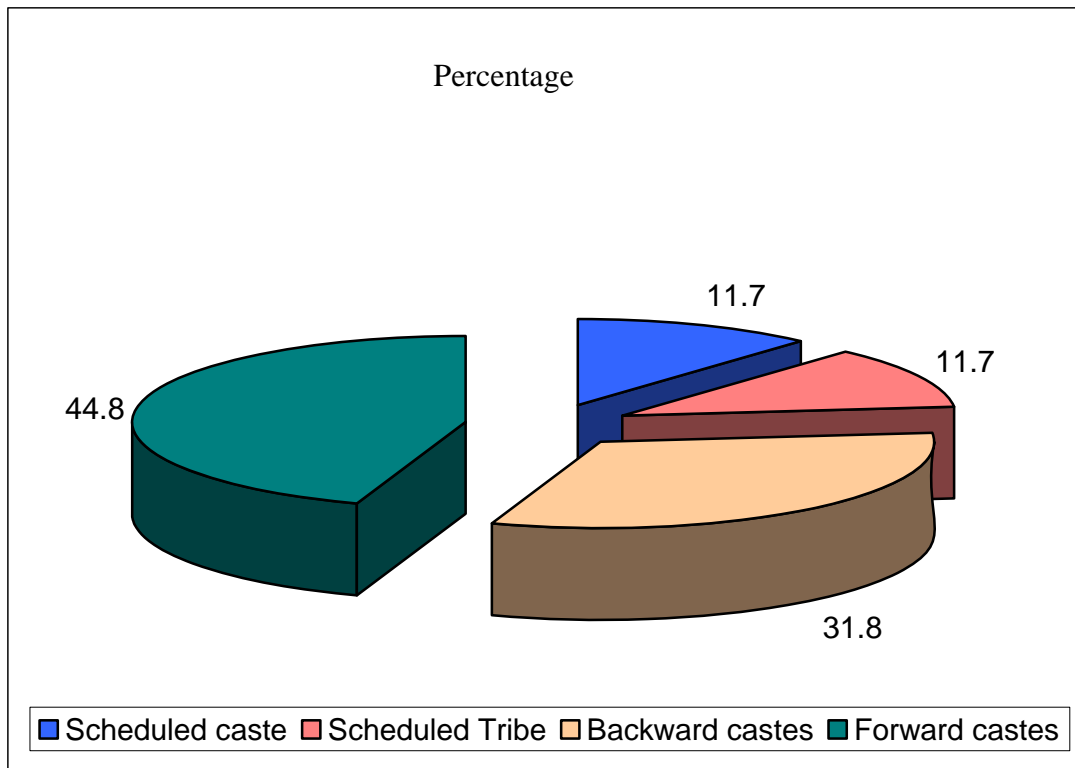
The educational background of the women gram panchayat members illustrated in Table 3.2 and figure 3.2 shows that the 37.7 per cent had education up to secondary level, 23.5 per cent had primary level education, while 14.1 per cent were graduates, 11.8 per cent had education up to pre university level, while 9.4 per cent were illiterates and 3.5 per cent were post graduates. This illustrates that the educational level of the women members is lower. It clearly indicates that the participation of respondents with below secondary education tends to be more in a decentralized democracy. It is an accepted fact that the overall educational status of female is quite low in all the Gram Panchayats.

Table No. : 3.3

Caste-wise classification

Caste level	Number	Percent
Scheduled caste	30	11.7
Scheduled Tribe	30	11.7
Backward castes	81	31.8
Forward castes	114	44.8
Total	255	100

Figure No. 3.3: Caste-Wise Classification



Caste structure of respondents has been depicted in Table No. 3.3 and figure 3.3. It shows that about 44.8 per cent of the members belonged to the forward castes/communities. The representation for the scheduled caste is 11.7 percent, while scheduled tribe is 11.7 percent and 31.8 per cent for the backward castes. The one-third representation of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women in the gram panchayat clearly indicates that the reservation of seats for them in general and women in particular ensured the participation of women. It may be pointed out that 73rd constitutional amendment introduced reservation of seats for women in gram panchayats. This reservation was based on population of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes. It is instrumental in bringing the socially and economically backward sections of the people to the main stream of politics.

Table No: 3.4

Religion-Wise Classification of Respondents

Religion	Number	Percentage
Hindus	192	75.3
Christians	54	21.2
Muslims	09	3.5
Total	255	100

Figure No. 3.4: Religion-wise classification of Respondents

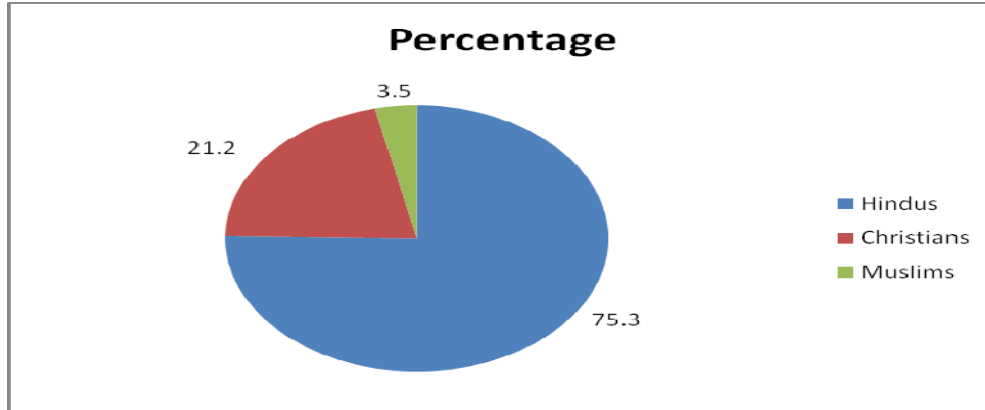
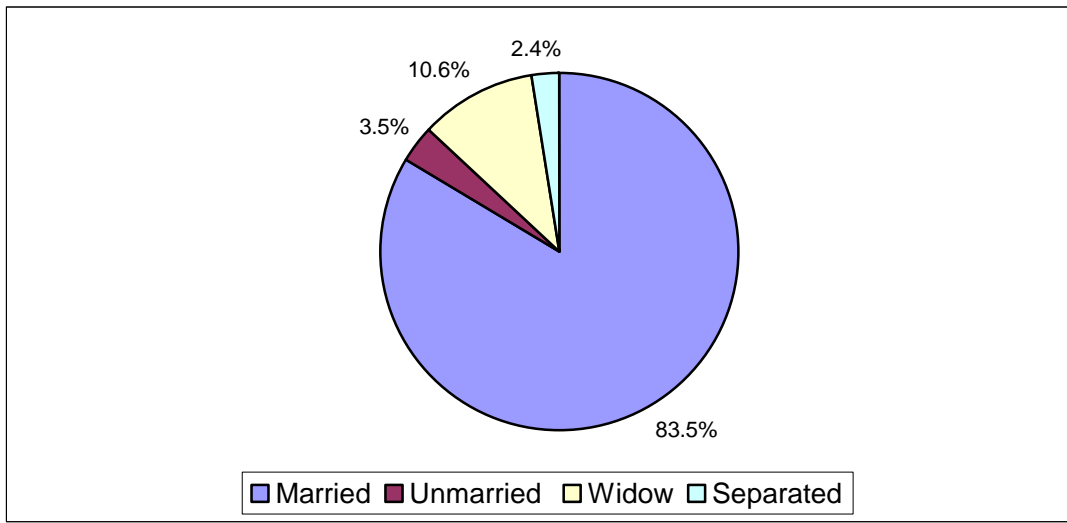


Table No. 3.4 and figure 3.4 presents religion-wise structure of respondents. The religion-wise data shows that majority of women members were Hindus who numbered 75.3 per cent. While Christian women members were 21.2 per cent and Muslim members were 3.5 per cent. This result is an outcome of population structure of the villages. It may be observed that the Christians had a better representation than Muslim members in the Gram Panchayats.

**Table No. : 3.5
Marital Status of Respondents**

Marital Status	Number	Percentage
Married	213	83.5
Unmarried	09	3.5
Widow	27	10.6
Separated	06	2.4
Total	255	100

Figure No. 3.5: Marital Status of Respondents



Data on the marital status of women members are given in Table and figure No. 3.5. It shows that 83.5 per cent of women members were married. Only 3.5 percent of the members were unmarried. Among the married respondents, nine were widows. Two members of the sample study were separated. The table reveals that majority are married women and they are able to balance their roles as gram panchayat members/vice presidents/presidents with their role in the family. The participation of more number of widows indicates their faith in the political empowerment of women through grass-roots level democratic institutions.

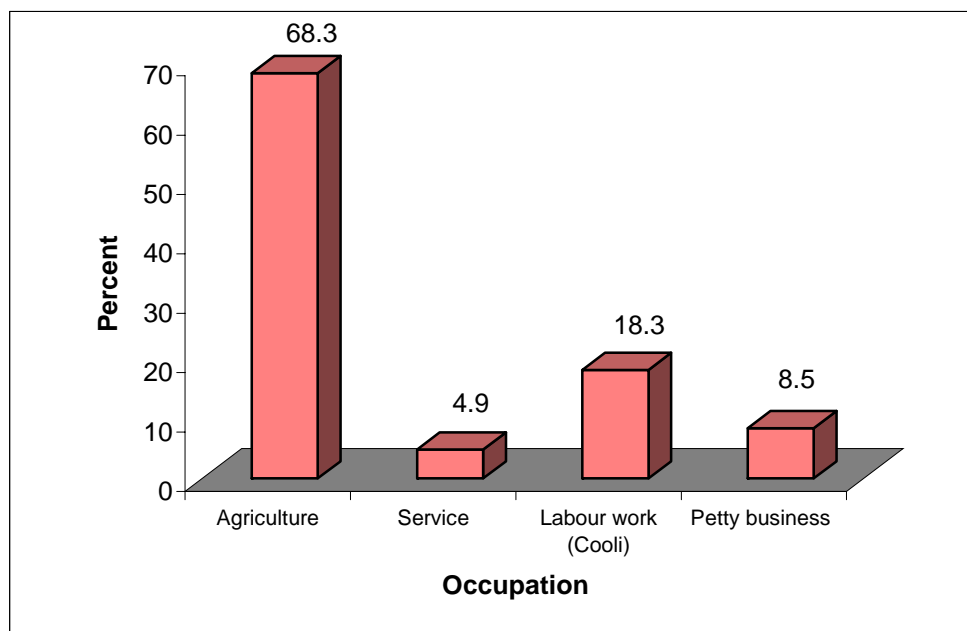
Table No.: 3.6

Husband's Occupation of the Respondents

Occupation	Number	Percent
Agriculture	168	68.3
Service	12	4.9
Labour work (Cooli)	45	18.3
Petty business	21	8.5
Total	*246	100

***Note:**Total number of respondents was not equal to 255 as 9 respondents were unmarried

Figure No. 3.6: Husband's occupation of the Respondents



The occupational status of the spouses of the women gram panchayat members illustrated in Table No. 3.6 and Figure No. 3.6 shows that the

primary occupation of the majority of them,i.e., 68.3 per cent was agriculture, 18.3 per cent was labour work, 8.5 per cent was petty business and 4.9 per cent was governmental service. It revealed that a majority of gram panchayat members' spouses were engaged in the agricultural activities as cultivators.

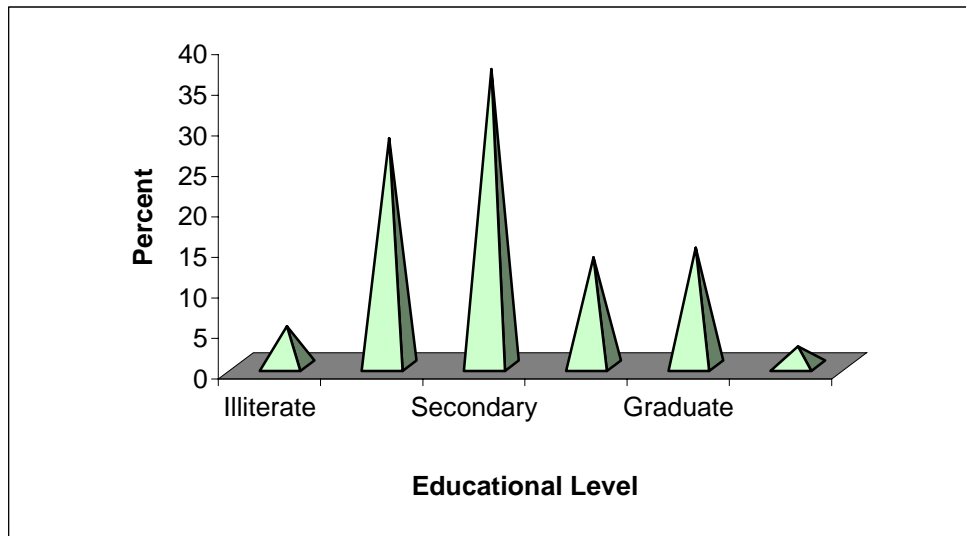
Table No.: 3.7

Table showing the Educational Qualification of Spouses

Educational Level	Number	Percent
Illiterate	12	4.9
Primary	69	28.1
Secondary	90	36.6
Pre university	33	13.4
Graduate	36	14.6
Post graduate	06	2.4
Total	*246	100

***Note:** Total number of respondents was not equal to 255 as 9 respondents were unmarried.

Figure No. 3.7: Educational Qualification of Spouses



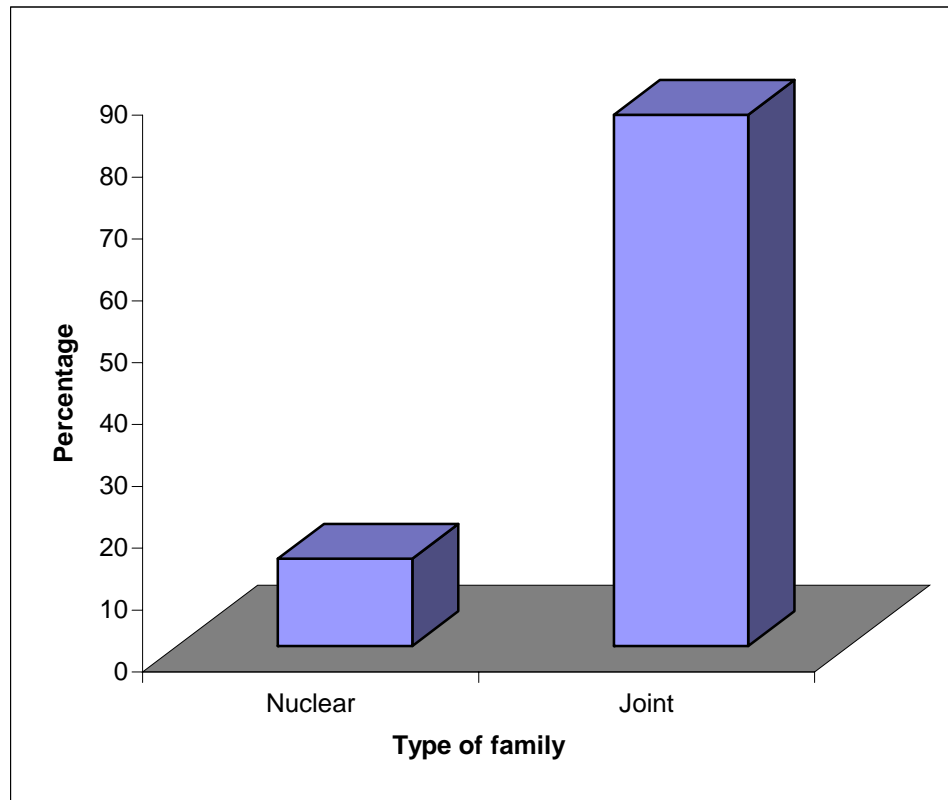
The educational characteristics of the spouses of respondents are illustrated in Table 3.7 and Figure 3.7. A large proportion of them, nearly 36.6 per cent had higher secondary level education and 14.6 per cent were graduates. The educational level of spouses clearly indicates that the participation of people with lower education levels tends to be more in a gram panchayat.

Table 3.8

Type of Family structure of Respondents

Type of family	Number	Percentage
Nuclear	36	14.1
Joint	219	85.9
Total	255	100

Figure No. 3.8: Family structure of Respondents



Classification of respondents according to the type of family has been shown in Table No. 3.8 and Figure No. 3.8. It is observed that 85.9 per cent of families were joint families, while remaining 14.1 per cent were nuclear families. An overwhelming majority of the respondents is from Joint family system. Therefore it can be concluded that respondents have other members in the family to look after the members in the family and other affairs of the family such as education, welfare of children etc.

Table No. 3.9

Occupational –wise classification of the Respondents

Occupation	Number	Percentage
House wife	126	49.4
Agricultural labour	72	28.2
Beedi Rolling	33	12.9
Industrial labour	18	7.1
Self-employed	06	2.4
Total	255	100

Figure No. 3.9: Occupational –wise classification of the Respondents



The occupational status of the respondents presented in Table No. 3.9 and Figure No. 3.9. The majority 49.4 per cent of them were engaged in the

household related non-economic activities as house wives, 28.2 per cent of the gram panchayat women members were working as agricultural labourers. 7.1 per cent of them were working as (factory) industrial workers. 12.9 per cent of members were working as Beedi-Rolling and 2.4 per cent of them were engaged in self employment. The occupational skills of respondents in all selected panchayats are also uniformly low. This is also reflected in the income levels of the respondents.

Table No. 3.10

Income-Wise classification of the Respondents

Annual income	Number	Per cent
Less than Rs. 11,000/-	114	44.7
11,000/- to 25,000/-	66	25.9
26,000/- to 50,000/-	36	14.1
51,000/ to 75,000/	21	8.2
76,000/ to 1,00,000/-	12	4.7
Above 1,00,000/-	06	2.4
Total	255	100

Figure No. 3.10: Income-Wise Classification of the Respondents

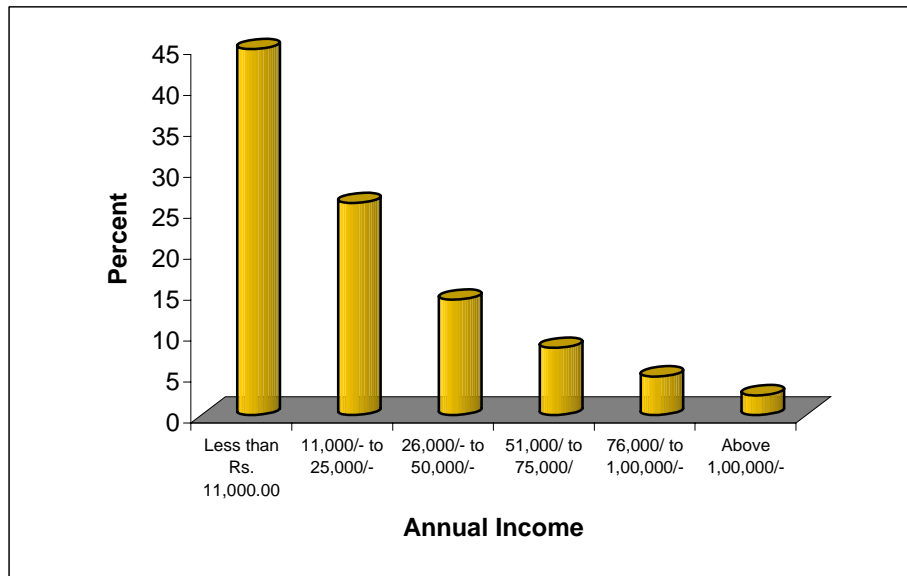


Table No. 3.10 and Figure No. 3.10 presents income distribution across members. The majority 44.7 per cent of the respondents has annual income of less than Rs. 11,000/- This is due to the higher number of respondents engaged as agricultural labourers and House Wives. Income groups Rs.11,000/- to Rs. 25,000/- covered 25.9 per cent and Rs. 25,000/- to Rs. 50,000/- covered 14.1 per cent and Rs. 50,000 to 75,000/- covered 8.2 per cent and Rs. 75,000/- to 1,00,000/- covered 4.7 per cent and remaining 2.4 per cent families had income above Rs. 1,00,000/-. This is because many seem to be engaged in home-based occupations, which are not perceived as profession. It was found that large number of respondents fell in the low income group.

It was well visualized that very little opportunities and freedom have been provided to women to participate in educational systems, social and

cultural activities and in seeking employment in rural areas of selected 32 sample gram panchayats due to traditionally developed and prevailing backward social and cultural system. Inequalities in work participation were highly prevalent among the women of different castes and income groups. The women among the upper castes and those belonging to economically sound households were hardly participating in different economic activities even in the family enterprises and agricultural operations. The existence of some strict practices in Muslim communities restrict the ladies to participate in different social and religious functions. However, the unmarried girls had little more opportunities than the married women to participate in different activities and to move outside households. The proportion of literate women representatives was significantly higher than in the previous years.

The economic activities of different categories of respondents show that agricultural operations were generally performed by the women members belonging to low-income groups. The women members belonging to upper castes and higher economic background participated more in other economic activities apart agricultural work. By and large some women members of Gram panchayat had relatively higher level of freedom to move outside households and to participate in different economic, social, cultural and political activities. At the same time, various studies also postulate the fact that poverty is not the sole cause; other socio-cultural factors also influence the phenomena of women respondents' participation in work.

The intervention of government to secure the representation of women in local level panchayati raj institutions in rural areas through introducing the reservation policy for women could be an important planning initiative for maximizing the role and participation of women in different socio-economic, cultural, political and decision-making processes of the family affairs and to bring out significant change in their socio-economic status and empowerment. However, the level of success of the concerned motives would mainly depend upon the socio-economic and political background and related basic characteristics of women elected as the representatives of different panchayats. The advantages of introducing reservation policy have gone largely in favour of women belonging to socio-economically and politically sound background.

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CHAPTER – IV

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATS

The empowerment of women is becoming an increasingly popular term in development discourses. Women's empowerment is a process, and the outcome of the process, by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources, and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and gender-based discrimination against women in all the institutions and structures of society.

Empowerment is concerned with power, particularly with changing the power relations between individuals and groups in society. The outcome of empowerment should manifest itself as a redistribution of power between individuals, genders, groups, classes, castes, races, ethnic groups. Empowerment means the transformation of structures of subordination, through radical changes in law, property rights, control over women's labour and bodies, and the institutions, which reinforce and perpetuate male domination. Therefore, empowerment means making informed choices within an expanding framework of information, knowledge and analysis of available options.

Women's empowerment is not against men, but against the system of patriarchy and all its manifestations. The empowerment spiral transforms every person involved – the individual, the collective and the environment.

The method of measuring and evaluating women's empowerment and progress is by looking at

- Whether women status has improved as a result of being in panchayats?
- Whether awareness levels of women in panchayats has increased?
- Whether the ability of effective participation in panchayats has increased?
- Measure whether the women have been raising problems in panchayat meetings.

The issue of women's empowerment, which enables women to assert their political power, has been on the anvil of discussion at many levels in India. The Beijing conference (1995) drew particular attention to the neglect of women in political structures all over the world and the importance of bringing women into political arena.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment providing for one-third of the seats to women members in Gram Panchayat is considered a land mark attainment towards women empowerment. These provisions are basically to create more awareness among women and to strike a greater gender balance in the decision making process. The provision of reservations for women in the panchayats provides tremendous scope and opportunities for women to participate in public life and decision-making process. It is a big step in the process of political empowerment of women. Though initially at least

reservation appears to be the only way to bring women into panchayats, there is a need to ensure their effective participation in the functioning and decision-making process at the grass-roots level through a process of sustained capacity building.¹ Women are empowered to play an effective role in panchayats, in terms of being fully aware and able to use their full potential in carrying out their roles and responsibilities, in making decisions etc. The present study is aimed at looking at the levels of empowerment of women.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment in which a provision has been made for 33.33 per cent women's reservation is an act of positive discrimination. It has not only unpacked gender relations but also transformed the quality and thrust of local self government. It provides opportunities for women to assert their rights over resources and have a definite say in the development process. While it enables women to develop a greater understanding of the political structures and systems of governance and how to participate in panchayat.

Empowerment means very different things to different groups of women and varies according to the level of development in particular society.

1. C Hemalatha Prasad, "Empowerment of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.", research Report Series – 70, Women in Gram Panchayat, in 10 selected gram panchayats across the Udupi Taluk, National Institute of Rural Development, 2005, P. 78.

“A women’s empowerment begins with consciousness – perception about herself and her rights, her capabilities and her potential awareness of how gender and socio-cultural and political forces affect her”²

Empowerment is a process by which marginalized groups recognize their powerlessness and address deprivation and discriminations in their individual capacities as well as through collective bargaining. It is also defined as a process that fosters power (that is the capacity to implement) in people for use in their own lives, their own communities and in their own society, by acting on issues that they describe as important. Above all, empowerment is the result of participation in decision-making (Saxena: 2000).³

In this context, women’s empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition at par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity.⁴ But, what is empowerment through Panchayati Raj ? According to the UNO document on Women’s Development (1985) ⁵. Women’s role in the political process has virtually remained unchanged since independence.

2. Country Paper Bangladesh, April 1995, New Delhi.

3. Saxena, N.C., Note on what is meant by people’s participation, Journal of Rural Development, Vol.XLIV, 2000,pp. 48-57.

4. Palanthurai, G.. The Genre of Women Leadership in Local Bodies: Experience from Tamil Nadu, Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. XLII, 2001, PP. 38-50.

5. Women’s Link, Women in Local Governance, Vol. 10, No. 3, July-September, 2004, pp. 22-23.

Broad-based political participation of women has been severely limited due to various traditional factors such as caste, religion, feudal attitude and family status. As a result, women have been left on the periphery of political life. Observing this dark picture, 73rd constitutional Amendment Act is passed to provide them an opportunity to ventilate their grievances and to take active part in decision-making process at the local level.

Women's empowerment challenges traditional ideas of male authority and supremacy. Empowerment has been variously understood as a process, a movement a collective action etc. Empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power. It requires political action and collective assault on cultural as well as national and community power structures that oppress women and some men (Batliwala: 1994)⁶.

Thus while acknowledging the need to improve the lives of grass roots women, Batliwala insists that women's empowerment requires transformative political action as well. According to Rowlands (1997) empowerment is more than participation in decision making, it must also include the process that lead people to perceive as able and entitle to make decisions. It is personal, relational and collective.⁷

6. Batliwala, S., "The meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts for Action in G. Sen, A. Germain and L.C. Chen (eds), Population policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 13.

7. Rowlands, J., Questioning Empowerment, oxford: OXFAM, 1997, p. 28.

Measurement and Evaluation:

In the present study, measurement and evaluation of empowerment has been looked in to based on several important dimensions viz. awareness, participation, decision-making, perception etc.

Awareness:

The first step towards the empowering process is to become aware about the roles, responsibilities and various development programmes. In the context of panchayati raj institutions, the presence of women for over a decade as members has provided opportunities to become aware of the panchayati raj system and its functions. "Increased awareness is one of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and the women's empowerment⁸ (Beijing Declaration)

Government introducing the reservation policy for women could be an important initiative of awareness for maximizing the role, responsibilities and participation of women in Gram Panchayat.

The present study has focused on measuring and evaluating awareness levels of women in Gram Panchayat. The interview schedule prepared a set of questions, aimed at assessing the awareness levels on the general and information relating to panchayat. Such as percentage of reservation for women, women's political reservation Bill, 73rd Constitutional

8. Beijing Declaration: "Increased awareness", The Beijing conference (1995).

Amendment Act, Power and position, roles and responsibilities etc. This study has tried to measure the awareness levels of the respondents.

Table No. 4.1
Table showing the sources of inspiration

Sources of inspiration	Number	Percentage
Family members	54	21.2
Husband	60	23.5
Political party	93	36.5
Village leaders	27	10.6
Self	66	25.9

***Note:** Percentage is not equal to 100 due to multiple choices.

Figure No. 4.1: Sources of Inspiration

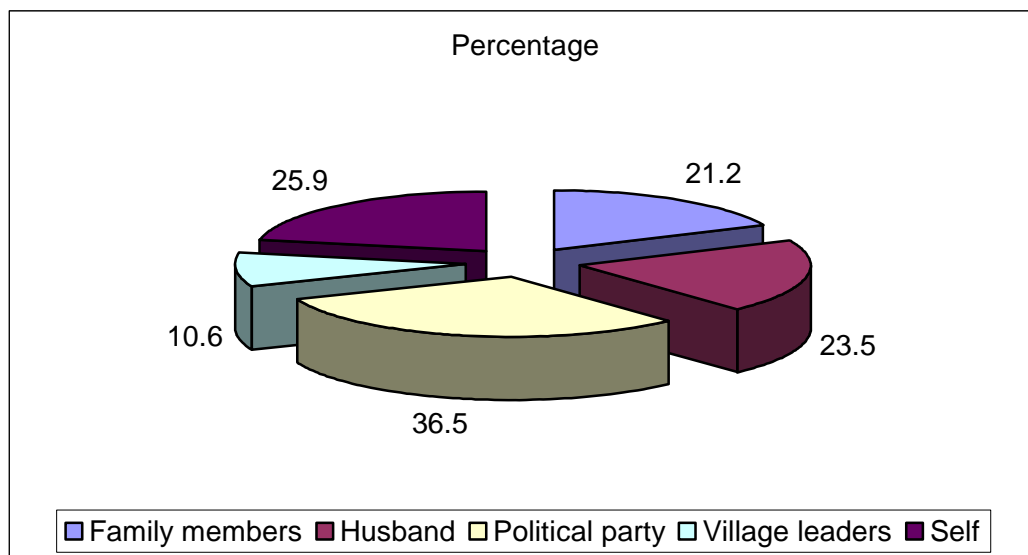


Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 indicate the sources of inspiration of respondents into the public life due to the influence of varied factors, such as self interest, compulsion of family members and party encouragement. It is evident from the table 4.1 that party encouragement was the chief factor responsible for large-scale induction of women into Panchayats, which constitutes 36.5 per cent, while 25.9 per cent had self motivation with a deep urge to serve public. 23.5 Per cent of the members were encouraged by their spouses to enter politics and 21.2 per cent were motivated by their family members. Only 10.6 per cent of the respondents were made to enter politics by village leaders. It is clear that political parties, husband and family members played an important role in motivating women to enter politics.

Table No. 4.2

Table showing the present position of the Respondents in Gram Panchayats

Present position	Number	Percentage
Member	210	82.4
Member of standing committee	24	9.4
Vice president	12	4.7
President	09	3.5
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.2: Present Position

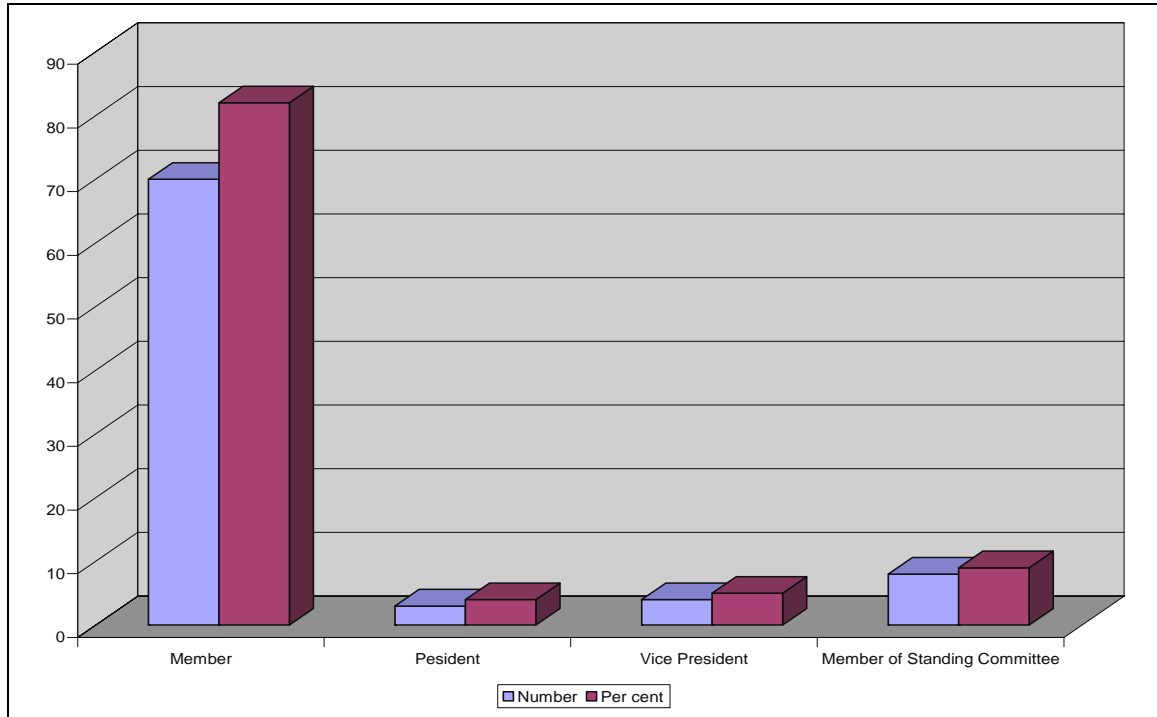


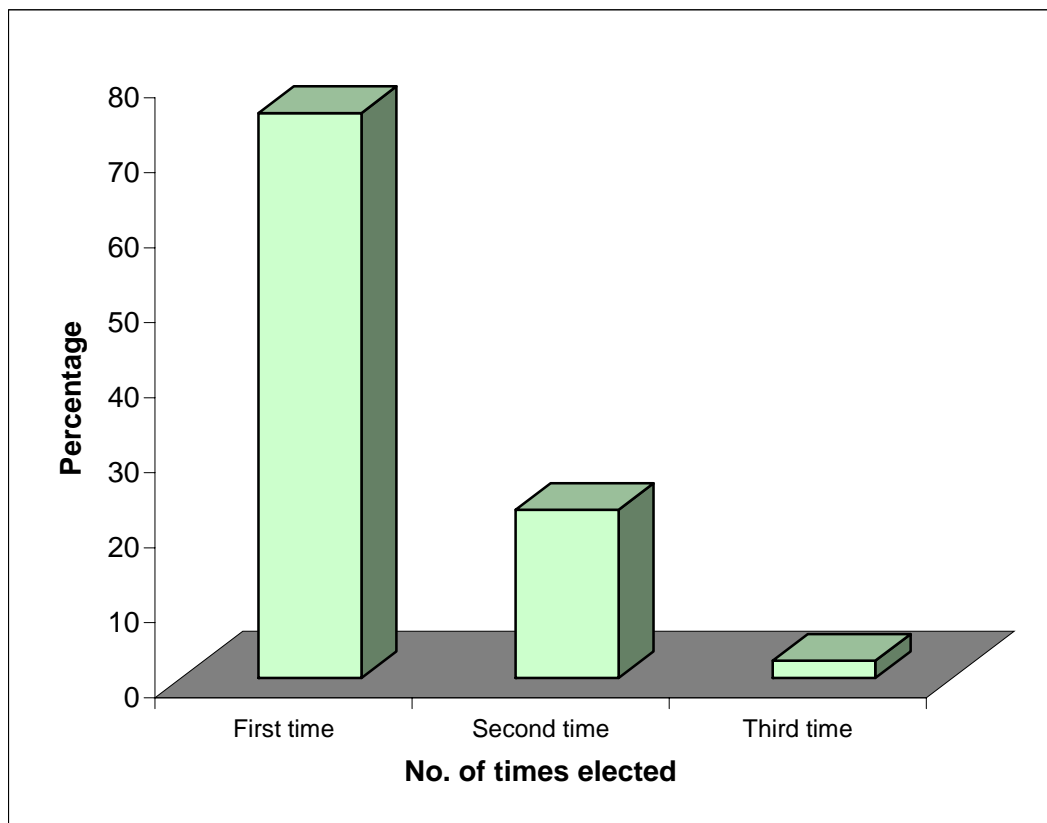
Table and figure 4.2 explains the present position of members in their respective gram panchayats. An over whelming majority of 82.4 per cent are just the members in gram panchayats, whereas meager percentage of 3.5 enjoy the position of presidents. Slightly less than 4.7 per cent of the respondents enjoy the position of vice-presidents. From this, it follows that a majority of the gram panchayats are headed by male presidents and minority number of gram panchayats are headed by female presidents.

Table No. 4.3

Table showing number of times Respondents elected to panchayats

No. of times elected	Number	Percentage
First time	192	75.3
Second time	57	22.4
Third time	06	2.3
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.3: Number of times respondents elected to Panchayats



From the above table and figure, it can be inferred that majority 75.3 per cent of the respondents are representing their ward for the first time, only a moderate number, 22.4 per cent are representing their wards for the second time and a small percentage of 2.3 per cent are representing their ward for the third time. Thus majority of the members are first entrants to Panchayats and hence are less experienced.

Table No.: 4.4

Table showing the awareness of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act by Respondents

Awareness of 73rd amendment	Number	Percentage
Very well aware	69	27.1
Just aware	144	56.5
Ignorant of it	42	16.4
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.4: The aware of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act by Respondents

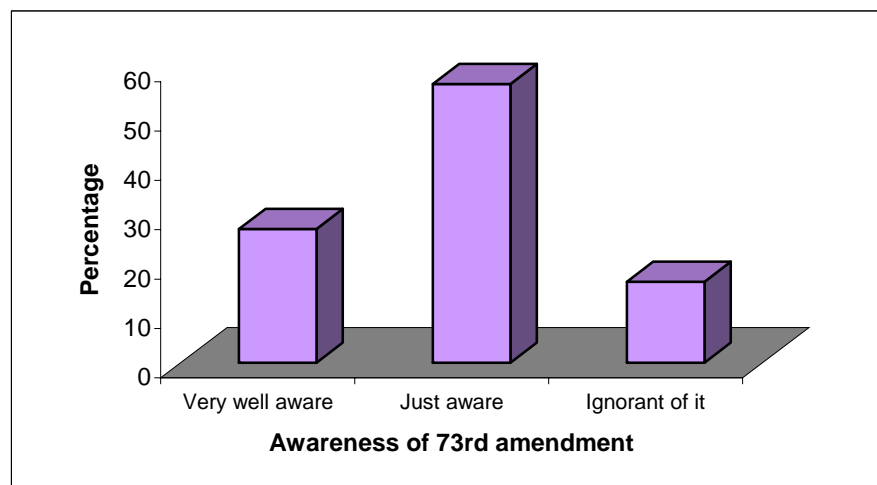


Table and figure no. 4.4 showing the awareness of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act by respondents, in which a provision has been made for 33.33 per cent women's reservation in gram panchayat. Of the total 255 respondents 144 are elected from the reservation category. It shows that a majority of 56.5 percent are just aware of the 73rd constitutional amendment act, 27.1 per cent are very well aware and 16.4 per cent are ignorant of it. From this, it is concluded that most of the respondents knew that reservation of seats has been made for women as per the Amendment Act. This illustrates that the awareness levels of women in gram panchayat is quite high.

Table No.: 4.5

Training imparted to Newly Elected Women Representatives

Training imparted	Number	Percentage
Yes	180	70.6
No	75	29.4
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.5: Training imparted to newly elected women Representatives

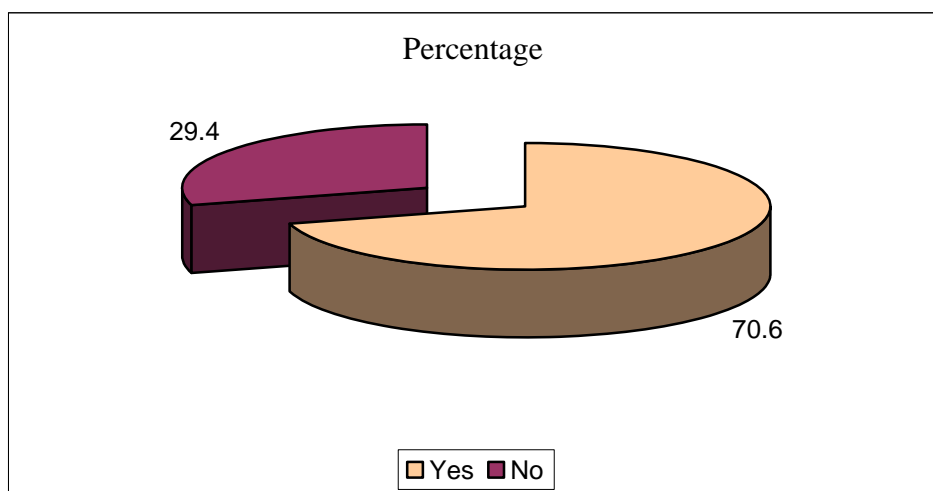


Table 4.5 and figure 4.5 indicates that 70.6 per cent respondents had undergone some sort of training, while 29.4 per cent did not get any training. Training is important for better participation of women in political processes. The study reveals that majority of the members have received training in political participation which has increased their awareness.

Table No.: 4.6

**Opinion Expressed by the Respondents on the women’s Political
Reservation Bill**

Opinion on Women’s political Reservation Bill	Number	Percentage
Absolutely essential	54	21.2
Essential	153	60
Not essential	39	15.3
Not at all essential	09	3.5
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.6: Opinion on women’s Political Reservation Bill

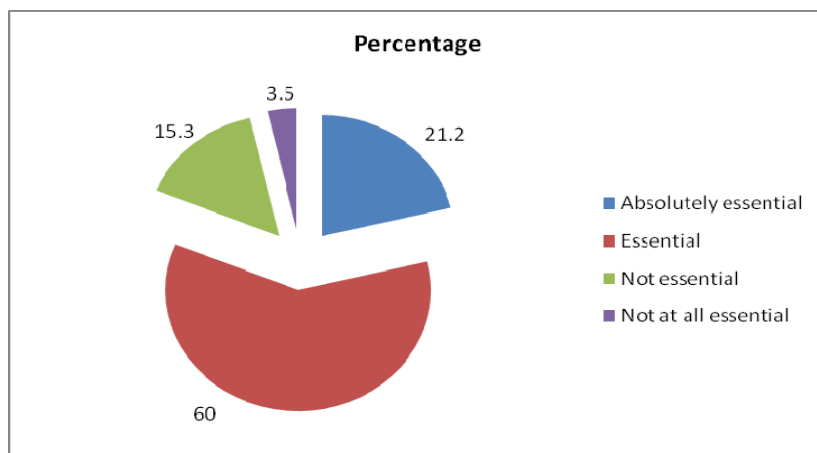


Table 4.6 and figure 4.6 explains about the awareness of respondents on the women's political Reservation Bill. Among them 60 per cent of respondents say that it is essential, 21.2 per cent of respondents are of the opinion that it is absolutely essential, 15.3 percent of women expressed the opinion that it is not essential and a meager proportion of 3.5 percent argued that it is not at all essential.

It can be concluded that an overwhelming majority of the respondents are in favour of the bill, because, this has enabled a large number of women to enter into politics. Similarly, the reservation for SC/ST, OBC and women has provided opportunities to become members and participate in the development process.

Participation:

Women participation in panchayati raj can play an important role in becoming effective tool of empowerment of women. Women's participation in out door socio-economic and political activities is an effective means to empower women. The assessment of out door participation potential is important because purpose is not to simply empower a cadre of women but to use them as model, as an instrument and as weapon to work in their various capacities.⁹

9. Women's Link, Women in Local Governance, Vol. 10. No. 3, July-September, 2004, pp. 10 -11.

Active participation and involvement in the social, economic, and political processes that affect lives is an essential element of human development. Participation is a major component of empowerment and the two are closely interlinked. Empowered individuals are more likely to participate in organisational activities, participation tends to promote empowerment. Similarly, participation and awareness are also related. It is generally assumed that increased awareness leads to better and more active participation. Collective participation has far reaching benefits on individual as well as the group. Practical knowledge, skills and opportunities can be gained from collective participation. Ability to effectively participate can come about naturally; can be impelled by a crisis or through an accumulated sense of need. It can also be strengthened through capacity building programmes.

The 73rd constitutional amendment has created a space for women in political participation and decision-making at the grass-root level. By providing reservation seats reserving for women in the political institutions will, provide them an opportunity to raise their grievances and other related social and economic problem in a formal forum, a political process necessary to ensure the improvement for all women in all sphere of life (Barghava: 1996)¹⁰.

10. Bhargava, B.S., et. Al., women in grass root democracy – A study of Kerala, University of Kerala Sources, 1996, p.11.

Other states that the main purpose of 73rd constitutional amendment involves the participation of women as voters, women as members of political party, women as candidates, women elected members of Panchayati Raj Institutions taking part in decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation.

Reservation for women in panchayats has provided opportunities to participate in the activities and functioning of the panchayat. Women's presence in the panchayats has scope and potential to not only cater to the needs of the society but also bring into focus and address women's needs.

In order to assess the actual levels of participation of women panchayat members, the study looked at specific areas within the panchayat and the participation of women in these areas. An interview schedule on participation was used to gauge the levels of participation of the respondents in the thirty two gram panchayats.

Table No.: 4.7

Table showing the Affiliation of Respondents to other Social Organisation

Member of Local Organization	Number	Percent
Mahila Mandala	33	12.9
Self help group	96	37.7
School betterment committee	42	16.5
Any other	84	32.9
Total	255	100

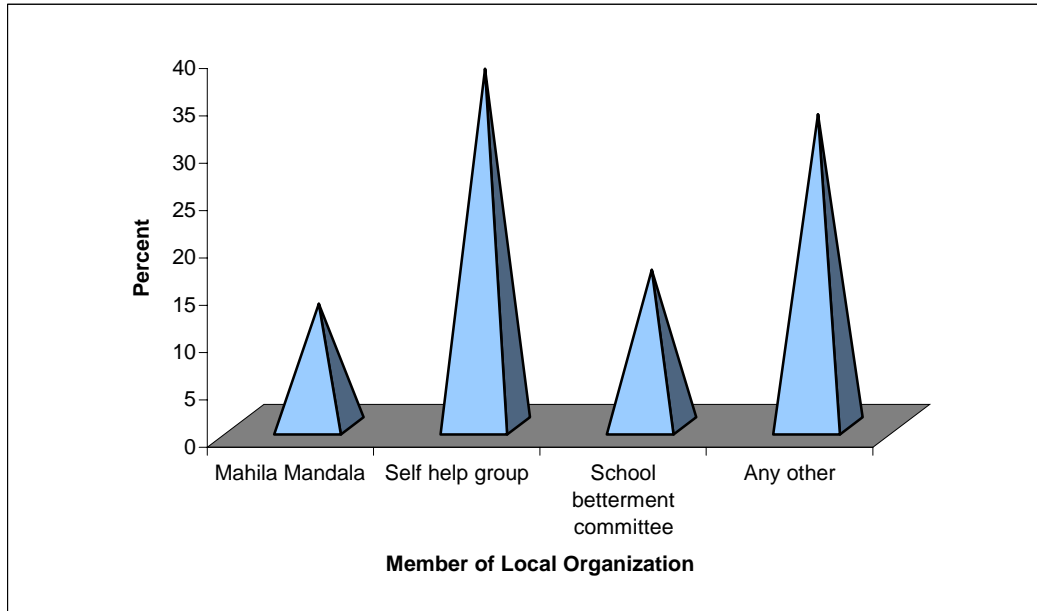


Table and figure No. 4.7 reveals that 37.7 per cent of the respondents are the members of self help group. While 32.9 per cent were the members of other social organization like Bajana Mandali, co-operative society, Rotary club, Lions club etc. 16.5 per cent of respondents are the members of school betterment committee and sizeable number of respondents are the members of mahila mandala.

The participation of respondents in various social organizations shows that women representatives are very active in most of these organizations. This enhances the empowerment of women members in Gram Panchayats.

Table No. 4.8
Table showing the Nature of participation by Respondents in Panchayat Proceedings

Nature of participation	Number	Percentage
Always	36	14.1
Very often	93	36.5
Often	69	27.1
Less often	39	15.3
Not at all	18	7
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.8: Nature of Participation of Respondents in Panchayat Proceedings

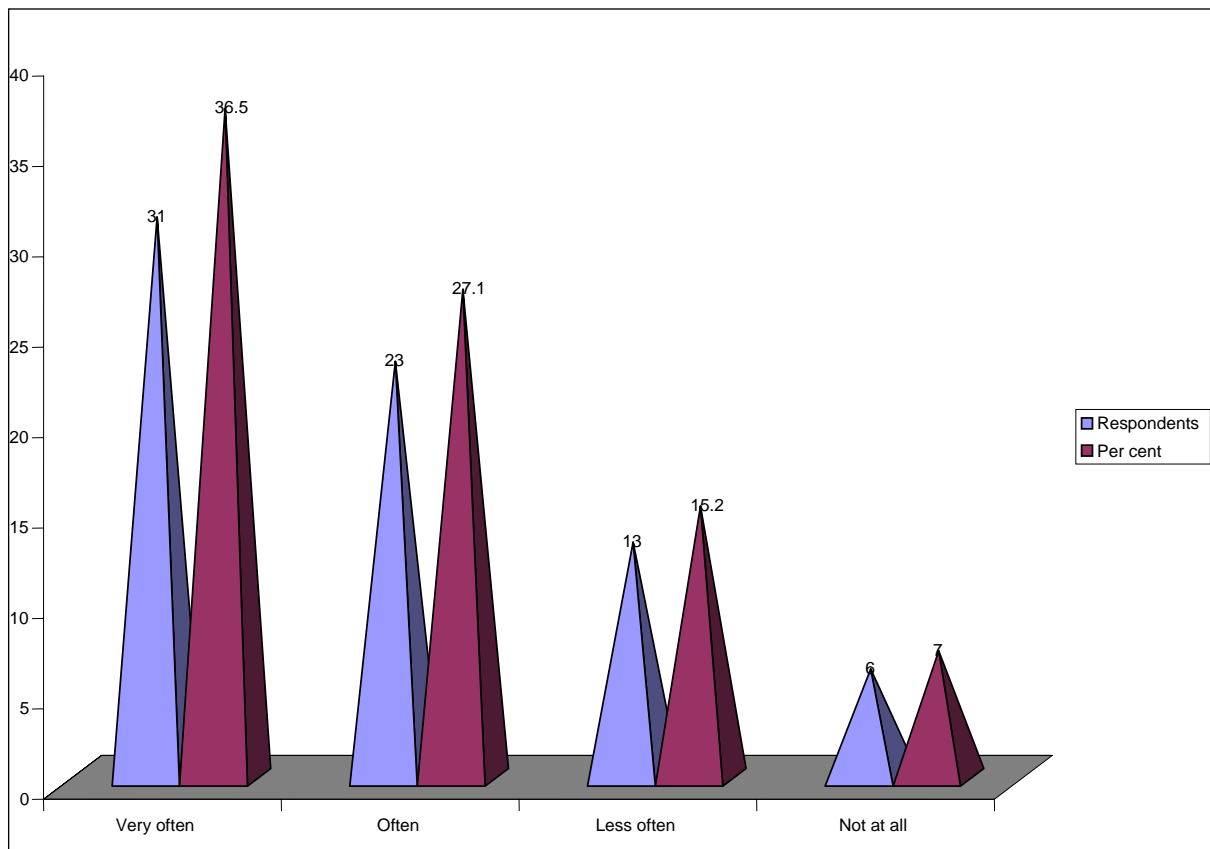


Figure and Table 4.8 explains participation of respondents in the proceedings of Panchayat meeting and speaking about ward related issues. 36.5 per cent of the members take part in the proceedings very often and 14.1 per cent of them always speak in the meetings. 27.1 per cent of the members participate in the proceedings often and 15.3 percent less often. 7 per cent of the members did not take any part in the proceedings. Majority of the respondents thus take part actively in the proceedings of Panchayats.

Table No.: 4.9

Table showing Frequency of visit by the Respondents to their wards

Visit the ward	Number	Percent
Always	78	30.6
Very frequently	90	35.3
Frequently	54	21.3
Less frequently	27	10.6
Never	06	2.2
Total	255	100

Figure No: 4.9: Frequency of visit by the Respondents to their wards

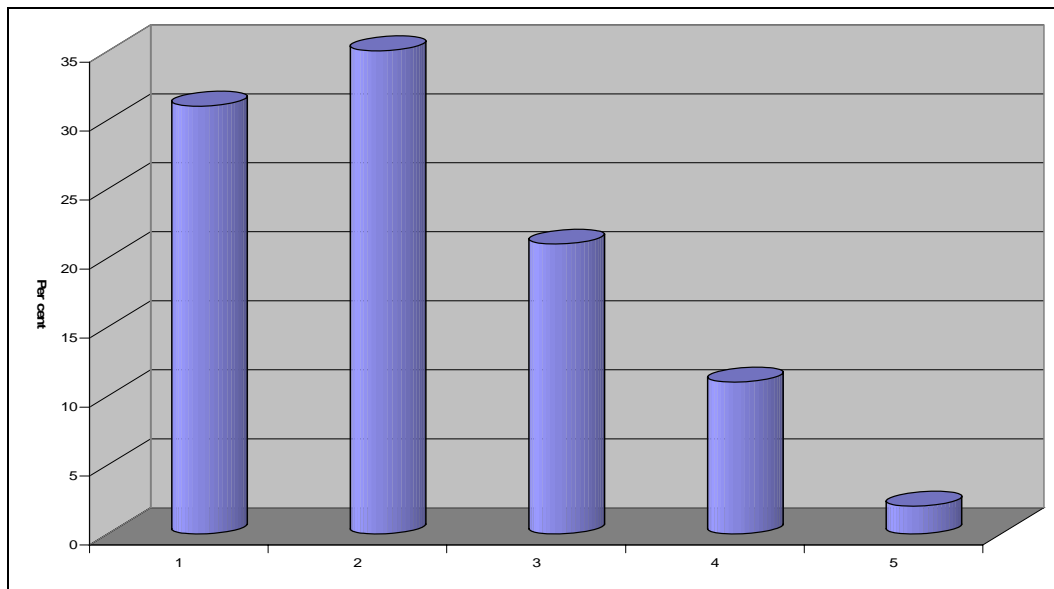


Table and figure 4.9 illustrates the frequency of visit by the respondents to their wards. An overwhelming majority of 65.9 per cent very frequently and always visit their wards, 21.3 per cent members frequently visit their wards, while 10.6 per cent and 2.2 per cent respondents less frequently and never visit their ward, respectively.

It can be concluded that majority of the respondents have the awareness of their roles and responsibilities in panchayats. They visit the ward and interact with people to identify the problems of the wards.

Table No. 4.10

Table showing the Nature of Participation by Respondents in ward sabha and panchayat meetings.

Nature of participation in meetings	Number	Percentage
Very actively	33	12.9
Actively	117	45.9
Less actively	81	31.8
Passively	24	9.4
Total	255	100

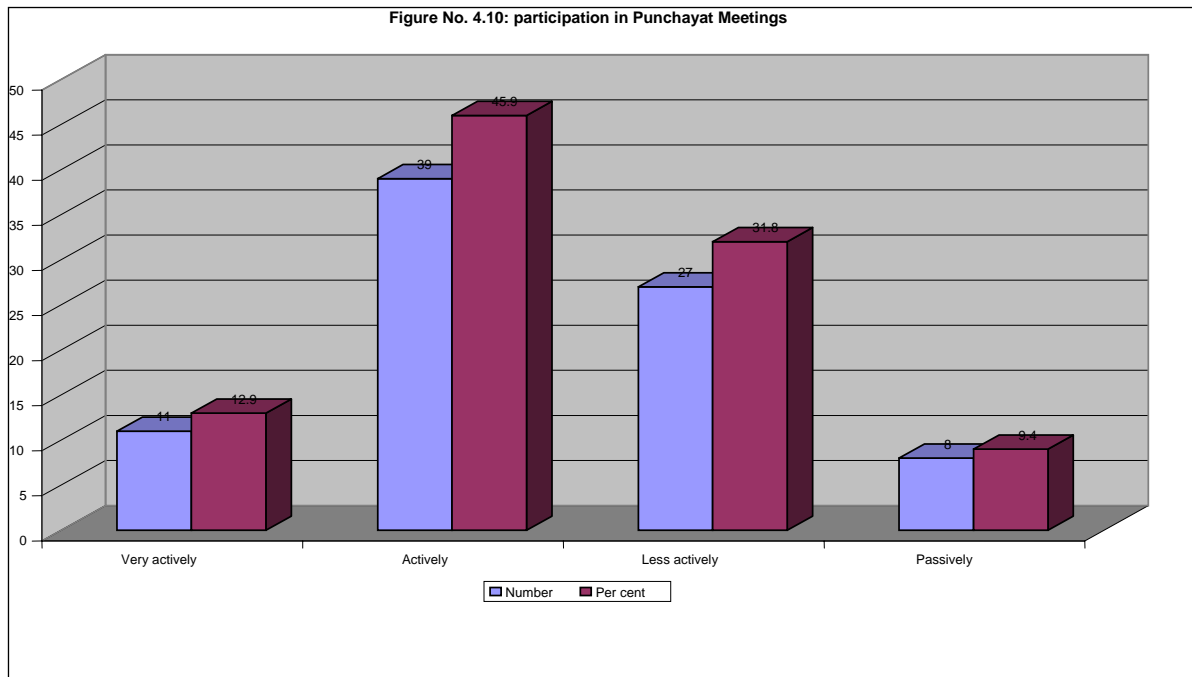


Table and figure 4.10 shows participation of women members in ward Sabha and Panchayat meetings. 45.9 per cent of the members take part in the meetings actively and 12.9 per cent have reported very active participation. The participation of 31.8 per cent of the members is found to be less active while 9.4 per cent of the members reported only passive participation.

It is observed that majority of the members take active participation in ward Sabha and Panchayat meetings.

Plate 1 : Ward meeting is in progress...



Panchayat members are brainstorming to arrive at concrete solutions

Table No. 4.11

Table showing the Frequency of presentation of problems by respondents in ward/panchayat meetings.

Frequency of presentation of problems	Number	Percentage
Always	30	11.8
Very often	72	28.2
Often	78	30.6
Less often	48	18.8
Not at all	27	10.6
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.11: Frequency of presentation of problems by respondents in ward/panchayat meetings.

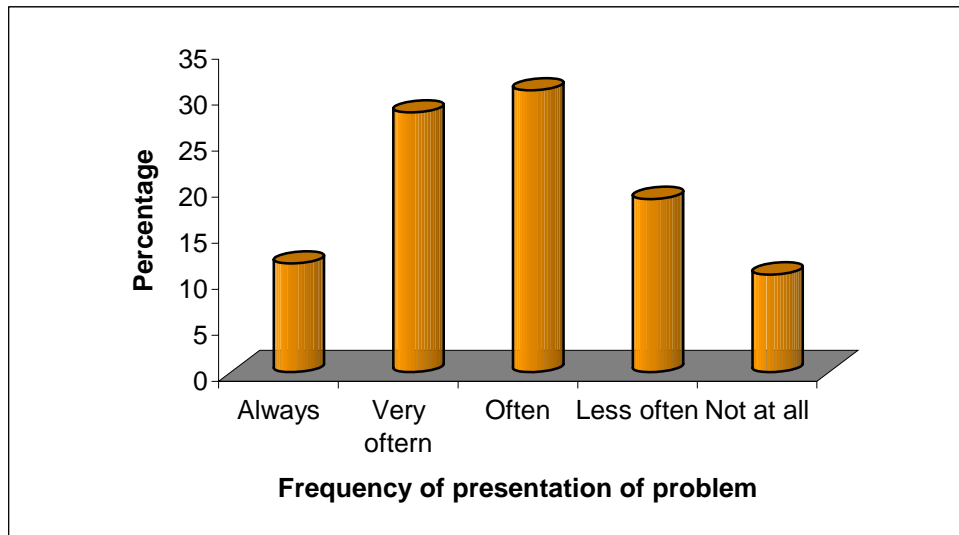


Table and figure 4.11 illustrates that the frequency of presentation of problems by respondents in ward and panchayat meetings. An majority of 30.6 per cent are often presenting the problems, where as 28.2 per cent very often present the problems in panchayat meetings; 18.8 per cent of the respondents present problems less often, while a meager percentage of 10.6 did not present the problems. It follows that, in general respondents in most of the Gram panchayats seems to play an active role in discussing village problems in ward meetings, interacting with people to identify the needs of the community etc.

Table No.: 4.12

**Opinion Expressed by the Respondents on Women Empowerment
through 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act**

Empowerment with 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act	Number	Percentage
Yes	132	51.8
No	57	16.5
Can't say	42	22.3
Not Known	24	9.4
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.12: Opinion Expressed by the Respondents on Women Empowerment through 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

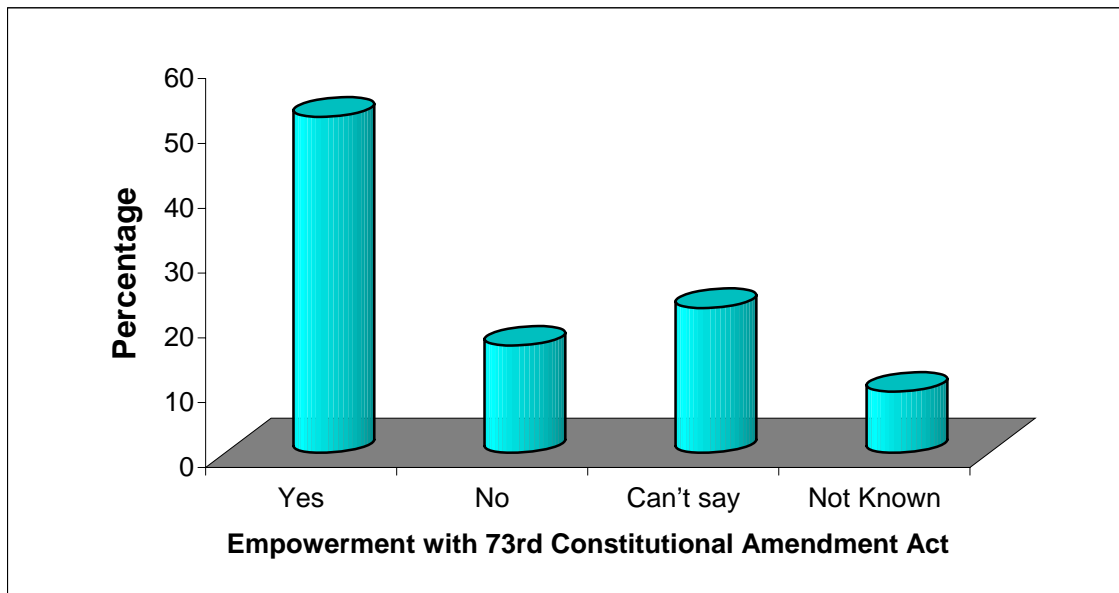


Table and figure 4.12 illustrates the opinion expressed by the respondents on women empowerment with 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Majority of the respondents i.e 51.8 per cent are in favour of women empowerment through 73rd constitutional amendment Act, 22.3 per cent of respondents are neither in favour of the Act nor in disfavour of it, 16.5 per cent in disfavour of the Act and only 9.4 per cent of respondents have shown their ignorance of the Act.

It can be concluded that, majority of the respondents expressed the opinion that after the advent of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the women had been empowered in politics to a greater extent.

Table No.: 4.13

Table showing the Specific problems faced by women in Politics

Specific Problem	Number	Percentage
Gender discrimination	66	25.9
Family-life and Work-life balancing	138	54.1
Male members dominant attitude	48	18.8
Lack of previous political experience	93	36.5
Lack of knowledge of the Panchayat Act and other Govt. circulars sent from time to time	180	70.6
Male dominated society	78	30.6
Lack of awareness, inferiority complex and self confidence	51	20

***Note:** Percentage is not equal to 100 due to multiple choices.

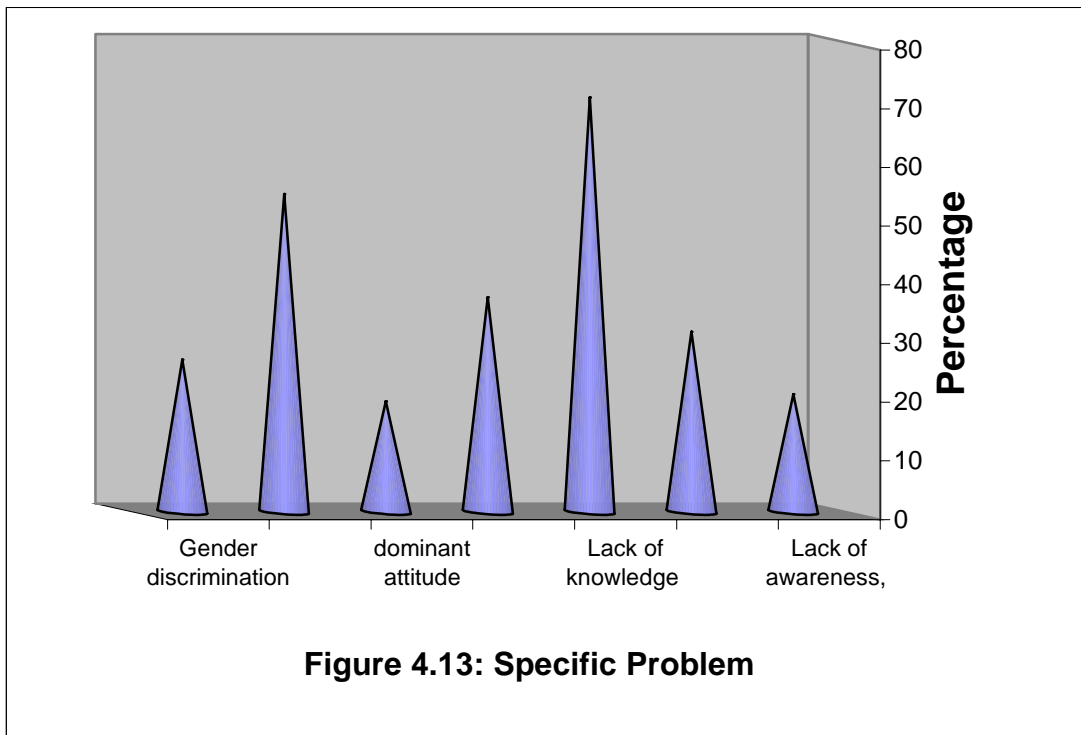


Table and figure 4.13 shows that over whelming majority of the respondents argued that they face various problems in politics. For 70.6 per cent of the respondents problem is the lack of knowledge of Panchayat Act and other Government Circulars sent from time to time. 54.1 per cent of the respondents are finding it difficult to balance their family life and political career. For 36.5 per cent of the respondents the problem is lack of previous political experience. 30.6 percent and 25.9 per cent of the members admitted male domination and gender discrimination in the society as their major problems. For 20 percent of the members the problem is lack of awareness, inferiority complex and self confidence. Domination by male members in the Panchayats was considered as a problem by 18.8 per cent of the members.

Table No.: 4.14

Opinion Expressed by the Respondents on Continuance in Politics

Continue in polities	Number	Percentage
Yes	96	38.8
Can not say	60	37.6
No	99	23.6
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.14: CONTINUANCE IN POLITICS

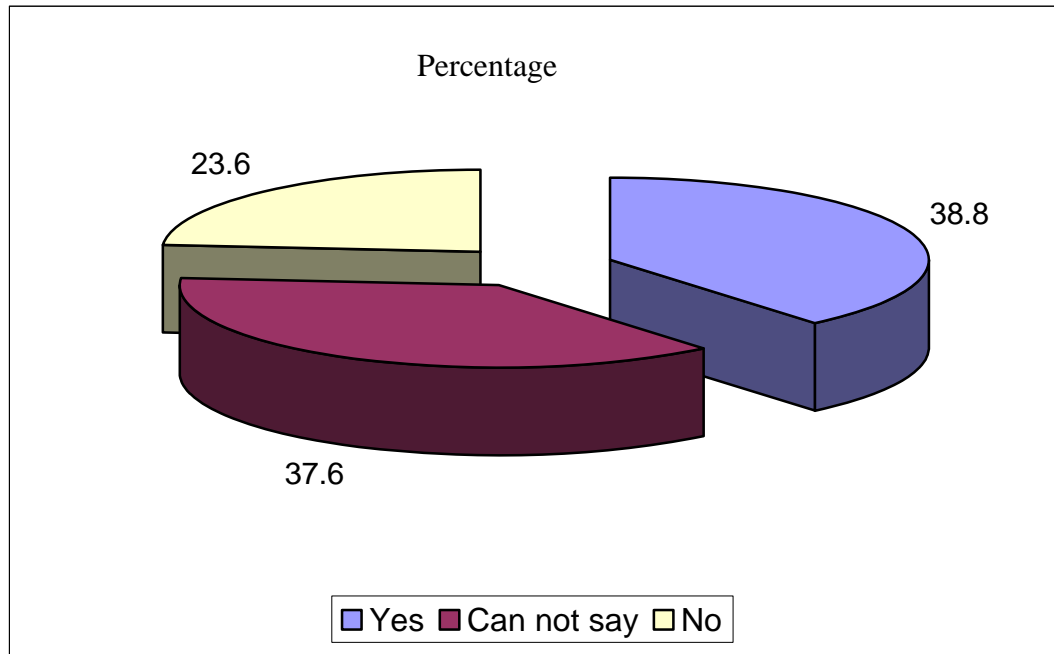


Table 4.14 explains about the respondents on continuance in politics. Of 38.8 per cent of respondents expressed their desire to continue in politics and an equal proportion of respondents were unwilling to continue their political career. 23.6 per cent of the respondents could not give any opinion. From this, it can be analysed that a majority of the female members have interest in politics and minority of female members are not interest in politics.

Table No.: 4.15

Opinion Expressed by the Respondents about the Enhancement of Status in society after the membership

Opinion	Number	Percent
Enhanced a lot	78	30.6
Moderately increased	84	32.9
Some what increased	51	20
Neither increased nor decreased	42	16.5
Decreased	Nil	0
Total	255	100

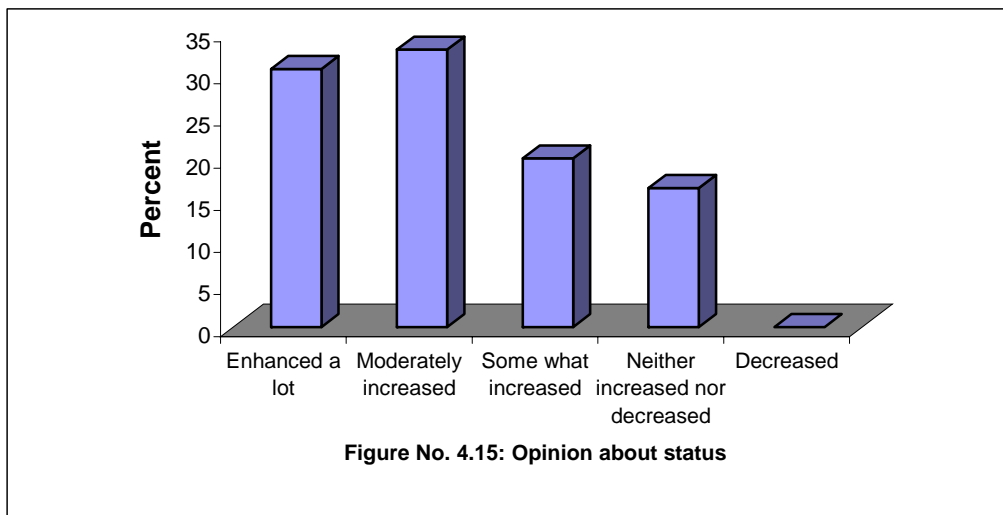


Table and figure 4.15 illustrates that opinion expressed by the respondents about the enhancement of status in society after the membership. 30.6 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that membership of Panchayats had enhanced a lot, their status in society. For 32.9 per cent of the respondents it was moderate enhancement and for 20 per cent it was small

increase, 16.5 per cent expressed the opinion that there was neither increase nor decrease in their status in society due to Panchayat membership. No respondent indicated decrease in social status. It can be concluded that Panchayat membership has given better status to women in public spheres.

Decision Making:

The ability to think and take independent decisions is an important dimension in the empowerment process. Decision-making either at the individual or at a much larger societal or institutional level is a process that involves a lot of factors such as rational thinking, access to knowledge and information choices available and active participation in activities etc. It also depends to a large extent on the social and cultural background of the individual as well as the values of the society.¹¹

Subjugation of women to a large extent is a result of either denial of the right to decide for themselves or the inability of women themselves to take decisions even in their own personal affairs. Better level of awareness and providing opportunities for participation in public sphere combined with an enabling environment could lead to effective decision making among women.¹²

11. Women in Political Management and Decision making process, Encyclopedia of Women Development and family Welfare, Vol. 4, Institute of sustainable Development, Lucknow, India, 1978.

12. Imtiaz Ahmed, Women in Politics, in Devaki Jain (ed.), Indian Women, New Delhi : Publication Division, 1975, p. 312.

This study looks at the decision-making levels of the respondents in the panchayat level. In order to assess the levels of decision-making, certain questions were posed to the respondents. This study also sought the opinion of the respondents on enabling factors that they think are most essential for effective decision making.

Table No.: 4.16

Opinion Expressed by the Respondents on Extra Responsibilities of women leaders towards women

Opinion on Extra Responsibilities	Number	Percentage
Yes	144	56
No	111	44
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.16: Opinion on Extra Responsibilities

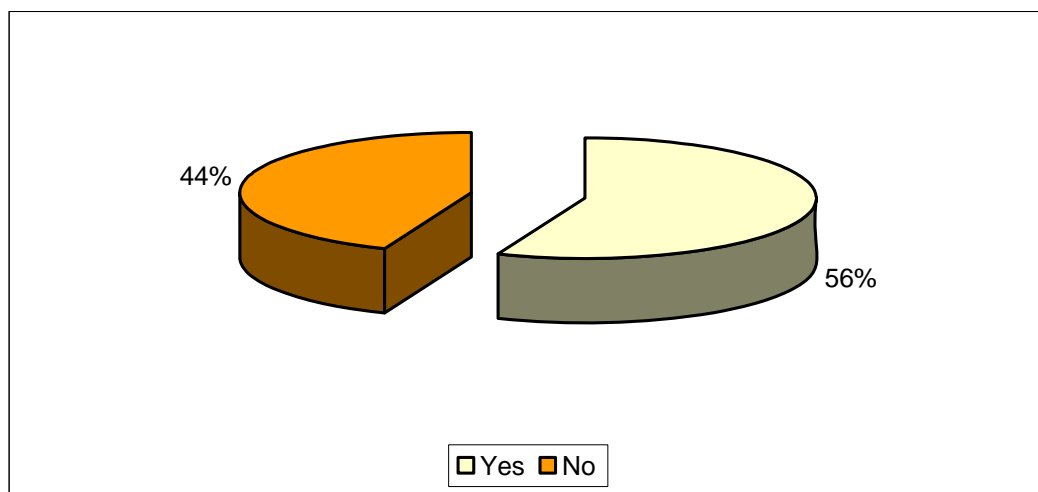


Table and figure 4.16 analyse the opinion expressed by the respondents on extra responsibilities of women leaders towards women. An overwhelming majority of 56 per cent of the members expressed the opinion that they had extra responsibilities towards women. But 44 per cent of the member did not think so. Thus it can be inferred that majority of the women members believed that they had extra responsibilities towards women.

Table No.: 4.17

The nature of involvement in the process of decision-making by the Respondents

Involvement in Decision making	Number	Percent
Actively involved	69	27.1
Involved to a moderate level	93	36.5
Less involvement	60	23.5
No involvement	33	12.9
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.17: Nature of involvement in the process of decision-making by the Respondents

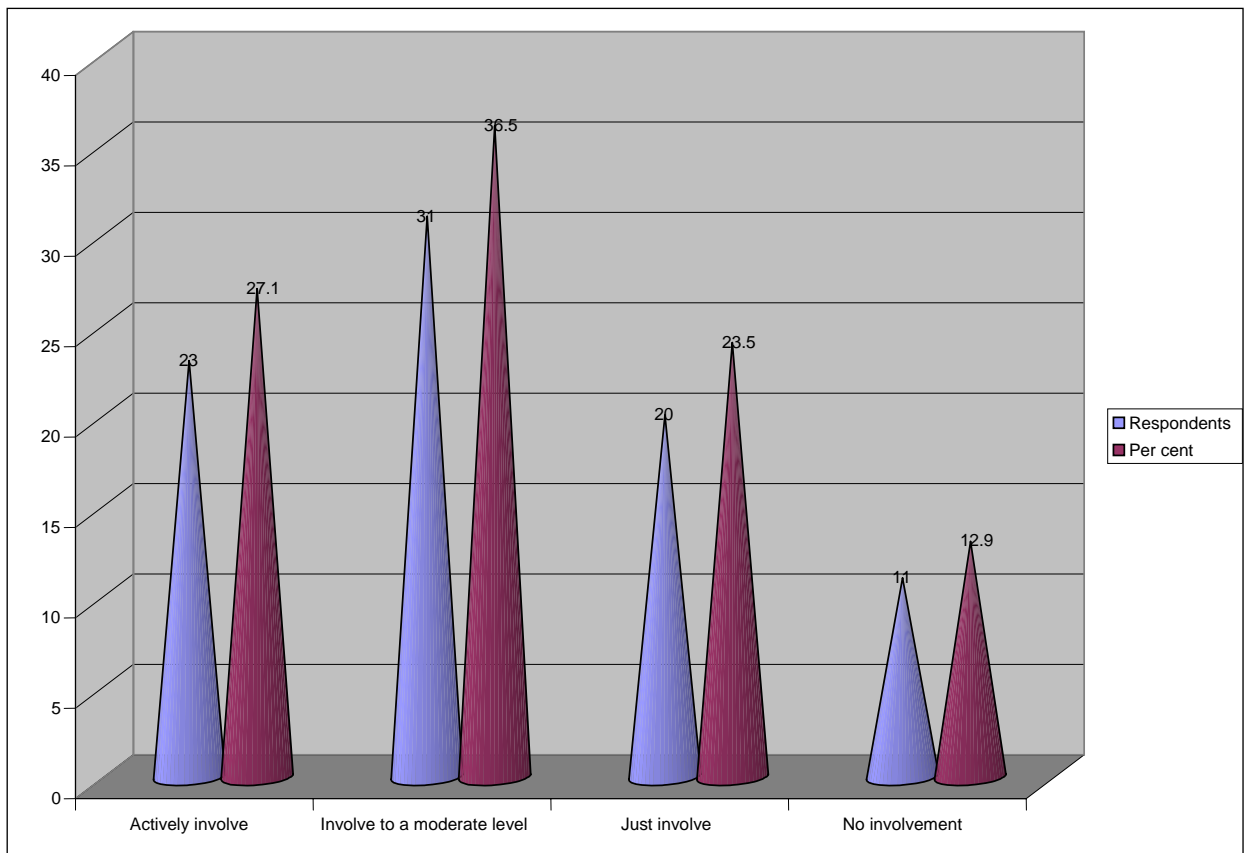


Table and figure 4.17 explains the nature of involvement of respondents in the process of decision-making. It was reported by a majority of respondents 36.5 per cent that they involve moderately in decision-making. 27.1 per cent were actively involved in decision-making process of Panchayats. 23.5 per cent women members just involved in the process of decision-making, while a very small number of respondents 12.9 per cent were not involved in the process of decision-making. From this it follows that a majority of the respondents are moderately and actively involved in the

decision-making process of panchayats. There is a lot of scope and potential for women to emerge as decision-makers. Involvement of women in decision-making roles is an important tool for empowerment. Better understanding of rules, regulations and procedures of the panchayats and the various schemes are equally important for the women members to take proper decision at the panchayat level.

Plate 2: Involvement in decision making



Panchayat president and members deal with the written complaints, grievances, problems and other demands of the people of the respective area

Table No.: 4.18

Table showing Respondents handling issues independently

Handling Issues independently	Number	Percentage
Yes	156	61.2
No	99	38.8
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.18: HANDLING ISSUES INDEPENDENTLY

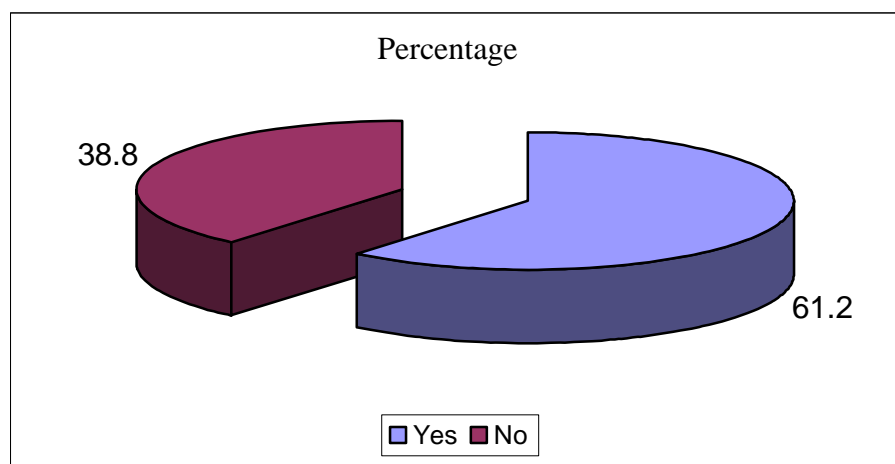


Table 4.18 and figure 4.18 explains the respondents handling issues independently. An overwhelming majority of 61.2 per cent are handling issues independently in wards and panchayats, while 38.8 per cent of respondents are not having the capacity to handle issues independently in their constituencies.

From this analysis, it is understood that majority of the respondents are very strong in the consciousness of their role in panchayat. They are capable of handling issues independently.

Table No.: 4.19
Table showing the Responsibilities discharged by the Respondents

Responsibilities	Number	Percent
Identification of the present problems of the ward	66	25.9
Presenting the problems in the meeting and getting the approval	102	40
Presenting the problems identified by the people of the ward	63	24.7
Taking initiation to complete the half done projects	24	9.4
Taking initiation to see that Govt. projects and schemes reach the people	33	12.9

***Note:** Percentage will not be equal to 100 due to multiple choices.

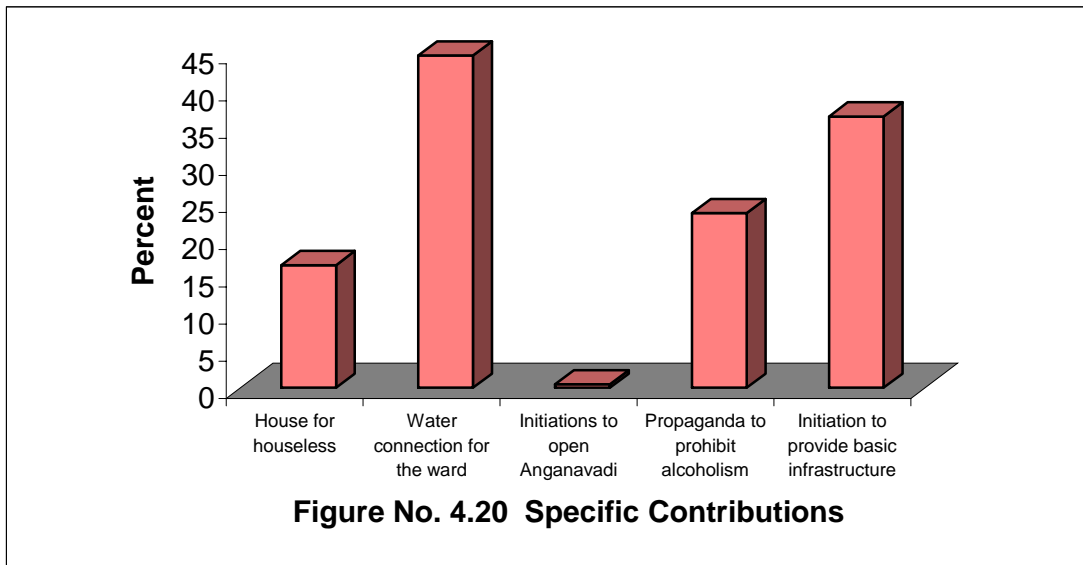
Table 4.19 analyses the fact that a large proportion of respondents 40 percent were discussing the problems in meeting and get the approval, 25.9 per cent of women identify the present problems of the ward, while 24.7 per cent of respondents discuss the problems identified by the people of the ward in the meetings. 12.9 per cent take initiative to see that Government projects and schemes reach the people. Only few 9.4 per cent take the initiate to complete the half-done projects. From this, it follows that majority of the respondents are aware of their responsibilities and independently discharge their functions in Panchayats.

Table No.: 4.20

Table showing the specific contribution made by the Respondents to their ward

Specific Contributions	Number	Percent
House for houseless	42	16.5
Water connection for the ward	114	44.7
Initiations to open Anganavadi	12	1
Propaganda to prohibit alcoholism	60	23.5
Initiation to provide basic infrastructure	93	36.5

***Note:** Percentage is not equal to 100 due to multiple choices.



From the analysis of the data, it is inferred that 44.7 percent of the respondents provided water connections in their ward, 36.5 per cent provided basic infra-structure, 23.5 per cent were engaged in propaganda against alcoholism, 16.5 per cent provided houses for the houseless and 1 per cent

took initiative in opening up of anganwadies. It can be concluded that women members have better knowledge of their roles and responsibilities and knew the functions of the gram panchayats.

Perception:

There is a 'core' to the empowerment process common to different situations, which consists of increase in self-esteem, a sense of dignity and having their right to be respected by others. If these core aspects are encouraged and developed women's self-perception will hang and internalized oppression challenged, contributing to increased power-to and power-from within.

The way one perceives oneself has a direct bearing on the confidence levels and assertiveness of an individual. A person, who perceives him or her in a positive light is self-confident, has the capabilities to take action and be responsible for them. While positive self-perception leads to many positive traits and actions, the perceptions of others also influence to a significant extent the individual's self-perception.

Self perception plays a significant part in the empowerment process. Holding office or responsible positions in the public sphere provides a tremendous boost to an individual's perception. While awareness, participation and decision-making are closely interlinked; perception is a more subjective attribute and is difficult to measure. An attempt has been made in this study to explore and analyse the perceptions of the respondents regarding their

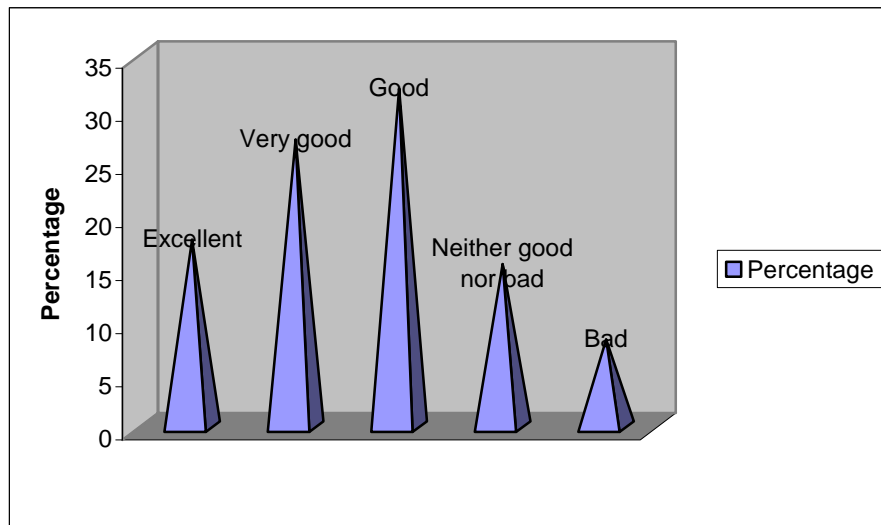
position in the panchayat, status in society, the way they perceive their roles as members and decision-makers, their limitations and potentials etc. A few dimensions of empowerment were identified in order to examine the extent of influence of each of these dimensions on the level of empowerment through panchayats.

Table No. 4.21

Table showing the perceived level of satisfaction of power and position of respondents in Gram Panchayats

Level of satisfaction	Number	Percentage
Excellent	45	17.6
Very good	69	27
Good	81	37.8
Neither good nor bad	39	15.3
Bad	21	8.2
Total	255	100

Figure No. 4.21: Level of satisfaction



It is quite evident from table and figure 4.21, that nearly 58.8 percent expressed their opinion on power and position as very good and good respectively. Only a minority of the respondents expressed their opinion on power and position as bad and disappointing. As a result of their outdoor participation in the delivery of welfare services, these respondents have acquired a new identity full of self-satisfaction and self-respect. They are getting much awaited social recognition from the community people. Moreover it is not only that their status changed within the family but even the very status of the family has changed in the community.

Table No.: 4.22

Table showing the perceived level of dominance by male members in the meetings as reported by the Respondents

Dominance by male	Number	Percentage
Dominance to a greater extent	36	14.1
Dominance to a moderate extent	63	24.7
Dominance to a minimum extent	54	21.2
No dominance	102	40
Total	255	100

Figure 4.22: Dominance by male members in the meetings

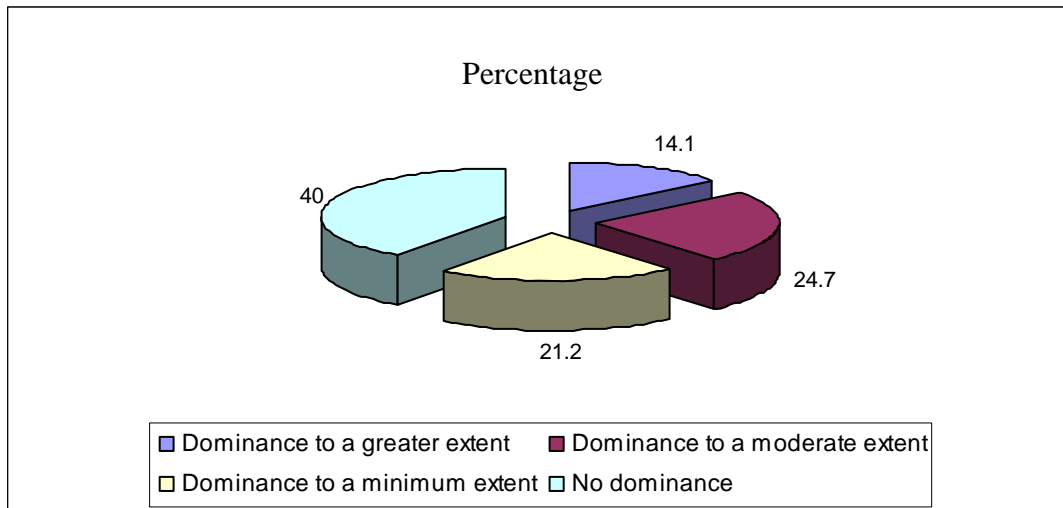


Table and figure 4.22 explains that 40 percent observed that women were in no way dominated by men. 24.7 per cent of respondents opinion is dominance to a moderate extent. 21.2 per cent respondents expressed the view that there was dominance to a minimum extent and only 14.1 per cent reported dominance to a greater extent. Majority of the women reported no or limited dominance by male members. However the analysis reveals that traditionalisation still exists and some, particularly illiterate and ignorant members were subject to domination in Panchayats by male members.

Male Member's Perception:

The study would be incomplete if one were not aware of the perception of men and officials associated with Gram Panchayat about the role of women members as well as the empowerment process. Therefore, the study explored the views and opinion of male members, officials and public. A separate

interview schedule was designed to understand the perceptions of these respondents. Overall their views on women empowerment have been quite encouraging.

- A majority of men perceive the reservation policy as beneficial to women. They feel that it has improved their status and respect within the family and society, increased awareness about the community. Women are now more visible in the public life.
- Another positive trend is that women as members and office-bearers in panchayats take more interest in developmental programmes.
- They give more importance to activities which meet the basic needs of the community such as drinking water, street lights, bore wells etc.
- An overwhelmingly large number of male respondents in panchayats view women as less corrupt.
- The active participation in meetings, regular interactions with the community and officials have improved the communication skills of women.
- Many male respondents do acknowledge the dual burden of women in carrying out their household responsibilities as well as official functions

To sum up:

Women have made good use of the opportunities provided by the reservation policy and are taking their roles and responsibilities seriously in the Gram Panchayats. An equally positive trend is observed regarding the men's acceptance of the women's capabilities and role in panchayats. Gender

sensitization for both men and women to bring about change in mindsets and behaviour is crucial for the empowerment process.

This study states that majority of women entered into politics due to the mandatory provision of reservation. Most of the women are from non-political background and entered into politics due to pressure from the political party or from the self interests. The important aspect of the study is that the women who reluctantly entered into politics showed great maturity in outlook enthusiasm, increasing political consciousness and increasing perception of their role and responsibility. In this study, it is found that a majority of the Gram Panchayats are headed by male presidents. When awareness levels are compared with the socio-economic profile of the respondents, it is found that age, education, caste and economic status might have a bearing on the awareness levels. Education is key to empowerment and it has a definite bearing on the awareness levels. In general respondents seem to play an active role in activities such as participation in panchayat meetings, discussing village problems in Gram Sabha, interacting with people to identify the needs of the community and an interesting revelation is that in a majority of cases it is found that women get lot of encouragement from their family members to attend panchayat meetings. Women seem to be actively participating in creating basic infrastructure at the Gram Panchayat. When levels of participation are compared with socio-economic profile of the respondents, generally education and access to information seem to be the most significant

CHAPTER – V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the objective of the study following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of empirical analysis:

- In all the thirty two panchayats, it has been found that women are fairly young in age, which indicates that the younger generation of women have realized the value of political participation.
- It has been observed that the participation of respondents with below secondary education tends to be more in a decentralised democracy.
- Regarding the caste profile, one third of the representatives belonged to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. The reservation of seats for these groups ensured their participation in Gram Panchayats.
- It is found that the Christians had a better representation than Muslim members in the Gram Panchayats.
- It reveals that majority of the respondents are married and are able to balance their roles in family life and political life.
- An overwhelming majority of the respondents come from joint-family background.
- The occupational status of the respondents' shows that, majority of them were housewives engaged in the household related activities.
- A majority of the respondents belonged to low income groups.

- Most of the women are from non-political background and entered politics due to the pressure of political parties, husband and family members.
- Social status of the family tends to bear a strong influence in determining women empowerment in Gram Panchayat than the economic status of the family.
- Majority of the respondents are only the members in Gram Panchayats.
- It is found that a majority of the Gram Panchayats are headed by male presidents.
- Majority of the respondents have represented their wards for the first time. It indicates the lack of experience, skill and ability of participation on the part of members.
- The members have secured self-satisfaction and self respect and also acquired a new identity because of their participation in welfare services.
- Most of the respondents knew that reservation of seats had been made for women from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and they were in favour of the Bill. This shows that the awareness level of women in Gram Panchayat is quite high.
- Majority of the respondents have awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They always visit the ward and interact with people to identify the problems of the wards.
- The nature of participation by the respondents in Panchayat proceedings and the ward sabha are quite encouraging.

- Involvement of women in the public activity is important for empowerment of women.
- Majority of the respondents have strong consciousness of their role in Panchayats and are capable of handling issues independently.
- The respondents in most of the Gram Panchayats discuss village problems in meetings, interact with people to identify the needs of the community and implement developmental programmes.
- Majority of respondents have made specific contributions in the form of taking initiative to provide basic infrastructure and water connection for ward.
- Decision- making role is important for empowerment. Majority of the respondents have involved themselves actively in decision making process. They have also exhibited potentiality to emerge as decision-makers.
- Large proportions of respondents present the problems in the meetings and get the approval. They are aware of their responsibilities and discharge their functions in Panchayat independently.
- Dominance by male members still exists in the Panchayat. The respondents think that only illiterate and ignorant members are dominated by male members.
- A majority of respondents have shown interest in continuation in politics.

- A large proportion of the respondents' opinion is that women leaders have got extra responsibilities towards women.
- Most of the respondents are of the opinion that training should be imparted to newly elected representatives.
- The problems faced by majority of the women in politics are balancing family life and professional career, lack of previous political experience, lack of knowledge of the Panchayat Act, lack of awareness, inferiority complex and lack of self-confidence.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Women are relegated to the background in politics because of male domination in Panchayats.
2. Most of the women are involved in politics out of the compulsion from political parties and family members. They have not entered into politics out of personal traits.
3. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the reservation policy for women undoubtedly make them to enter into public sphere. But reservation for women by itself will not empower the women members. They require regular orientation, training, educational and awareness building programmes which should be provided by the government.
4. Reservation policy for women has set a positive trend. Therefore reservation for women and reservation on the basis of caste should be continued.
5. Biased opinion of male members towards women should be given up.
6. Hardworking, result oriented and qualified women should be encouraged to join politics.
7. In most of the case maintaining a balance between their family life and political life is very challenging. This appears to be the major impediment for women in not making much headway in politics.

8. There is increasing presence and interference of major political parties in the day to day administration of the Panchayats. Intrusion of party politics is not a healthy trend.
9. Even though women occupy and hold positions in the Local Panchayats, participation and involvement in Panchayat affairs is secondary, while family affair is primary for them.
10. Unless socio-economic empowerment of women is not done, then political empowerment of women is almost impossible. Therefore political empowerment of women should be preceded by socio-economic empowerment.

SUGGESTION

In the light of the above study following specific suggestions can be made for the empowerment of women through their effective participation in political processes.

1. Men's hostility, indifferent attitude and domestic responsibilities are the major constraints in empowerment of women. Therefore, political awareness programmes should make women understand their rights and the benefits.
2. There is the need for regular orientation and training programmes that will help to increase the political and management skills of women in panchayats. Being politically skillful, they will be able to understand and assimilate diverse political opinion, participate intelligently in political debates and analyse issues to make useful decisions.
3. A long-term solution to women's participation in political activities rests in greater awareness about their role, responsibilities and entitlements.
4. Participatory approaches need to be adopted.
5. Expansion of information, education and development of communication Skills of women.
6. Empowerment as a process requires multi-dimensional efforts and holistic interventions. This requires concerted and sustained efforts by all

- concerned-policy makers, Governments, NGOs, Training Institutions and by the women and men themselves.
7. Sensitisation of men, both officials and elected members is very essential for women to be able to function effectively.
 8. Sharing and co-operation by both women and men would result in better designing and implementation of activities in panchayats.
 9. Women members have to be provided access to the basic rights such as literacy, legal and property rights etc.
 10. Contribution by women members should be recognized and appreciated in public spheres.
 11. Political empowerment of women need more support from officials and the public.
 12. Gender discrimination should be minimized or avoided.
 13. Reservation for women should be continued to ensure their empowerment through greater participation in political administration and decision making.
 14. More reservation for women in Panchayats is suggested for the empowerment of women.

CONCLUSION

It is quite evident from the study that, Gram panchayats in many places have become highly politicized. Without political patronage it is difficult in a majority of cases for both women and men members of panchayats to get elected. This interference from political parties and their representatives has adversely affected these local bodies.

An integrated approach is necessary to make the panchayats truly democratic and strengthen good governance. Training and research institutions, concerned state and central departments have a role in strengthening the panchayati raj institutions.

Reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has definitely set a positive trend overall. Despite the many problems and limitations women have proved that given an opportunity they are capable of becoming equal partners in the development process. To an extent women have managed to overcome their lack of access and opportunities whether pertaining to literacy, skills, mobility etc. and yet perform their roles and responsibilities as members of panchayati raj institutions. While reservation has provided a window of opportunity for women to enter the public sphere, much needs to be done to empower women in the true sense. It is important to be aware of the socio-economic and political background of the women who are elected to panchayats.

Awareness and training programmes to a large extent have focused on general aspects relating to the functioning of panchayats. As seen from the study in a majority of cases the awareness levels of women on these aspects are quite encouraging. Women cannot function and play their roles effectively unless they are able to assert themselves.

Empowerment is a process and multi-dimensional. It cannot be confined to a limited sphere. Planned interventions have to be made in areas including the economic, social and political spheres for true empowerment to take place. Therefore, women have to be provided access and opportunities to the basic rights such as literacy, legal and ownership rights etc. Political empowerment can be better sustained if women have at least a degree of economic independence.

The 73rd constitutional amendment and the reservation policy for women undoubtedly have set a positive trend. Women in large number have been able to create and occupy space in the public sphere. It has given them greater visibility as well as mobility. Women have also been able to enter other sectors and actively participate in local organizations. This has changed the perception and outlook of women and given them greater self-confidence. Women have gained better status both in family and outside. Family members and men in many instances perceive women in a more positive way.

In the context of gram panchayat, more reforms and structural changes are needed that would actually delegate powers and responsibilities to elected

women members. Sensitisation of men, both officials and elected members is very essential for women to be able to function effectively. Sharing and co-operation by both men and women would result in better designing and implementation of activities for the benefit of all.

At the same time women need to gain greater role clarity and strike a balance between their household and official responsibilities. While men have to be sensitized to be supportive in this, women need to bring about shifts in their attitudes and outlook.

Unless all these processes take place simultaneously and on a continuing basis empowerment of women in gram panchayats would remain a buzzword without translating into reality. There is a lot of scope and potential for women to emerge as leaders and decision makers and play a key role in the development and good governance of local institutions. It requires dedicated and committed efforts by all concerned.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of the Member:

2. Age:

3. Educational Qualification:

Illiterate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>	P.U.C	<input type="checkbox"/>
Graduate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Post Graduate	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Caste:

5. Religion:

6. Name of the Ward/Panchayat:

7. Family Background:

i) Marital Status: Married Unmarried
Widow Separated

ii) If Married

a) Husband's Occupation: Agriculturist Government Service
Private Sector Self employed

b) Husband's Education:

Illiterate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>	P.U.C	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

Graduate Post Graduate

iii) **Size of the Family:** Nuclear Joint Family

iv) **Occupation:** Agricultural Labour Industrial Labour

Self Employed House Wife

8. **Annual Income:** Less than 11,000.00

11,000/= to 25,000/=

50,000/= to 75,000/=

75,000/= to 1, 00,000/=

1, 00,000/= and above

Information relating to Panchayat Membership:

9. The persons who inspired you to enter politics:

Family members Husband Self

Political Party Village leaders

10. Present Position: Member Member of Standing Committee

Vice President President

11. Number of terms elected to Panchayat:

a) One b) Two c) Three 4) more than four

12. Please state your perceived level of satisfaction of power and position

Excellent Very Good Good

Neither good nor bad Bad

13. Are you aware of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act?

Very well aware

Just aware

Ignorant of it

Participation:

14. How often do you speak in panchayat meetings?

Always Very often Often
Less often Not at all

15. Do you participate actively in ward sabha and grama sabha and panchayat?

Very actively Actively
Less actively Passively

16. How often do you have presented the problems of your ward / panchayat in meetings?

Always Very often
Often Less often Not at all

17. Do you participate in process of decision making?

Actively involve Involve to a moderate level
No involvement

18. Do you meet the members of your ward and solve their problems?

Always Very frequently Frequently
Less frequently Never

19. What are your responsibilities in the Panchayat?

20. Do you observe any domination by the male members in the Panchayat?

Greater Extent Moderate extent

Minimum extent No dominance.

21. Do you act on your own in Panchayat?

Yes No

If No, Whom do you depend upon?

Husband Family members Panchayat leaders.

22. What is your contribution for the development of your ward / Panchayat?

General:

23. Do you intend to continue in politics?

Yes Cannot say No

24. As a women leader you have got an extra responsibility towards women

Yes No

25. What is your opinion regarding the women's Political Reservation Bill?

Absolutely essential Essential

Not essential Not at all essential

26. Do you think that the condition of women have improved with 73rd

Constitutional Amendment Act?

Yes No Can't say Not known

27. Do you think that as a woman you face problems in politics?

Yes No

If Yes, Give reasons

28. Are you a member of local organization?

Mahila Mandal

Self Help group

School Betterment Committee

Any other

29. Do you feel that your status in society has increased since then?

30. Is training imparted to newly elected women representatives?

Yes

No

31. How women can perform better in Panchayat activities? Give Suggestions.

32. If any other Suggestions?

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APPENDIX – II

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