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Rural Women : Leadership in Development

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**THE ROLE OF MAHILA MANDALS IN LOCALLY
MANAGED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM**

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ABSTRACT

In the post-independence period, several institutions have been introduced in rural areas for ensuring local participation in the task of socio-economic transformation of India. These institutions have included: Panchayats, Cooperatives and Mahila Mandals. This study was confined to Mahila Mandals and Panchayats. The Mahila Mandals were to act as nurseries fostering leadership qualities so that women could participate in all these institutional endeavours. Besides, the Mahila Mandals were to organise women for collective action and for acquiring new ideas and skills.

Some of the preconditions for the Mahila Mandals to flourish were (a) increasing growth of panchayats - the grassroot democratic institutions, and (b) decreasing control of official machinery over rural development programmes particularly those capable of being managed locally and the planning and implementation of such programmes being entrusted to democratic institutions. These conditions have not only been absent but operating in the reverse direction: decreasing role of panchayats and increasing centralised bureaucratic control over even locally manageable rural development programmes. As could be expected, this process has left the Mahila Mandals high and dry, if not defunct, barring some brave exceptions.

Exceptions do however confirm that where women in Mahila Mandals had access to panchayats (especially panchayats where women had been given a significant presence as in Karnataka), leadership qualities among women have developed demonstrably. They are able to articulate and press for development needs of their constituency or organise protests against anti-development/anti-social practices, fearlessly and fairly successfully.

But nowhere have the Mahila Mandals been associated, by design, with the planning and implementation of locally manageable rural development programmes - not even where a percentage of the programmes is earmarked for women (IRDP, JRY etc.) or even where the entire programme (e.g. DWCRA) is for women. This exclusion of Mahila Mandals is all the more glaring since the same Union Ministry oversees the development of Mahila Mandals, Panchayats and poverty alleviation programmes and it has had the benefit of findings of periodic evaluations in three decades.

Everywhere, women members of Mahila Mandals/Panchayats are handicapped for lack of information about formal structures, their scope and functions. This suggests serious failure of the extension organisation in fulfilling its educational/informational role entrusted to it since 1954. Where the Mahila Mandals have not suffered from such a constraint, the study invariably found the supporting hand of a non-government organisation.

The policy implications are obvious.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

The focus of this study of The Role of Mahila Mandals in the Locally Managed Rural Development Programmes with Special Reference to Panchayati Raj System, is on leadership: whether Women's organisations have really developed; and if not what are the constraints?

In the study outline, this central question was elaborated from different angles in some 8-points.

1. An assessment of the activities of the Mahila Mandal/National Programmes which are being implemented through them.
2. Analysis of the strategies of the Mahila Mandals for (a) mobilising women (b) local people over public issue/fund raising, through consciousness raising.
3. Assessment of problems and constraints, success or failure of Mahila Mandals to achieve the above.
4. To assess the response of local leaders, people and beneficiaries of programmes of these organisations.
5. To assess whether the Mahila Mandal has been effective in creating linkages with local institutions like Panchayats, Zilla Parishads.
6. To assess how far Mahila Mandal has been successful in sending women representatives in the district planning bodies.
7. To what extent they participate in the decision making process of village development programme.
8. To study if Mahila Mandals are capable of providing training ground for women to fight panchayat election?

The aim was to identify the factors external and/or internal to Mahila Mandals which contribute to their success or stagnation; and the emerging policy and related measures necessary to enable women to be visible play a vital role in social and economic development and in the decision making process.

The results of the study which included field work in selected states and purposive interviews with women members of Mahila Mandals and panchayats, are presented here, preceded by a brief historical perspective starting from the First Five Year Plan.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Social and economic transformation has been the theme and thrust of India's planned development with the beginning of the First Plan in 1952. A National Community Development Programme was initiated that year to awaken and mobilise the rural masses for such a transformation. But it so transpired that operationally, the Community Development Programme was spearheaded not by the community itself but by a specially raised administrative machinery named Block Development Organisation, headed by a Block Development Officer aided by 'extension' workers upto the village level. Each district had on an average 10 to 12 CD blocks. All the Block Development Organisations working in a district were to work under the overall direction of the existing District Administration headed by the Deputy Commissioner. It was soon realised however that while this administrative organisation had succeeded in introducing a variety of development activities in rural areas, in diverse fields, it was inherently limited in awakening and mobilising the community.

Hence, the Planning Commission came to accept the findings and views advanced by various high-powered review committees (notably the Balvantrai Mehta Committee) that (a) the institutional base for social and economic transformation must be a network of democratically elected and run institutions (named by the committee as Panchayat Raj Institutions); and (b) that while panchayats were necessary, they were not sufficient to mobilise fully the power and participation of women in the development endeavour, which would require a special additional effort. This realisation gave birth in the early 50's to the idea of bringing up village level 'Mahila Mandals' which were conceived as an institution to foster leadership among women and to provide a platform for collective action by women as well as a vehicle for acquiring new ideas and skills. But again, this idea too suffered from the same pitfall as the CD programme. Operationally, the ushering in of Mahila Mandals was entrusted to the Block Development Organisation. The BDO being aided in this programme by full time women extension workers designated as Mukhya Gram Sevika and Gram Sevikas. Though there was a caveat that the sevikas would play "only a marginal role" i.e. act mainly as catalytic agent, in practice the Mahila Mandals came to be 'dependants' of the extension organisation rather than self-propelled vehicles for the advancement of rural women.

In contrast, legislative and administrative measures were taken to give substance to 'democratic decentralisation' (Panchayati Raj) to vest responsibility and power with the rural community itself for leading the development endeavour. However, corresponding measures - to reorder the role of the official machinery to make it play a supporting if not subordinate role in relation to panchayati raj institutions - were not taken.

In concept, Panchayati Raj and Mahila Mandals were to be mutually reinforcing social forces. Formal political authority and budgetary resources were, however vested by law only in the Panchayats. The latter comprise of popularly elected representatives - subject to periodic elections; and have wider/universal responsibility to all the population including women. Clearly, in the scheme of things the existence and vitality of panchayat raj institutions was a pre-requisite of success of mahila mandals which were to foster leadership qualities in rural women and organise them for collective action in a democratically (and not bureaucratically) planned and managed development endeavour.

The pursuit of panchayats which began energetically in the late 50's, slackened by the late 60's. The Panchayat enactments were allowed to languish. On the other hand, from the 70's, a greater push was given to 'poverty alleviation programmes' with substantial back-up of budgetary resources. The Panchayats were not associated with these programme in any planning or operational responsibility. That responsibility was vested exclusively in the official machinery. This exclusion compounded the decline of the panchayats. On the other hand the official machinery was expanded and strengthened substantially. A special setup was raised comprising of officially owned and operated 'registered societies' called the District Rural Development Societies/Agencies (DRDS or DRDA). This step institutionalised the exclusion of panchayats and indeed the community at large, from the development endeavour.

The roles were thus reversed again (as in the early 50's) - the people and their representative institutions were moved to the periphery while the officials occupied the centre of rural development. The latter thus acquired unprecedented power and influence given the wide range of poverty alleviation programme (IRDP, NREP, DPAP, RLEGP, DWCRA, TRYSEM, JRY etc.; and their huge outlays. According to the Eighth Plan, outlay on such programmes is estimated about Rs. 6500 crore per annum. The influence of DRDAs was in fact overblown in the absence of panchayat raj institutions.

These developments shrank the overall environment necessary for the success of Mahila Mandals. They limited the scope for linking the Mahila Mandals with elected women members in the panchayat raj; or for the Mahila Mandals to participate in development activities which rested almost exclusively on the discretion of the official machinery.

Though in 1960, there were as many as 50,000 Mahila Mandals, a study found that they were 'just paper organisations.' The study attributed this study of affairs to a growing shift of policy and approach from Community Development Programmes to Intensive Agricultural Development (IADP) which was more pronouncedly administration-led programme. Then even the CD programme than that study found, "led to further neglect of focus on women".

Although several programmes such as IRDP, JRY envisaged 30% earmarking for the poorest of the poor women, the administration in command of these programmes had not thought it fit to involve the Mahila Mandals (even where the latter existed) with those programmes. A programme like DWCRA, which is exclusively for rural women and children, and almost tailor-made for mahila mandal involvement is also operated by the official machinery (Gram Sevikas and BDO) without participation of the Mahila Mandals.

Thus, the Mahila Mandals if they have survived or succeeded, have done so inspite of the absence of the encouraging external environment which panchayats or control over locally managed rural development programmes, were to provide. The centrally-sponsored programmes, and related guidelines/manuals, do not delineate any role for the Mahila Mandals. Nor does the official machinery at the ground level concede them any corner.

This marked indifference to or exclusion of Mahila Mandals, has continued despite numerous evaluation and other reports, reaching the policy-makers in the past three decades. As early as in 1957, the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO) of the Planning Commission had reported that a high percentage of Mahila Mandals were "inactive". The same year the High Powered Committee on Planned Projects found that the Mahila Mandals were active largely in semi-urban villages, and little among poorer women. In 1959, a UNCD Evaluation Mission reported the pathetic reduction of Mahila Mandals to "tailoring" and recorded women's aversion to being categorised as mere tailors. By 1960, PEO found that 60 percent of the Mahila Mandals had become "defunct"; and by 1965 they were engaged mainly in bhajans/kirtans.

In 1971, independent academicians noted that officials considered their responsibility to end with "establishing" Mahila Mandals; and that ensuring the latter's meaningful involvement in the programmes was not their concern. In 1976, the National Commission on Agriculture regretted that involvement of Mahila Mandals, in the development programmes by the officials was "half-hearted". In 1977, NIRD found that even in the ANP programme where the MMs were relatively more involved, their involvement had been rendered "rather marginal"; and that the full potential of MMs was not being utilised for development.

In 1978, a working group attributed slow progress of MMs to lack of clear objectives, largely sectional approach of official development agencies compounded by lack of coordination among the latter, and to "rigidity" in design/structure of the rural development programmes. All these factors were seen as inhibiting membership of MMs, which was reported to be "stationary" and "negligible", specially women from the poorer sections.

More recently 'Sharam Shakti' (Report of the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1988) made the following observed that in many states, mahila mandals exist historically e.g. in the North East, where they are playing

a significant role in the community. In other States, where village level mahila mandals have come up after independence, their role has not been effective, nor have they been able to draw in a majority of the poor women in the village.

"With the spread of development and poverty alleviation programmes, reaching the interior parts of the country, women in the villages have become aware, and are eager to do something to improve their situation. Many mahila mandals, so far dormant are today eager for action. Mahila Mandals have tremendous potential in actively involving village women in changing the rural scene. But this potential is still not utilised"

The Commission perceives the village mahila mandals as a suitable vehicle for change. Therefore, it strongly recommends that

1. "The village mahila mandal should be vigorously utilised in the implementation of the poverty alleviation programmes. It should be entrusted with the responsibility of identifying IRDP beneficiaries. The list submitted by the village mahila mandals should carry enough weightage at the decision making level. The village mahila mandals may also be entrusted to prepare a list of work-site and proposed programmes under NREP, TRYSEM, RLEGP, Social Forestry and the like.
2. The mahila mandal should be encouraged to initiate innovative programmes like smokeless chullah, sulabh latrines, income generating skill training, water management and biogas plants.
3. The Mahila Mandals should be provided adequate resources by the Government to enable it to carry effective messages and information.

The Government must give recognition to mahila mandals. There will be resistance from the local officials and vested interest groups against the mahila mandal getting active, so a strong sustained support will be absolutely necessary from the government. The mahila mandals may make mistakes, they will take time to prepare themselves for this role, but once they become active, they will be in a position to energise the mass of women workers. The Commission recognises that this is the only way to involve village women actively in the development process."

In the two principal sites chosen for this study - U.P. and Karnataka, the panchayats were revived in Karnataka in the recent past, but not so in U.P. Comparative results of the study from the two states do confirm the historical experience analysed here - that active panchayats do create favourable conditions for Mahila Mandals/women in general, for participation in the locally manageable development, and that their participation in development programmes increases with decreasing centralised bureaucratic control over planning and administration of such programmes. Another historical fact that is noteworthy is that since 1952 -

i.e. for full four decades, the same Union Ministry has been overseeing community development (later renamed rural development, including poverty alleviation programmes) as well as mahila mandals and panchayat raj. But what is not noticeable is any conscious effort to link or establish harmony in the accepted roles of these institutions and programmes to enhance their effectiveness. This rigid compartmentalisation at the top, regrettably, also gets transferred wholesale to the official programmes and machinery upto the village level.

The phenomenon that for four decades the wisdom of successive studies and evaluation reports have gone unheeded and that structural compartmentalisation from top to bottom has continued unyieldingly, can be explained only in terms of excessive "political centralism which has grown in the country over the years". This has had the effect of "emasculating if not destroying a variety of institutions which are vital for democracy and social justice". Mahila Mandals and panchayats belong to this family of institutions.

It is in this perspective of a passive if not discouraging external environment that the achievements of rural women's institutions - MMs and panchayats have to be adjudged, and their size and impact though limited, stands out as nothing short of a miracle.

RURAL INSTITUTIONS, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND LINKAGES

This section provides a brief description of the two principal rural institutions: Mahila Mandals and Panchayats which were/are expected to facilitate women's advancement followed by major rural development and social development programmes relevant for meeting women's development needs and capable of being managed locally such as IRDP, JRY, DWCRA, TRYSEM.

The section concludes by reviewing linkages, conceived, established and realised at the ground level, between the aforesaid rural institutions and development programmes. The structure of this section is as follows:

A. Institutions

1. Mahila Mandals
2. Panchayats

B. Programmes

1. IRDP
2. JRY
3. DWCRA
4. TRYSEM

C. Linkages between Institutions and Programmes

1. Earmarking for women.
2. Role assigned in planning and implementation to Mahila Mandals and Panchayats

INSTITUTION - MAHILA MANDALS

India has had a long years of experience in organisations for women, including rural women. Before independence there had been a tradition for women, meeting in Samajams both to enjoy their leisure and for community activities. There had also always been natural tendency for women to socialise amongst themselves rather than with men. But today, the scenario is different. Mahila Mandal is no more an informal group but a formal one. Mahila Mandal is a registered society under 1860 Registration Act. Anyone can become member of society irrespective of caste and creed. It consists of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

With the beginning of planned economic development in 1951, an officially sponsored national programme for women and youth was launched. According to that programme Mahila Mandals or women's associations, were to be organised as vehicles for disseminating various types of welfare programmes and extension services to

women. Hence the concept of Mahila Mandal emerged formally. Steps were being taken to strengthen existing Mahila Mandals and to promote such institutions in those villages where these did not exist. There was a large number of programmes, particularly those meant for women and children in the Fifth Five Year Plan which could be implemented by the voluntary groups in rural areas. These programmes included family welfare, integrated child development services, nutrition services and sanitation.

The role of Mahila Mandals was reemphasised once again under the poverty alleviation programme. The main emphasis was Mahila Mandals or women's groups to serve as village level forum to organise women. This was the result of various changes that came up with the progress of women's movement. In late 1974 Committee on Status on Women in India (CSWI) submitted its report 'Towards Equality'. The report presented the disadvantaged position of women as evidenced by declining sex ratio, lower life expectancy for women than for men, higher infant mortality for female children etc. Subsequently, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) initiated research programmes on women. The Planning Commission directed the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) to collect information on women's works in its 32nd round (1977-78). These advances led to major phenomenal changes in the policy formulation of the programme targeted for the women. The Sixth Five year Plan (1980-85) introduced some major changes in programmes for women. The plan emphasised economic independence of women along with access to health care and family planning services. The programmes like TRYSEM and DWCRA were also introduced.

A large number of Mahila mandals have been organised in both rural and urban areas through the initiative of welfare organisations like the Central Social Welfare Board and its state agencies, Ministry of Agriculture and Community Development etc. The annual report of CSWB (1990-91) states that at present 314 Mahila Mandals are being involved in various activities (balwadis, maternity and social education). The objective of the Mahila Mandal programme was to serve as forums through Gram Sevikas imparting certain skills such as sewing, knitting and kitchen gardening and to organise women for collectively running their own Mahila Mandals. The programme was to provide initial support in the form of funds, equipments, personnel and access to other appropriate agencies from whom the women might obtain assistance.

Some of the Mahila Mandals have been found to have contributed positively towards rural development as mentioned in the following studies :

In Himachal Pradesh the Mahila Mandals working in collaboration with Rural Centre for Human Interest (RUCHI) have been found to be successful in involving women in wasteland development schemes, teaching simple crafts, providing smokeless chullah, sulabh sauchalaya, creches and starting primary non-formal education, (Statesman, 1989).

In Andhra Pradesh Mahila Mandals working in close collaboration with Bhagavatula Charitable Trust (BCT) a NGO, have been found to be successful in training women as 'para-vets' that is animal health and extension worker, (Ramdas, 1988).

In Kerala Mahila Samajams have done excellent work in the area of health, education, poultry, cattle rearing and in social forestry, (Vasu, 1989). Another successful story of Mahila Samajam of Pacha-poika in Kerala reveals that they have done excellent work in employment generation activities and setup creches for the children of working mothers. Samajams have been able to form multi-purpose cooperatives. For implementing the non-formal education scheme Mahila Samajams bagged a state level award from Kerala State Council. Mahila Samajams have also been able to construct a balwadi building and to run the programme successfully under the composite program for women and children, with financial assistance from the block authorities and the local public, (Kamalakshan, 1987).

In Karnataka, 36 Mahila Mandals have been found to be effective in the process of socio-economic upliftment of rural women. Mahila Mandals have helped women in bringing about a better understanding among the members and also improve their status in the village, (Hanumappa and Sujata, 1984).

In the recent meeting conducted by HERC, representatives of Mahila Mandals from four districts of Uttarakhand region Chamoli, Tehri, Pauri and Uttar Kashi have shown their interest in taking up economic activities for the women. The women experience feeling of strength and recognise their potential to undertake development activities in future, (Kriti, 1992).

On the other hand there are studies which noticed failures of the Mahila Mandals and identified the reasons for the same. Jain & Reddy, (1979) conducted selective study of Mahila Mandals in Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Orissa, Punjab and Tamil Nadu and attributed the following reasons for its failure i) lack of funds (ii) non-availability of guidance from officials (iii) lack of proper infrastructure and orientation in organisation's management.

Reddy (1982) pointed out in her study that the Mahila Mandals of three villages from Andhra Pradesh, by and large had not laid down specific rule for purpose of their organisation, management, election procedure, meeting, implementation of programme and the collection of membership fee. The progress of the membership was found to be steady. Reasons for such findings were attributed to illiteracy, lack of time, interest, understanding, and co-operation. A need for providing education and training for job was emphasized for the women which would help them to earn extra income.

Chakraborty (1985) pointed out the following handicaps which beset the Mahila Mandals.

- lack of clarity in objectives;
- difficulties in identifying target groups;
- neglect of economic activity or training in productive skills;
- lack of properly qualified field staff;
- failure to mobilize effective and sustainable support of menfolk;
- little encouragement of local initiative for identification of needs etc.

The study conducted by SNDT University (1982) on the Mahila Mandals in the city of Bombay observed that most of the Mahila Mandals made efforts to take up economic activities in order to provide employment and income to needy women. They also conducted various classes which helped women in their homes. The study also observed that most of the Mahila Mandals consisted of members of women from upper middle class and were situated in the better area of the city. Majority of the active members belong to the age group of 35-50 years which means Mahila Mandal have not been able to attract young workers to their organisation.

Arguing over the issue that women were to be viewed not as recipients of services but as responsible participants in the process of development, Sharma (1986) reviewed the role of Central Social Welfare Board. Many of the Mahila Mandals working in the village level were supposed to be funded by CSWB. According to her the number of Mahila Mandals has been declining because of lack of funds. Sharma maintained that lack of effective administrative machinery is also a reason for failures of the Mahila Mandals.

It appears from the above section that Mahila Mandals have tremendous potential to carry out rural development programmes. However, as some of the studies have pointed out they have largely failed to achieve this potential for reasons to be discussed in the concluding part of this section.

PANCHAYATI RAJ IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

Panchayati Raj, one of the most important political innovations of independent India is supposed to be a channel for popular participation in the development process. It is intended to function as a politico-administrative arrangement mostly to replace and extend the pattern of colonial administration to the new policy. Balvant Rai Mehta Committee in its study of the Community Projects and National Extension Survey, emphasised the imperative of democratic decentralisation as the basis for rural reconstruction. It concluded that without local initiative and interest, community development programmes would not work. It recommended setting up of elected self-governing institutions to institutionalise people's participation in community development, tribal development, co-operation, communication, promotion of

rural industries, health, education, agriculture and animal husbandry. The Committee also made recommendations for promoting the welfare of women, and urged that they should particularly be assisted to increase their income. The Committee recommended the appointment of gram sevikas and women social extension officers to facilitate effective implementation of women's welfare programme.

In 1978, another high powered review was made by the Ashok Mehta Committee. It evaluated the functioning of panchayati raj institutions. According to the report the growth of Panchayati Raj had gone through three phases - the first phase of ascendance 1959-64, the second phase of stagnation 1965-69, the third phase of decline 1972-75.

The Ashok Mehta Committee report too emphasised the role of women. Programmes for women "should recognise and strengthen their constructive, decision-making and managerial roles so as to enable them to have full access to development resources and services". Emphasising the importance of the motivational and promotional role of panchayati raj bodies in women's programmes, the Committee recommended a formation of a Committee with all women members of the proposed mandal panchayats represented in it so that the decision on priorities and choices in welfare and development programmes meant for women were made by them. But the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee Report were not implemented by the central or state Government with any firmness, with the exception of Karnataka, which legislated in 1985 to set up the recommended Mandal Panchayat and Zilla Parishads, and to reserve 25 percent of the seats for women. The system of Panchayat in Karnataka is described separately in this section.

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) proposed reservation of seats for women in panchayats and zilla parishads and local municipal bodies in order to promote increased political participation by them. It also recommended that higher representation of women belonging to SC, ST and economically weaker sections should be ensured.

In short, the various committee reports throughout have not only highlighted the inadequacies in the existing panchayati raj structure but also, emphasised the role of women in promoting rural development. As a result of this a need at the centre was felt to bring structural and functional changes in the set-up. This led to the introduction of 64th Amendment Bill which has specified two schemes for women. First - The Panchayat (Constitution (64th) Amendment Bill) has specified two schemes of reservation for women. First of seats reserved by SCs and STs 30% of the seats, or if there are only two such seats then one seat, should be reserved for women from SC and ST. Second, as nearly as may be, 30% (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to SC and ST) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat and allotted by rotation in different constituencies in a panchayat. Although the 64th Amendment Bill failed to secure parliament's approval, the above

provisions relating to women have been embodied in the 72nd Amendment Bill for Panchayats, currently under consideration of Parliament.

STATUS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ STRUCTURE IN UTTAR PRADESH AND KARNATAKA

After the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report the government of U.P. gave serious thought to introduce democratic decentralisation. It made Zilla Parishad the vital instrument in the scheme of democratic decentralisation through the Uttar Pradesh Anthrim Zilla Parishad Act. The Anthrim Zilla Parishad took over the function of existing District Boards and District Planning Committees.

The structural pattern of U.P. Panchayati Raj System consists of three tiers. first tier or village level represents Gram Panchayat, second tier or the middle level represents block level (Kshetra Samiti), and the third tier or upper level represents the Zilla Parishad.

Gram Panchayat

Each village has three types of bodies for the purpose of day-to-day administration. These are the Gaon Sabhas, Gaon Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats, which are, respectively, the legislative, executive and judicial bodies.

A Gaon Sabha consists of all adults ordinarily residents in the area for which it is established. It is empowered to pass its own budget with the approval of the prescribed authority under the Act, viz. the District Panchayat Raj Officer. Some of the compulsory duties of a Gaon Sabha are the construction, repair, maintenance and lighting of public paths, maintenance the opening of libraries, dispensaries, planting of trees on public highways, etc.

A Gaon Panchayat is an elected body of the Gaon Sabha, whose primary duty is to implement the decision of the Gaon Sabha, it consists of a Pradhan, one Upa-Pradhan and 7-15 members elected by the Gaon Sabha. The number of members is fixed on the basis of population. The functions of the Gaon Panchayat can be divided into two categories - obligatory and discretionary. They cover a wide range including cultural, social, agricultural and development activities ranging from sanitation, drinking water supply, construction of roads, culverts, schools and bridges etc. They are encouraged to mobilize their own financial resources and manpower through people's participation.

Kshetra Samiti

Under the democratic decentralisation scheme as recommended by the Balwant Rai Mehta Study team, the three tier system was adopted

in U.P. in 1961. A Kshetra Samiti comprises 10 or more Nyaya Panchayats which consists of about 100 villages.

Every Kshetra Samiti has a Pramukh who is elected by the members of the Samiti. There is a provision for two Upa-Pramukhs to be elected from amongst the members of the Kshetra Samiti. It consists of all Pradhans of Gaon Panchayats, Chairmen of all Town Area Committees and notified Area Committees within the block and all MPs and MLAs representing the Area. It also coopts persons, interested in planning and developmental works, representatives of women and persons belonging to scheduled castes.

The Kshetra Samiti is entrusted with various types of functions in the sphere of development of agriculture including formulation and execution of plans for increased production, construction and maintenance of minor irrigation works, in the sphere of Animal Husbandry, Medical, Public Health and Education.

Zilla Parishad

A Zilla Parishad is an indirectly elected body with a membership consisting of the Pramukhs of Kshetra Samitis, the Presidents of Municipal Boards, members of the State Legislature and of both the houses of Parliament as its ex-officio members and certain representatives of co-operatives of cooperative institutions and trade unions. The above members coopt certain women and persons belonging to scheduled castes also. Every Zilla Parishad has an Adhyaksha and Upa-adhyaksha elected by its members.

The powers and functions of Zilla Parishad include control and regulation of cattle markets and fairs, provision of veterinary facilities, assistance to Kshetra Samitis in promoting and developing village roads and district roads for the purpose of management by Gram Panchayats, Kshetra Samitis and the Zilla Parishad, respectively, to act, subject to the rules made on his behalf, as the main channel of correspondence between the State Government on the one hand and the Kshetra Samitis and Gaon Panchayats on the other.

To conclude, though in the immediate post-independence period, Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh gained in prestige and power and the Panchayat system became statutory and was backed by administrative and regulatory functions, its subsequent history has been chequered. In recent past, even the Anthrim Zilla Parishads which were regarded by the state as the cornerstone of the system, have been debilitated. Elections have not been held for a long time and they have been run by the administrators.

In 1978, all of them were superseded and again in 1988 elections were held after 10 years. Not only elections to this tier have been highly irregular, the Zilla Parishads have remained with no executive functions or resources of their own.

The Ram Murti study team reported that in U.P., the Kshetra Samitis and Zilla Parishads are in actual practice no better than the old Block Development Committees and the Antarim Zilla Parishads, mainly because of certain reservations and resistance in certain quarters (NIRD, 1980).

Karnataka

The government introduced a totally new legislative scheme for Panchayati Raj known as the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluka Panchayat Samithis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act, 1985.

Zilla Parishad

This is the most powerful institution in the Panchayati Raj, around which the new system moves. Its jurisdiction extends over the whole district except in places where there are town municipalities and municipal corporations.

There is one member elected for every 28,000 people (except in Kodagu where a member represents 12,000 people).

Every Zilla Parishad has an Adhyaksha (President). He has been conferred the status equal to a minister of state. The Zilla Parishad also has an Upadhyaksha (vice-president), with a salary and status equal to that of a deputy minister. Both hold office for five years.

One of the main duties of the Zilla Parishad is to formulate and execute the district plan. It undertakes overall supervision, co-ordination and implementation of the plans. The development programmes which the Zilla Parishad implement are in the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, welfare of SCs and STs, and Backward Classes, management of hospitals and dispensaries, construction and maintenance of roads, minor irrigation works, promotion of cottage industries etc. Every Zilla Parishad is to have nine standing committees to specialize in different specific functions and areas of responsibility. It also has the power to review the work of the Mandal Panchayat from time to time.

Mandal Panchayats

A Mandal Panchayat area comprises a revenue village or group of villages having a population of not less than 8,000 and not more than 12,000. One member for every 400 population (approx. 80 families) or part thereof is elected to the Mandal Panchayat.

The Mandal Panchayat elects the Pradhans and Upa-Pradhans. The mandal has three different kinds of functions : obligatory, discretionary and transferred. The obligatory functions include health and sanitation which embodies construction and maintenance

of wells, tanks and water supply, sanitation and provision of public latrines. Construction, repairs and maintenance of roads, drains, bunds, regulation of grazing lands and lighting of the villages are some of the other tasks of the mandals.

The mandals also formulate agricultural production plans of the area, establish stores of improved seeds and pesticides, propagate improved methods of cultivation and related activity. Promotion of educational, economic, social, cultural and other interests of SCs and STs are also important responsibilities of the mandals. The transferred functions include management of forests, waste land and cultivation of common lands.

The most significant feature of the 1983 Act is the reservation of seats for weaker sections of society, such as women (25% reservation) and SCs/STs (minimum of 18% seats reserved). One seat each in the Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayat is reserved for women of the SCs/STs. Karnataka is certainly the only State in the country which has made such a large reservation of seats for women. Considering the fact that there are 887 seats in the Zilla Parishads and 55,188 in the Mandal Panchayats, women have 222 seats in the Zilla Parishads and 13,797 seats in the Mandal Panchayats reserved for them.

S.K. Dey, after the Karnataka Panchayati Raj had functioned for six months remarked, "I found during my discussions with them (women members) that they were educated and proposed to act as catalysts. It is these 15,000 women in the Mandal Panchayats who will be built-up as the fighting core for development. Once they start being the core targets among the functionaries, the message of Panchayati Raj will spread like wild fire"(Dey, 1987).

The present Act envisages a complete separation of the development and regulatory functions in the district. The regulatory functions have been assigned to the Deputy Commissioner of the District. The responsibility of discharging development functions have been entrusted to the chief secretary of the Zilla Parishad. The clear-cut demarcation of powers would, presumably, also lead to the efficient management of the developmental resources and functions.

The third notable features of the Act is to bring both planning and implementation under the purview of the elected representatives of the grass-roots, and also the direct participation of the people at the Gram Sabhas. In many states, plans are usually prepared at the State level, without the direct in-put from the people of villages. Some states have district planning councils of MLAs, MLCs and MPs under the chairmanship of a state minister or a district collector to perform limited functions of planning. A local bodies Finance Commission is constituted on the lines of the Central Finance commission. It decides, once every five years, the quantum of devolution of funds from the State to the local bodies.

The financial outlay to be transferred to the Zilla Parishad is enhanced substantially. The Gadgil formula of devolution of resources has been applied to make the Zilla Parishad a viable development agency of the district.

For the first time in the country, all the developmental departments and agencies of the district have been brought under the purview of the elected representatives. The District Rural Development Societies (DRDS) have been amalgamated with Zilla Parishads. No other State including West Bengal has done this yet.

This facilitates the integration and co-ordination of the efforts and resources of development of the district. Secondly, the element of accountability of administrators to the elected representatives of the Panchayati Raj has been introduced.

Earlier, a district officer enjoyed enormous power. He was the powerful executive responsible for policy making and implementation. There was no effective check (by local elected representatives) on the acts of commission and omission of the district officer. He also had enormous financial authority.

Now, the district administration, earlier under the deputy commissioner, is under the political elected members. A great deal of money is now routed through the Zilla Parishad, estimated at about 900 crores a year.

To assist the political leadership in the Zilla Parishads, with proper administration and coordinated supervision of all development staff in the Zilla, the Zilla Parishad has been given a chief executive officer (governmental official), of the rank of deputy commissioner who is designated as the chief secretary of the Zilla Parishad. Although the chief secretary is of the same rank as the deputy commissioner, he/she is a person who is senior to those who hold the rank of deputy commissioner in the districts.

A summary of findings of a recent evaluation of the Panchayati Raj in Karnataka are given in the appendix together with a profile of women in the Zilla Parishads. (see Annexure)

Briefly it says :

Among the matters that had to be considered were the innovations that were introduced in the new Panchayati Raj Act of 1983. These included the 25% seats reserved for women, for the first time in the country, and also the fact that for the first time, the bulk of the planning and development activities in the State (rural areas) was now under the Panchayati Raj.

While the seats for women and other weaker sections of society were filled, there was a perceptible indication that Panchayati Raj was not effective or had any noticeable impact on the functioning in the Panchayati Raj was not effective or had any no-

ticeable impact on the functioning of these institutions. This is not surprising, when one considers that these weaker groups, particularly women and SCs and STs were in a poor position vis-a-vis the men of upper castes, and this had persisted for generations. One cannot really expect these groups to immediately begin to assert themselves, even though they now have some opportunity to do so.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN

With the shift in approach to women's issues from welfare programmes in social sector to mainstream development effort, the Government embarked on some major programmes for women. While some programmes were exclusive to women, others kept specific targets for them. The major development programmes implemented by the Government have been mentioned in a Table III-A and also described briefly as follows:

Self Employment Programmes

1. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) to promote self employment through subsidized credit. In order to ensure women's participation it was decided that 40% of the beneficiaries should be women.
2. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) targeted specifically for women to provide them with suitable self employment opportunities through inputs. The strategy adopted for DWCRA is that of group formation, each consisting of 10-15 women belonging to the target families. Each DWCRA group is given a grant of Rs.15,000/ as revolving fund for infrastructure, raw material, marketing etc., The programme has also included provisions of community centres to provide space for training and demonstration.
3. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) to promote group formation and training skills. The programme provides for coverage of 40% of women as beneficiaries.

Wage Employment Programmes

1. Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) to provide additional opportunities through employment-generation scheme. This programme has earmarked 30% of the employment for women.
2. Employment Guarantee Sheme (EGS) implemented by the Govt. of Maharashtra. The important achievement of EGS is that it has a high female participation rate. Some evaluatory studies have shown that women contributed more than half of the wage income.

Welfare Programme

Integrated Child Development Programme (ICDS), a national level programme was introduced in 1975 by the Government, in different parts of the country (rural and urban areas). The projects aimed at delivering a package of services in an integrated manner to pre-school children, expectant women and nursing mothers. The various components of the package of services being provided in the ICDS scheme include supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health checkup, nutrition and health education, referral services and non-formal education. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Rural Development (1991-92) has also stated that DWCRA has been dovetailed with ICDS in many states of the country.

Special Nutrition Programme

Under this scheme supplementary nutrition is provided to the beneficiaries of the ICDS projects. World Food Programme, an UN agency extends food aid for supplementary nutrition for children below 6 years, pregnant women and nursing mothers. The project completed four phases from 1976-1990 and so far covered 2.12 lakh mothers distributed in 12 states of the country.

Linkages between Institutions and Programmes:

It is apparent from Table III-A that the various programmes implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development have no provision for linkages with the local level institutions, barring JRY, but even in JRY, Panchayats are recognised but not the Mahila Mandals.

This is in spite of the fact that various National level bodies and have strongly advocated the involvement of Mahila Mandals. Even appraisals conducted by the Department of Rural Development since 1960s of various developmental programmes implemented by it (IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA etc) have nowhere brought out the importance of Mahila Mandals. Even a scheme like DWCRA (meant specifically for women in rural areas) has limited its emphasis on the importance of Gram Sevikas at the block level and Assistant Project Officers (W) at district level. The Reports on Panchayati Raj section have completely by-passed the importance of Mahila Mandals.

The National Commission for Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector (NCSW, 1988) recommended that Mahila Mandal should be utilised in the implementation of rural development programmes like IRDP, JRY, Social Forestry etc., The Commission recognised this as a major step in involving women in the development process.

The Report brought by the Planning Commission (1990) emphasised the need for providing technical assistance to, local level

functionaries, Panchayats, Village Women's Groups towards effective implementation of the development programmes. It is ironical that neither such recommendations have been incorporated in any of the policy document nor the Mahila Mandals have been assigned specific role to play in the implementation of the programme.

Despite the neglect in recognising the role of Mahila Mandals in implementing various development programmes, it has been observed that in many states Mahila Mandals on their own initiative or while working with NGOs have made notable contributions in indifferent states as is cited by the studies (Ramdas, 1988; Vasu 1989; Kamalakshan, 1987).

IV

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the present study is to explore the role of women's organisation in strengthening and empowering women. Therefore, in the study an attempt has been made to address some of the issues relevant to the functioning of women's organisations in the context of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The relevant issues are whether women are ready to represent themselves in the panchayati Raj; Whether they are ready to design programmes that would contribute to development; If not what could be the reasons for it; Whether it is due of the lack of education among women or casteism that prevents or creates hindrance in the organisation of women's group; Whether they are aware of various programmes implemented for rural development; Whether they feel capable of suggesting something which could be helpful for them.

The study was proposed to be undertaken in two states with different structures and functions of Panchayati Raj system. In order to evolve a concrete methodology, a lot of discussions were held with knowledgeable people. An Advisory Committee was formed comprising of Ms. Radha Bhatt, an activist from Kumaon and Ms. Nivedita Menon, lecturer, Political Science, Sri Ram College, New Delhi. During the Advisory Committee meeting a few suggestions that emerged, to be followed as a part of the methodology were:

- to identify areas of active and non-active Mahila Mandals; to find out to what extent women involve in the decision making policies in case of active Mahila Mandals; whether they are able to suggest new programmes appropriate to their needs and lastly; to what extent they provide the feed back to the political set-up regarding the existing programmes. Also it was suggested to identify those factors which create hindrance for the Mandals to be active; to collect the list of existing registered as well as non registered Mahila Mandals from the office of the Social Welfare Board; to identify the voluntary organisations working actively with the women's groups; to identify the blocks in which DWCRA scheme has not been implemented so far.

Researchers visited the State Social Welfare Board in Lucknow to collect the list of Mahila Mandals but no such list was available with them, only a few names of NGOs were provided to the researchers. It was the BDO who furnished the list of Mahila Mandals when visits were made to the respective blocks.

The methodology included survey of literature - mainly studies and reports published on the relevant subject. This was done to develop a conceptual framework as well as to understand the present status of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Karnataka and U.P. This also helped to frame the questions to guide the investigators in interviewing members of the mahila mandals. An interview with a member of mahila mandal was conduct-

ed and discussed in the meeting so that some of the issues raised could be revised. The feedback from the discussion facilitated better analysis of the data collected.

A joint meeting was held on 2nd August 1991 in Delhi with members of Advisory Committee which was attended by researchers from the state of Karnataka and Kumaon region. During the discussion both groups presented the report of the preliminary survey carried out in both the places. The case study done at Malur was discussed at length. On the basis of the case study and the views obtained from the research investigators of Kumaon, a guideline was constructed to help the interviewers to carry out their interviews while at the field.

Another method of gathering information included interviews with government representative at each level and also women members of Mahila Mandals, Block Development Council and women Gram Pradhan. In addition to this, the records available at the BDO's office consisting of the minutes of the meeting of Gram Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat were consulted, wherever available.

Procedure followed in Karnataka

The following five districts in five regions of Karnataka were visited:

1. Belgaum district of old Bombay region
2. Bidar district of Hyderabad Karnataka region
3. Chikmagalur district of Malnad region
4. Kolar district of old Mysore region
5. Dakshin Kannad district of old Madras region

Members of Mahila Mandals, Yuvathi Mandals, Mandal Panchayats, Zilla Parishats and Cooperatives were interviewed. A total number of 40 women were interviewed in these five districts. A meeting with women representatives of Mandal Panchayat of Kolar district was organised to elicit their views and perceptions as members.

Few male representatives of Mandal Panchayat, village leaders and common people were also interviewed to obtain a picture of women's participation in Panchayati Raj and their role as development workers.

Procedure followed in Uttar Pradesh

The first round of visit to the field indicated that not many women's organisations are participating in the Panchayati Raj institutions or development programmes, so it was decided that all the 14 blocks of Almora and 12 blocks of Pithoragarh would be visited and a general overview of the blocks would be collected by interviewing the BDOs, other officials and few villagers.

BDOs were contacted in all the blocks of Almora and Pithoragarh in order to have a list of Mahila Mandals existing in the respective blocks and to gather information regarding the various developmental programmes implemented. Most of the time it was found that the list obtained from the office consisted of more than 20 Mahila Mandals but actually only a few were found to be functional on ground. The BDOs were of the view that only few of them are active, the reason being that women do not find time from their domestic activity. In most of the cases BDOs helped to identify the active Mahila Mandals and exact location of the villages etc. They also provided the name of the President of Mahila Mandal. Researchers visited these identified Mahila Mandals only.

In some cases the researchers found it difficult to meet the president of the Mahila Mandal in one go, as they were busy either in the fields or engaged in collecting fuel and fodder. Researchers had to make several visits to meet her. In most of the cases while interviewing the president, other members of the Mandal were present and their opinion was incorporated hence members were not interviewed separately.

FIELD REPORT: KARNATAKA

PANCHAYATI RAJ IN KARNATAKA -- The story so far :

The Karnataka government recognised the fact that welfare and economic development programmes for women have not proved to be sufficient for an effective and durable change in the status of women, and decided to delegate women for managerial roles and participate in the decision making process. Accordingly, in 1983, the Karnataka government launched the Panchayat system in the state. The Zilla Parishats, Taluk Panchayat Samithis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act 1983, received the presidential assent in July 1985. Elections were held in January 1987 and these institutions started from April 1987 for a five year term. To ensure adequate participation of women in these local institutions, 25% seats were reserved for women, out of which one seat again was reserved for SC/STs.

In Karnataka, the Panchayati Raj consists of two effective institutions - Zilla Parishat at the district level and Mandal Panchayat at the village level. Taluk Panchayat Samithi acts as a co-ordinating and advisory body.

Including a few illiterate and literate women, atleast 30,000 women contested for the membership of the Panchayat in the last election. Most of them on the party basis. Major parties were Congress and Janatha. 14,025 women were elected in Karnataka. It is clear from this that Panchayat Raj has successfully drawn women into politics.

After the elections, the elected members were trained to help them get acquainted with the functioning of the Panchayati Raj so that they participate effectively. But the training was only at selected parts of the state and very few women representatives benefitted by this training.

These institutions after performing their functions for five years in Karnataka have been taken over by the Administrators. In other words, rural women have been denied of the opportunities of participating in the decision making process. Against this background, we present the analysis of the data collected during the field work. The analysis is presented in parts. Part-1 reflects some of the major observations on the status of women in panchayati Raj system. Part-II presents the demographic characteristics of the members of Mahila Mandals and Mandal Panchayat.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ

It was a beginning, just a beginning. Women entered this field due to various reasons. Whatever the reasons, having entered they got started in working for the people. This clearly shows that, given the opportunity and 'time' - yes! time also is an important factor - this movement would have gathered momentum and the women would, in our opinion, have gone ahead and contributed a great deal for the development of our villages.

Some of the reasons women got into Panchayati Raj are :

1. The family wanted to retain a seat for which usually a male member would contest. But with the introduction of Panchayati Raj, reservation for women was also introduced which drew women into politics. For eg. Sulochana Shankar Kadam of Uchchagaon, Belgaum District.
2. Women who were actively working for the people wanted to contest on their own because they felt it would enable them to work better as they could have better knowledge of government schemes and also get the government agencies to implement the programmes and schemes. For eg. Gujjubai - Bidar District.

THE NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE, EDUCATION AND TRAINING :

Performance of these women as representatives reflected in the improvement of their respective villages; while few women unaware of what was happening around them, few were used as puppets for eg. Kalamma of Mailemoney, Chikkmagalur District, smart women gathered confidence over a period of time and actively represented their people eg. Pramamma of Madapura, Malur Taluk, Kolar District.

Women expressed that they need information and awareness to perform better. Also, Training for elected women representatives was another requirement as suggested by them. The more the representatives' educational level, the better their performance was. But as in every field there are exceptions to the rule. A non-literate woman representative, Vittoobai of Bhagdai, Bidar District was found actively performing her role as a people's representative. She was suppressed by her male counterparts for demanding the details of accounts. Her request to show the accounts was denied. She then stopped asking for the details of amount sanctioned or spent for a particular programme, but keenly concentrated on seeing that the schemes were implemented. " I am not bothered about the money sanctioned or spent but I will see that the work for which the money is sanctioned is completed" , says Vittoobai.

ACTION !!!!!.....

Protests, demonstrations, in general action against injustices : Women in Panchayats have proved that they cannot tolerate corruption and dishonesty. For example, Ayeshabi a member of Mandal Panchayat, Mailoor, Bidar District lodged a complaint against the Mandal Pradhan for misusing the amount sanctioned for various programmes. He was even arrested by the police. Later she threatened him !!!!! " I have elected you as a Pradhan. You are not our boss but our servant. I can even throw you out if you do not work properly. I can make you go around with your ' toota chappal ', I have come to ask you to sanction the schemes for my village. Tell me if you can't do it ". The erring pradhan was brought to books and made to work properly thereafter.

Almost all the women of Mahila Mandals interviewed at Malur Taluk of Kolar District reported that they protested against—social evils such as dowry, child marriage. They also fought together for facilities like drinking water. In this the assistance of NGO to Mahila Mandal members played an important part.

At Athani of Belgaum District women were organised by an NGO mainly with an intention of creating awareness amongst the devadasis about the evils of that particular system. A woman who was a devadasi earlier spoke about the unsuitable government approach to eradicate the evil system. She said, " Government has announced incentives in the form of cash for men who come forward to marry a devadasi. Men are selfish. They marry devadasi, receive the incentive, and leave her in a much more vulnerable situation". She asks, " Why should the government try to introduce such a programme which is not suitable for us? Instead, why can't they provide us some training such as in weaving etc. through which we can earn our bread?".

However, Mahila Mandals at Malur and Athani were definitely found performing better due to the support of NGOs. At places where NGOs were not present, the Mahila Mandals were formed either because of the motivation of active members, or sometimes by the Grama Sevikas.

RESPONSE FROM GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS :

In all the five districts we visited, we found that the Grama Sevikas and Mukhya Sevikas were not well/properly equipped to do their work. They struggled to provide information about Mahila Mandals and sometimes even a blank face was turned towards us. But we came across one exceptional case at Belgaum BDO office. When we entered the BDO office, Belgaum to collect the lists of Mahila Mandals, we were pleasantly surprised to come across a mukhya sevika Smt.Vandana Ajagaonkar, who was eager to help. After enquiring where we come from, and what the purpose of our visit was, she sat down and to our surprise, orally gave us the list of Mahila Mandals and the villages they were formed in and how to reach the village, which we noted down (approximately 35

in number. This happened because the typed list was not immediately available as a meeting was going on in that particular office.

INFORMATION SHARING FOR BETTER WORKING :

It was also found that women who were members of Mahila Mandals and Mandal Panchayats act as a link between women and panchayats. The eligible people for schemes are identified and recommended by the Mahila Mandals and information regarding various schemes available through the panchayats are passed on to the Mahila Mandals. It is evident that women are slowly but surely asserting themselves. They only need time and knowledge and a little support.

PART - II

Thirty seven case studies of women have been analysed and the major findings are presented in this section. These case studies were prepared on the basis of interview held with women which reflects their experiences, perceptions and views as members of Mahila Mandals, Mandal Panchayats and Zilla Parishats. Some of the major findings are furnished under different sub-headings like membership, age group, marital status, educational level, occupation, intervention of NGOs, Introduction to Panchayati Raj party affiliation, contested category, objectives of Mahila Mandals, activities of Mahila Mandal, size of Mahila Mandals, activeness of members and constraints. Annexure II presents the case studies.

MEMBERSHIP

Out of the 37 members interviewed, 15 women were members of Mahila Mandal, 4 women were representatives of Mandal Panchayat and 4 women who were members of Mahila Mandals also were representatives of Mandal Panchayat, 2 women were members of Yuvathi Mandals [which is a group comprising only young women], and 2 women were members of Mahila Mandal, Mandal Panchayat and local committees like - Area Development Samithi etc., while 2 women had enrolled as members in Mahila Mandal and local committees. Other 7 women were members each in Mahila Mandal and Zilla Parishats, Co-operatives, Yuvathi Mandals and in Mahila Mandal, Yuvathi Mandal, Mahila Mandal and in Mandal Panchayat, Yuvathi Mandal, Co-operatives and in local committees, Yuvathi Mandal and in other committees, Mahila Mandal, Zilla Parishat and in other local committees.

AGE GROUP

Fourteen women among the 37 interviewed were between the age range of 35 years and 45 years. While 12 were between 25 years

and 35 years. Seven women were in their middle age i.e., between 45 years and 55 years, and only 4 women were below 25 years of age. (Refer Table V-A-1)

MARITAL STATUS

While 29 women among 37 were married, 7 were un-married and only one woman was widow. (Refer Table V-A-2)

EDUCATION LEVELS

Thirty four members among those interviewed were literates and only 2 women were illiterates. Twenty one women among the literates were educated upto secondary level. While 5 were graduates. Four women knew just to read and write [as they had attended the literacy classes for adults]. Two women were educated upto PUC, and 2 women reported to be educated upto primary level, while one woman was educated only till pre-primary level. (Refer Table V-A-3)

OCCUPATION

Twenty six women reported that they were house wives and still were members of Mahila Mandal, Mandal Panchayat etc. Four women were working as wage labourers, 4 women were earning their livelihood working as tailoring teachers and 2 women reported to be rendering social service to the poor, while one woman was a business woman, actively participating in Mahila Mandali activities and in Taluka Mahila Federation. (refer Table V-A-4)

NGO INTERVENTION :

Twelve women who were members of Mahila Mandal, reported that the Mahila Mandalis in which they are involved received help and guidance to conduct their activities. It was also found that the objectives of the NGO'S were perceived as either the objectives of the Mahila Mandals or as an actively undertaken by the Mahila Mandals.

Though it is one of the positive steps in the way of implementing developmental activities through Mahila Mandals one cannot deny the facts that the NGO's use Mahila Mandals as a tool to achieve their goal.

PARTY AFFILIATION

Local leaders motivated 8 women to contest for the Mandal Panchayat and Zilla Parishat elections. Three women were forced by people to participate in the elections, while 3 women reported that they were forced by their friends and relatives to contest

in the elections. Two women were pushed into the Panchayat field by political leaders while 2 women came up with their own interests to contest. Only one woman reported that she was forced by her husband.

Among the 37 women interviewed, 19 women were elected members of Mandal Panchayat and Zilla Parishats, and majority of them were booked by political parties. Eight women belonged to Congress party and 6 women belonged to Janata party, while only 2 women had contested as independent candidates. One woman was not aware of the party through which she had contested. One woman had contested through Janata Dal and one woman through Maharashtra Eki Karam samithi. (refer Table V-A-5)

CONTESTED CATEGORY

Eighteen members had contested in the Panchayati Raj elections for the reservation seats for women and only one woman had contested for the SC/ST reservation seat. (Refer Table V-A-6)

ROLE OF MAHILA MANDALS AS PERCEIVED BY ITS MEMBERS

A total number of 9 objectives were reported by the members of Yuvathi Mandals and Mahila Mandals. To make women economically independent was the main objective mentioned by 16 members while 9 women reported that to organise women in their villages as the objective of their respective Yuvathi Mandals and Mahila Mandals. The objectives reported were to have a group of their own; to participate in Rural Development activities; to create awareness among women about importance of education, eradication of social evils etc.; to introduce small saving schemes; and to spread literacy among the poor.

ACTIVITIES

Out of the 32 members of 23 Yuvathi Mandal and Mahila Mandals interviewed, 23 women reported that conducting tailoring classes as their main activity. Other main activities undertaken are conducting nutrition demonstration classes and best baby shows and creating awareness about health and hygiene by conducting health camps, motivating women to adopt family planning, implementing developmental activities with the help of other local organisations, participating in workshops and training programmes and camps pertaining to development, conducting literacy classes for illiterates etc. Four Mahila Mandals involved in forming co-operative societies for women, and 3 Mahila Mandals perceived fighting for public facilities as one of their activities. Ten members reported that protesting against social evils was one of the activities under taken by Mahila Mandals.

The reason for giving more importance to tailoring is that women who were organising perceived that they can attract other women by introducing this activity. Moreover, it is this activity which brings women together.

SIZE

Of the 17 Mahila Mandals 9 had more than 50 members. Of the 4 Yuvathi Mandals, 2 had 40 to 50 members. These two Yuvathi Mandali were found actively participating in various activities. The more the members in Yuvathi Mandalis and Mahila Mandals the greater their participation. In other words, enrolling more women as members means more strength, unity and co-operation among women which leads to active participation.

ACTIVENESS OF MEMBERS

Of the 37 members interviewed, 15 women were found active in Mahila Mandals, 4 women were found active as members of Mandal Panchayats, and 4 members were actively performing their role as members both in Mahila Mandals and Mandal Panchayats - which means effective feed back to the Mandal Panchayats leading to effective implementation of programmes by members of Mandal Panchayats.

CONSTRAINTS OF MAHILA MANDALS/YUVATHI MANDALS

Of the 32 members of Yuvathi Mandali and Mahila Mandals interviewed, 7 women reported they had financial constraints. Other factors that hindered the activities of Yuvathi Mandalis and Mahila Mandalis as reported by the women are - lack of information, lack of participation, lack of co-operation among the members, and lack of training to improve their performance.

Table - V-A-1

Age Group of Members Interviewed

Age level of the Members		up to 25 yrs	25-35 yrs	35.1-45 yrs	45.1-55 yrs	above 55 yrs	TOTAL
SL NO	Membership in YM/MM/PR/CO-OP/Other						
1.	Yuvathi Mandali	2 (5.41)	-	-	-	-	2 (5.41)
2.	Mahila Mandali	1 (2.7)	7 (18.92)	4 (10.81)	3 (8.11)	-	15 (40.54)
3.	Mandal Panchayat	-	1 (2.7)	2 (5.41)	1 (2.7)	-	4 (10.21)
4.	Zilla Parishat	-	-	-	-	-	-
5.	Y.M/M.P	-	-	-	-	-	-
6.	M.M/M.P	-	1 (2.7)	2 (5.41)	1 (2.71)	-	4 (10.81)
7.	Y.M/Z.P	-	-	-	-	-	-
8.	M.M/Z.P	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
9.	Co-ops	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
10.	Y.M/M.M	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
11.	Y.M/M.M/M.P	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
12.	Y.M/CO-OPS/OTHERS	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
13.	Y.M/OTHERS	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
14.	M.M/OTHERS	-	-	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)	-	2 (5.41)
15.	M.M/M.P/CO-OPS/OTHERS	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
16.	M.M/M.P/OTHERS	-	-	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)	-	2 (5.4)
17.	M.M/Z.P/OTHERS	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
18.	OTHERS	-	-	-	-	-	-
19.	TOTAL	4 (10.81)	12 (32.43)	14 (37.84)	7 (18.92)	-	37 (100)

Table V-A-2

Marital Status

Marital Status of the Members		Unmarried	Married	Widow	Separated/ Divorced	Total
SL	Membership in NO YM/MM/PR/CO-OP/Other					
1.	Yuvathi Mandali	2 (5.41)	-	-	-	2 (5.41)
2.	Mahila Mandali	3 (8.11)	12 (32.43)	-	-	15 (40.54)
3.	Mandal Panchayat	-	4 (10.81)	-	-	4 (10.21)
4.	Zilla Parishat	-	-	-	-	-
5.	Y.M/M.P	-	-	-	-	-
6.	M.M/M.P	-	3 (8.11)	1 (2.7)	-	4 (10.81)
7.	Y.M/Z.P	-	-	-	-	-
8.	M.M/Z.P	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
9.	Co-ops	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
10.	Y.M/M.M	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
11.	Y.M/M.M/M.P	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
12.	Y.M/CO-OPS/OTHERS	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
13.	Y.M/OTHERS	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
14.	M.M/OTHERS	-	3 (5.41)	-	-	2 (5.41)
15.	M.M/M.P/CO-OPS/OTHERS	-	1 (2.71)	-	-	1 (2.7)
16.	M.M/M.P/OTHERS	-	2 (5.41)	-	-	2 (5.4)
17.	M.M/Z.P/OTHERS	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
18.	OTHERS	-	-	-	-	-
19.	TOTAL	7 (18.92)	29 (78.38)	1 (2.7)	-	37 (100)

Table V-A-3

Education Level

Education Level of the Members		Illiterate	Literate	Pre- Primary	Primary	Secondary	Pre-University	Graduation	Professional	Others	Total
SL NO	Membership in YM/MM/PR/CO-OP/Other										
1.	Yuvathi Mandali	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	2 (5.4)
2.	Mahila Mandali	1 (2.7)	4 (10.81)	-	-	9 (24.7)	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	15 (37.8)
3.	Mandal Panchayat	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	3 (8.11)	-	-	-	-	4 (10.8)
4.	Zilla Parishat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5.	Y.M/M.P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6.	M.M/M.P	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	2 (5.41)	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	4 (10.8)
7.	Y.M/Z.P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8.	M.M/Z.P	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
9.	CO-OPs	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
10.	Y.M/M.M	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
11.	Y.M/M.M/M.P	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
12.	Y.M/CO-OPS/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
13.	Y.M/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
14.	M.M/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	2 (5.4)
15.	M.M/M.P/CO-OPS/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
16.	M.M/M.P/OTHERS	-	-	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	-	2 (5.4)
17.	M.M/Z.P/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
18.	OTHERS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
19.	TOTAL	2 (5.4)	4 (10.81)	1 (2.7)	2 (5.4)	21 (53.79)	2 (5.4)	5 (12.41)	-	-	37 (91.8)

Individual Occupation

Individual Occupation of Members		Own Cultivation	Wage Labour	Service Industry	Artisan	House Hold Work	Social Worker	Others	Total
SL NO	Membership in YM/MM/PR/CO-OP/Other								
1.	Yuvathi Mandali	-	-	-	-	2 (5.41)	-	-	2 (5.41)
2.	Mahila Mandali	-	3 (8.11)	8 (5.41)	-	4 (27.03)	-	-	15 (40.54)
3.	Mandal Panchayat	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	3 (8.11)	-	-	4 (10.21)
4.	Zilla Parishat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5.	Y.M/M.P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6.	M.M/M.P	-	-	-	-	4 (10.81)	-	-	4 (10.81)
7.	Y.M/Z.P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8.	M.M/Z.P	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
9.	CO-OPs	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
10.	Y.M/M.M	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
11.	Y.M/M.M/M.P	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
12.	Y.M/CO-OPS/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	1 (2.7)
13.	Y.M/OTHERS	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
14.	M.M/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	1 (2.7)	2 (5.41)
15.	M.M/M.P/CO-OPS/OTHERS	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)
16.	M.M/M.P/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)	-	2 (5.4)
17.	M.M/Z.P/OTHERS	-	-	-	-	1 (2.7)	-	-	1 (2.7)
18.	OTHERS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
19.	TOTAL	-	4 (10.81)	4 (10.81)	-	26 (70.27)	2 (5.41)	1 (2.7)	37 (100)

Table-V-5

Party Affiliation of the Panchayati Raj Members

SL NO	Contest in Party Affiliation	Mandal Panchayat	Zilla Parishad	Total
1.	B.J.P	-	-	-
2.	Communist Party	-	-	-
3.	Congress	-	-	-
4.	Congress (I)	7 (36.84)	1 (5.26)	8 (42.1)
5.	Janata Dal	-	1 (5.26)	1 (5.26)
6.	Janata Party	5 (26.32)	1 (5.26)	6 (31.58)
7.	Independent	2 (10.53)	-	2 (10.53)
8.	M.E.S.	-	1 (5.26)	1 (5.26)
9.	Others	-	-	-
10.	No information	1 (5.26)	-	1 (5.26)
11.	Total	15 (78.95)	4 (21.04)	19 (100)

Table V-A-6

Contested

Contested	General Candidate	Reser- vation	Nominated	Total
Membership in MP/ZP				
Mandal Panchayat	14 (73.68)	1 (5.26)	-	15 (78.94)
Zilla Parishad	4 (21.05)	-	-	4 (21.05)
Total	18 (94.73)	1 (5.26)	-	19 (100)

Note : Figures in the brackets represents the percentage of the respective figures in the total

FIELD REPORT : UTTAR PRADESH

ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis of data, information and insights gathered by interviewing the presidents, members, organisers of Mahila Mandals (MM) in selected areas in Uttar Pradesh. 34 case studies have been prepared on the presidents of Mahila Mandals and appears in Appendix II of the present report, along with those of Gram Pradhan and organisers of Mahila Mandals. The specific codes for Almora (A1....An) and Pithoragarh (P1....Pn) have been used for the purpose of making references wherever required. The major findings are categorised as activities of the Mahila Mandals and their characteristics such as size, level of education, dual membership, type of leadership and NGO support where available. The constraints are identified as also the needs of the Mahila Mandals.

To start with, the BDOs were contacted to obtain a list of Mahila Mandals in their respective areas. They provided a list containing of at least 20 Mahila Mandals in a block. However, they also acknowledged that only a few of the mandals are active. The researchers visited only those Mahila Mandals which were identified as functional by the BDOs. However, on the spot visit, showed that even out of those identified as working Mahila Mandals quite a few were non-functioning.

Looking at the process through which the Mahila Mandals came into existence, this study found that most of the Mahila Mandals in the districts of Almora and Pithoragarh were formed on the initiative of the Government (mainly BDOs) barring a few which have been initiated by local NGOs. As 'organisations' those Mahila Mandals are formal bodies, registered under the Societies Act. These 'organisations' meet once in every month and essentially each member is required to attend the meetings. Many of these groups have a fixed membership fee ranging from Rs. 2 to 5. The case studies revealed that the meetings are held regularly and mostly at the residence of the president of the Mahila Mandal, since they have no building where such and similar activities can be held. The women discuss various issues of concern. They also formulate proposals for initiating development programmes in their villages and submit such proposals to the BDO for assistance. The meetings are also used as a ground for information dissemination and awareness building. The money collected from members is used to finance the activities of Mahila Mandals and to buy some assets of use like utensils, durries, stationery etc. for the benefit of the group, as a whole. (refer A1)

MAHILA MANDALS AND ITS ACTIVITIES:

Some of the major activities carried out by Mahila Mandals could be grouped into 10 broad categories. Frequency distribution of the activities in Table 1 shows that the awareness programme on sanitation / health & hygiene and family planning are being carried out by maximum number of Mahila Mandals followed by programmes on social forestry ; training in weaving, spinning , poultry, beekeeping, kitchen gardening; running adult education programme; running balwadi; running non-formal education centre; anti liquor/narcotics/ dowry campaign, construction of road and maintenance of drains and providing nutritious food to the lactating mothers and children.

Table 2 indicates that 21.2% of the Mahila Mandals are involved in less than three activities, 45.4% are involved in three activities and 33.3% in less than three activities. In the present context, the number of activities Mahila Mandals are engaged in, is taken as an indicator of their success.

However, there are variations in the quality of performance of different activities pursued by different Mahila Mandals, as could be discerned during the field visits. It was beyond the scope of this study to attempt an assessment of each activity of Mahila Mandals and only a qualitative observation could be made.

SIZE OF THE MMD

It has been found that out of thirty three Mahila Mandals studied, about twelve of them have membership below twenty five and twenty one have members above twenty five. Table 3 presents size-wise distribution of Mahila Mandals.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE PANCHAYAT

The study found that some of the women are members of not only Mahila Mandals but also Panchayats. The incidence of dual membership is however small. The present analysis reveals that dual membership in Mahila Mandal as well as in Panchayat contributes positively in effective functioning of Mahila Mandals. If one compares the achievement or involvement of Mahila Mandals in various programmes, one can find that Mahila Mandals which have representative member in the panchayat do perform better than those do not have any. In other words linkages between these two institutions impacted positively on the development programmes especially those meant for women and children.

NGO INTERVENTION

Analysing the case studies it has also been found that group initiated by local NGO are showing better results as compared to those initiated by the BDOs. The local organisations - Gramin

Uthan Samiti and Himalayan Paryavaran Samiti both located in Almora reported to have initiated many women through training which were eventually registered by the Block Development Authorities. They were not able to provide a list of MMG. The list provided by the BDO consisted of some Mahila Mandals which were initiated by NGOs. Interviews revealed that some of the Mahila Mandals work in close collaboration with voluntary organisations in the area. These NGOs helped some women to form groups and trained them to run balwadi centres in the village. The women were also inspired by them to undertake plantation programmes. The group in its own launched health and sanitation campaign. A few other women helping Mahila Mandals to carry out many other activities (refer A3). Intervention by NGO would mean there is a voluntary participation by women, and relatively greater motivation among them to take in the development programme.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Table 4 presents education-wise distribution of presidents of Mahila Mandal. It can be seen from the table that 53.3% of the Mahila Mandals have president educated upto high school and 33.3% have literate president. Only 10% Mahila Mandals have president educated upto B.A. and M.A. Out of 33 Mahila Mandals 18 have been found to have all the members literate, 3 have members educated upto high school. Rest have not mentioned about the educational background of the other members. Most of the president mentioned education as the key to their success. They feel that with maximum of literate members it is easy to carry out the activities.

It is true that education plays an important role in building the self confidence of the women while awareness is also an important dimension. It has been observed that Gram Pradhan of Galoi is educated upto higher secondary but her awareness regarding government programmes has been found to be poor. Similarly in the case of Kahargam, it is found that the president of the Mahila Mandal is educated upto higher secondary and other members in the group are literate. So far the activities are concerned the Mahila Mandal is found to be inactive. On the other hand the president of Badikot Mahila Mandal who is educated upto the middle school and other members of the group are literate has been found to be performing much better in terms of the activities undertaken by them. It appears from this that the education upto tenth or twelfth standard does not really mean anything until or unless there is awareness about the programmes. Awareness about the programmes can be generated through frequent interaction with the officials. It is on the part of the officials to take interest and come forward to explain the nature of the programmes meant for the women and children.

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP

It is observed that the quality of leadership towards effective participation of the group which is dependent on the process

through which leadership emerges. If the leader emerges from the group then she is found to be much more effective in mobilising women. But where the choice is forced or someone is nominated because of her connections with the authorities, it does not really make her an effective leader.

ROLE AND PERCEPTION OF THE BDOs

The BDOs have played a crucial role in bringing Mahila Mandals into existence. It may be recalled that in 1954 when the idea of promoting women's participation in development was first worked as a part of the Community Development (CD) Programme, the BDOs were the main implementors on behalf of the Government. They were aided by a Mukhiya Gram Sevikas and gram sevikas. It is they who approached the rural women with the Mahila Mandal programme and depending on their contacts with the community or some sections of which they selected specific women in a village for organisation of Mahila Mandals. Lately, the post of sevikas were done away with leaving it all to the BDO. Not surprisingly many of the BDOs felt that if women officers are posted in the block it may lead to better situation in terms of organising women's group and in strengthening their activities.

Out of the 12 blocks, in 7 blocks women representatives have been found to be attending BDC meeting. The minutes of the meeting shows that there is no mention of the name of any of the women raising issues or putting forward any proposal of their interest. BDOs also reported that women participation has never been active. They remain passive listeners at the meeting. Contrary to the BDO's statement it was observed that the president of Mahila Mandals of Shamma village attends the BDC meetings regularly to bring forth some major issues concerning the village and had proposed to set up a nursery school for the children. The BDO approved it but so far no action has been taken towards setting up one. Similar cases of those who have had similar experiences have been recorded. (refer A 14)

As far women members of Panchayats, out of the 12 blocks only one block has been found to have a woman as a member of Gram Panchayat member. She has been found to be unaware of the fact that she is a member of the Panchayat. She says the BDO and the Gram Pradhan approached her to become a member that is how she came to know that she is a member. However she has neither attended any meeting nor does she know her role in the panchayat.

CONSTRAINTS

The Mahila Mandals are born with an inherent constraint - being promoted by a Government agency for its own aims - without prior and adequate information about aims, objectives, functions, rules and regulations - such as to ensure wider base of membership and selection of office bearers through a democratic process.

In the event, lack of motivation emerges as a serious hindrance for the growth of Mahila Mandals. To be motivated, they have to be aware of their rights and potential capacity and in what respect they can contribute towards implementing programmes; what are the modifications they really think can be brought about in the implementation of the programmes so that they gain maximally. Lack of family support and lack of support from local villagers have also been found to be responsible for the low participation of women.

On the activity side, absence of independent financial resources has been identified as one of the major constraints for the successful activities of Mahila Mandals.

Many of these Mahila Mandals expressed the desire to participate in such programmes which directly generate income for women. The views that are obtained from the members as well as the organisers of the Mahila Mandal show that unless women are involved in some income generating activities it is difficult to achieve their co-operation. Income generating programmes with some welfare measure would facilitate women's participation in the development programme.

FIELD REPORT : DELHI

TEHARPUR MAHILA MANDAL : A REVISIT

Teharpur is a semi rural settlement of Shahdara district in the Union Territory of Delhi with a population of 1000 households. People belonging to different castes - Rajputs, Chamars and Harijans live in this village. The area was declared 'urban' by a decree of Delhi Corporation in the 1960s. The village has a panchayat dominated by few who have economically better status. Due to the prevailing social customs women never participate in the panchayat meetings. A 'mahila mandal' was formed in 1961 and had been visited by ISST research team in the year 1978.

Activities of the mahila Mandal.

The Mahila Mandal at Teharpur was organised in 1962 and has been functioning for the last 30 years. There are about 30 members in this mandal who are required to pay a membership fee annually. The money collected is utilised to purchase utensils required for social functions.

This Mahila Mandal was organised by an NGO known as Bharatiya Grameen Mahila Sangh sponsored by Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB). Since the mahila mandal comes under the purview of Bharatiya Grameen Mahila Sangh, most of the activities related to income generation and awareness raising is carried out by it with the participation of members of the mahila mandal. At present the organisation is carrying out three major activities - running and managing a tailoring and balwari centre, serving mid-day meals to the children and involving women in economic activity (making spices). The members of the mandal participate directly in the income generating activity but are not actively involved in other two. The income generating unit has 10 women working in it, out of which 2 women work on daily wages and others on a salary of Rs. 200 per month. The pure women's group activity of the mahila mandal is the 'bhajan' gathering every Tuesday afternoon when members collect at the mandal premises and sing devotional songs. The mandal used to conduct adult literacy classes but has stopped it for the last few years. The Bharatiya Grameen Mahila Sangh receives grants from CSWB which are mostly irregular. On visiting the centre it was found that women workers have not been paid for the past 2 months.

To conclude most of the activities reported earlier (Jain et.al.1978) are still continuing in this centre.

As far as the physical development of Teharpur is concerned, despite its re-definition as a semi urban settlement, it lacks elements of urban development and has come under a lot of neglect. Some of the dwelling units are still 'kuccha' and there is a complete lack of basic civic amenities like public lavatories and drains.

TABLE V-B-1 : FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF THE ACTIVITIES
UNDERTAKEN BY MAHILA MANDALS.

S.NO.	LIST OF ACTIVITIES	NO.OF MMS UNDERTAKING ACTIVITIES
1.	To provide awareness programme on sanitation/health & hygiene/family planning.	23
2.	Social forestry (to raise nurseries and plants	12
3.	To provide training in weaving, spinning, poultry, beekeeping, kitchen gardening.	10
4.	To run Adult Education Programme	10
5.	To run balwadi, anganwadi	9
6.	To run non-formal education centre.	5
7.	To campaign against liquor/narcotics/dowry	5
8.	To assist in construction & maintenance of roads and drains	4
9.	To provide food to lactating mothers & children.	4
10.	To supervise water supply.	2

TABLE V-B-2 : NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY MAHILA MANDALS.

NO. OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY MAHILA MANDALS	NUMBER OF MAHILA MANDALS	PERCENTAGE
6	1	3.04
5	1	3.04
4	5	15.1
3	15	45.4
2	3	9.0
1	5	15.1
Nil	3	9.04

		99.6%

TABLEV-B-3 : SIZE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF MAHILA MANDALS.

MAHILA MANDAL WITH LESS THAN 25 MEMBERS	MAHILA MANDAL WITH MORE THAN 25 MEMBERS
12	21

TABLE V-B-2₁ : LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF PRESIDENTS OF MAHILA MANDALS.

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	NO. OF PRESIDENTS OF MAHILA MANDALS	PERCENTAGE
Literate	10	33.3%
Primary	-	-
Middle	2	6.6%
High School	16	53.3%
B.A	1	3.3%
M.A	1	3.3%
		99.8%

SUMMING UP

THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATION AND EMERGING
POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

1. A common thread running through the interviews with the women members of the Mandal Panchayats or with those of Mahila Mandals is that invariably they were induced by some official or political or social functionary, to involve themselves with these institutions.
2. At the outset, it is to be recognised that the Panchayats and Mahila Mandals are "non traditional" institutions, that is, they are outside the realm of the traditional experience of women which comprises largely of the family or a clan sabha or a traditional (non-elected) village or caste panchayat.
3. Very often, the concept, the scope, structure, rules and laws governing these institutions, the responsibilities and rights of individual members were not known to these women sufficiently at the time that they entered these institutions.
4. The phenomena is illustrated by an interview with one of the women members of a Mandal Panchayat in Karnataka whose first response when invited by a volunteer to attend a meeting with other women (as part of this study) to share their experiences, was "where is the register, where do you want me to put my signature?".
5. This revealed that she had come to believe that her main role was one of 'putting her signatures' to the proceedings book.
6. When she was told that the invitation to this meeting was not from the Mandal Panchayat, but from just a group of sisters to reflect on the process which brought her (them) to seek and contest election to the Mandal Panchayat, become its member, participate in its proceedings, and to manage its affairs, she said that she was not fully aware how she got elected and become a member, except that her signatures were taken on a form by a political functionary. She did not do any canvassing or campaigning for votes. Only when some people came to compliment her on her victory, she learnt that she had been elected.
7. On entering the Mandal Panchayat, in the initial period, she sat quietly and listened, to the discussions, which were mainly male dominated. Other women members too generally kept quiet. But gradually people in her constituency began to bring problems to her, and asking her to take up those with the Mandal panchayat. This gave her some notion of the role she was expected to play, and also a bit of courage to speak up at the meetings of the Mandal Panchayat.

8. But initially she found that she was often shouted down by male members. Always the tenor of their argument was : "you an illiterate woman, do you think you know better than us? Do not bring up all kinds of issues".

9. Then came the third phase when she felt growing in self confidence. Thereafter, she began to assert herself. The constant pressure from her constituents to articulate their problems was responsible for this development a great deal. She was able to insist that the matters raised by her must be considered by the Mandal Panchayat and solutions found to the problems which she had raised. "I have to answer my people". In some of the cases she succeeded in securing the right decisions. This improved her realisation of the role of a panchayat member (though in the first place it also helped to improve her image within the village community, and in her own eyes.

10. This was not an untypical interview. With slight variations of the theme, many other respondents recounted much the same experience.

11. Discussions with some of the political leaders at the state level provided an explanation as to why the entry of these women into the electoral process for the Panchayats, was often as dumb as described by the women. The Karnataka Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayat Act was passed by the state assembly after a joint select committee comprising of representatives of all the political parties (represented in the Karnataka legislature) had approved of it. The Act provided for reservation of 25 percent seats for women.

12. But while all political parties supported the 25% reservation for women, the fact remained that the top decision-making organs of the political parties did not really absorb the significance or the implication of such reservation. Quantitative compulsions of reservation dawned on them only when the notification was issued for the elections to be held and the last date was fixed for filing of nominations by the prospective candidates. The political parties suddenly realised that nearly 14,000 seats out of the 56,000 elective seats had been reserved for women, for which they had to field women candidates. Invariably, the first reaction within the decision-making forums of the political parties was that "there are no women, so how are we to fill so many seats by women?".

13. Time was lost in exploring whether something could be done to avert this situation and to transfer the seats reserved for women to male candidates on the argument 'that there were no women' to fill them. But here they came up against a wall. They found that there was no exemption possible i.e there was no provision in the law to transfer the seats reserved for women to non-women.

14. All this left very little time for any systematic

effort to be made to identify women to be named as party candidates. Since most of the political parties in Karnataka (as indeed elsewhere in the country) do not have any significant organisational presence in the villages, there was a general amnesty almost, to let any one of their contacts in the districts or below, to have the nomination forms filled in and filed before the due date from any women that they could choose. There was in any case, no time to undertake any informational or educational programme to explain to the prospective candidates the functions, scope and the relevant laws relating to the Mandal Panchayats.

15. This should explain why little was done in terms of political, functional and legal education of the women candidates who contested the elections on behalf of their respective political parties. Thus by and large, at the start of the process, women entered the Panchayats in circumstances of near complete ignorance "of what it was all about". It is however noteworthy, that once they entered the Panchayats, women learnt 'on the job'. Regretfully, though nearly five years have elapsed since the first Mandal Panchayat elections, the political parties do not appear to have made any serious attempt even, subsequently, at disseminating information and spreading the requisite amount of political literacy about panchayats.

16. In the case of Mahila Mandals, too, the experience was comparable to that of what happened to women joining the Mandal Panchayats. Most women respondents stated that it was usually the Block Development Officer (BDO), who during his visit to the village, asked a particular woman to take interest in organising a Mahila Mandal. All that the BDO explained was that the Mahila Mandal was "a good idea" which will "bring women together". There was no information or education provided about the scope, functions etc. of the Mahila Mandals.

17. The persons 'initiated' into organising Mahila Mandals were from a narrow segment of the village, with whom the BDO came in contact - usually the upper segment of village community. In the case of Mandal Panchayats, however, the sheer requirement of numbers (14,000 candidates for each political party) opened the field for a wide cross section of women. Competitive politics (between different political parties) widened the choice even further in terms of sections/segments of the village community.

18. Most Mahila Mandal respondents reported that they were "looking up", to the BDO/Government for ideas and help i.e they were dependent on the BDO's help for activating the Mahila Mandal or broadening its activities. Only a small proportion of the officially listed Mahila Mandals were found to exist or found to be active. The response to the question: why were they inactive? invariably was "what can we do, we are not getting any help from government?". But "whenever we visit the BDO, we do tell him our problems and needs." BDO's answer, according to them invariably is "he will try and see what could be done". But then nothing is heard over long stretches of time and thus the members lose interest. There were however some instances where the office

bearers of the Mahila Mandals showed independent initiative in short leadership, and mobilised local support for the needed services.

19. A strong conclusion emerging from this study is that through sheer exposure to these non-traditional institutions, and pressure of their constituents to do something to alleviate urgent local problems and needs, women have over time grown in awareness, contacts and self-confidence.

20. Clearly, the long duration of this learning process and pains could have been minimised, were their entry preceded by a general educational movement for social transformation, by political parties and non political social activists' groups. But even this weak and deficient process has brought to surface strong women representatives. A measure of their strength is that nowhere did one come across women members of the representative panchayats, who had continued to remain fearful, subservient or had given up. Invariably, it was found that once they realised their role, they tried to meet the challenge, rather than give in.

21. On this basis, it could be concluded that if the electoral process continues, uninterruptedly, with periodic elections to panchayats, then in each successive round, a larger proportion of women candidates will be entering the fray on the basis of awareness and experience. In fact, some of the women who have participated in the mandal panchayats and Zilla Parishads have during the first term of about 5 years, achieved a high degree of understanding of the political and development process and procedures, of the role of the panchayats as local self government institutions, as well as realised what it is to be accountable to the local constituency. In the latter part of their tenure, they have begun to raise some very pertinent and perceptive issues which speak for the growth of their political consciousness. For example,

(1) Why should women's representation be confined to only 25% reserved seats? Women are a large proportion of the electorate. Therefore in the subsequent elections to the Panchayats, women should also contest as candidates for the non reserved seats.

Incidentally, in Kerala, women elected to district councils (zilla parishads) are 34 percent i.e. higher than even the 30% proposed to be reserved for women in the 72nd Amendment Bill to the Constitution in respect of Panchayats. Nearly, 28% are first generation in the family to enter a political office and contest election.

(2) When the constituency of each mandal panchayat member is very small and manageable - and the electorate is fairly well known to each other, why should political parties choose and nominate candidates from outside the area; and that too without prior consultation with them. They feel that while

the system may be democratic and trying to establish a representative form of self government, its purpose and intent could be diminished, if not defeated, by the political parties taking decisions at the top without local consultations, especially if they import/impose candidates who are neither familiar with the peculiarities of the local area nor strictly accountable to the local electorate whom they seek to represent.

(3) Why the political parties, government and non-governmental organisations do not arrange for information, to help women (and men) voters at large, and explain to them what the self-governing institution (the panchayat) is all about? They feel they cannot depend entirely on the officials to train them in their functions, since the officials are not very comfortable about elected representatives. Groups interested in their success, should provide them systematic training.

(4) Women who were aware of the take over of panchayats by administrators, 'saw' the change. 'We have no access to the panchayat office now'. Previously, we could approach our 'representatives' at any time to take up our problems and provide some development services. But now, that door is shut.

(5) They realise that over time, they have been able to overcome the 'awe about male domination', and assert themselves without much inhibition.

(6) Lastly, they have gained familiarity with the 'non-traditional' institutions such as panchayats, Mahila Mandals and also cooperatives.

22. The case of women members of Mahila Mandals was different compared to that of Mandal Panchayat. Unlike the panchayat members, they were not elected by popular vote. They did not have a set constituency to approach them day to day and press them to 'act', to 'do something'. Mahila Mandal members tended to give up, if the response from above (BDO, government etc). was not forthcoming. It highlights the fact that non-traditional institutional mechanisms given birth to by Government agencies or dependent on the latter excessively, have some inherent weaknesses. In contrast, popular sanction, periodic elections i.e submission to constituents for renewal of mandate, act as dynamic agents to keep the non-traditional institutions on their toes and alive.

VII

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

The following suggestions may be made based on the findings of the survey :

1. NGO intervention must take place in a big way who would help rural women to undertake responsibilities towards socio-economic development and assist them to develop leadership in running worthwhile development activities.
2. There is a need to create awareness programme for the officials. Officials need to be given gender sensitization training.
3. A gramsevika needs to be posted in each block office so that she will be able to monitor the working of the Mahila Mangal Dals.
4. A training programme must be conducted to provide training to women members as to how to lobby or raise their voice and pursue their demands till they get passed.
5. A regular meeting should be held with the women of the village and the elected members of the Panchayat.
6. Mahila Mangal Dal should be entrusted with more responsibility by the government and taken into confidence by the B.D.O.
7. The women should volunteer to run the Anganwadi, Balwadi. Also they should effectively participate in the programmes of agriculture, animal husbandry income generation activity, family welfare, small savings, sanitation etc at the village level.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE ROUNDTABLE MEETING

1. Round table meeting was conducted to discuss the findings of this study in Bangalore with a view to eliciting responses from different sections - academicians, government officials, activists and members of different units of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The first strong recommendation that emerged was to document the experiences of women who have been part of the elected bodies. The gaps identified by these women as well as the achievements of decentralised development in terms of raising revenue, providing services in the area of health and education, locating untapped sources of revenue and finally for giving women a sense that they can have access to governance, need to be documented and widely diffused.

2. It was also felt that for local governance to be effective, there was need for strict devolution of financial powers. Without devolution of financial powers, the operation of panchayati raj will get stratified. Thus it was felt that a memorandum should be prepared and submitted to the Finance Commission, arising out of those who are participating and facilitating the role of women in panchayati raj. The Finance Commission and its decision would be critical at the macro level for the effective functioning of local governance. It was decided that a working group may be set up, which includes in it Mrs. Lakshmi Krishnamurthi from the Satyamurthi Foundation, who is deeply involved in the empowerment of women in panchayats and local bodies in Tamil Nadu; Mrs. Suman Kolhar, Former Vice President of the Zilla Parishad in Bijapur district; Ms. Srilata Batlivala, who was the coordinator at the Karnataka state level of Mahila Samakya; Dr. A. Vaidhyanatha, Director, MIDS. It was also suggested that Dr. Raja Chelliah join the Working Group. This Working Group would spearhead more consultations which would be necessary for preparing this memorandum. In other words, it was felt that there should be gender advocacy for the various types of state interventions required to make panchayati raj a success and in this, the outcome of the Finance Commission is a very important one.
3. The third strong recommendation that emerged was that it is necessary to start now to prepare the ground for facilitating women's participation in decentralised government on the assumption that the 72nd Amendment bill will be passed by the Parliament. Even if it is not, due to the recent decision of the High Court in Karnataka, elections will be held to panchayati raj institutions in Karnataka. Secondly, since women have found this system most effective for articulating their needs, a momentum could be built up on other states, through networks of mahila mandals.

It was found that even though those women who were already in the Panchayati Raj in Karnataka had quickly learnt to cope with participation, it was only at the end of five years that they really felt that they knew how to handle institutions of local governance. Therefore it is far better to equip them so that their participation could be as full and strong as they would like it to be.

Many recommendations have been made on how to engage in this facilitation process.

It was decided that the following action needs to be taken :

To set up an Advisory Committee which would be a kind of a network out of those who participated in the Bangalore meeting. This Committee would evolve an agenda for action. The Committee would be composed of a representative from West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and the three other participating institutions at Karnataka. The aim would be to set up a

research centre for elected persons. This resource centre would identify itself with the needs of the elected members and find ways of providing the necessary services. In other words, they would not come up with a prearranged agenda, but there would be a research centre which would respond to users' needs.

Under this broad institutional framework, several details were mentioned. First, providing a technical support base through data collection. Methods of data collection, identifying what needs to be collected, who would collect it etc. were discussed. A Working Group would be set up of people who have already experience in various methods of data collection, which are particularly beamed at empowerment. This Group would prepare these profiles of women and poverty with special reference to panchayati raj as well as full employment in two districts. One is Bijapur district in Karnataka, and the other from U.P. where the present study was conducted.

The second support service would be to provide kits of information as has already been implemented by some NGOs in Tamil Nadu. The resource centre would identify information kits, translate them into relevant languages, distribute them and have discussions.

In order to create a wider public awareness of the positive value of decentralised governance or local self government, it is important to prepare papers which would highlight some of the outcomes. It is necessary to make a paper which in fact locates and quantifies both revenue increments as well as the utilisation of revenue, the nature of women's empowerment in far greater detail. The document could be widely circulated and could become a source for developing widespread support for panchayati raj in states and among those who have not yet fully understood the significance of this movement. For this, the initial discussion on the differentiation between the various types of institutions and then the performance which has been often discussed orally, the experience of Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka, the West Bengal experience etc. should be consolidated.

Another approach that finally emerged was that in developing a support service system to facilitate the work of women elected to the panchayati raj bodies, a scan needs to be made of what is available in that geographical and cultural zone. There would be Mahila Mandals, other types of non governmental organisations, women's organisations which are autonomous, university groups which could serve as potential facilitators, for providing strong inputs in the process of empowerment, and technical services, using participatory methodologies.

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Interview with Vishalakshi Yadwad, secretary, Jagruthi Yuvathi Mandali, Athani Tq. Belgaum district.

This yuvathi mandali was started quite recently, on Aug. 15th '91. There are 70 members. Vishalakshi is the Secretary and President of the organisation is Mrs. Vasantha Kalyani, Vice-president-1 is Dr. Prema Pangi, Vice-President-2 is Sukanya Chakravarthy.

Actually Vishalakshi was a member of another Mahila Mandali earlier called The Jaswini Mahila Mandali. Here the majority of the members were Gujarathis. Moreover, they were not willing to take up any activity which involved going outdoors. They believe strongly in sitting at home (inside four walls) and doing something. They used to learn stitching, embroidery, cooking etc. The local members had language problem also. Therefore, Vishalakshi and a few others thought of breaking away and forming their own local Sangha.

Activities :

They have so far participated in quite a lot of sports competitions and won prizes. The group sent a team to Dasara Festival held at Mysore, and they have brought back certificates and prizes not only in sports, but one or two other events. Two members were sent to All India National Integration Camp where 600 members from all over India had participated.

The members of the Yuvathi Mandali with the help of one NYK Member and another youth from the village repaired a badly damaged road at Reddaratti.

Other activities include teaching handwork like embroidery, embossing, working with beads, etc. They had organised an exhibition at Surgi.

The group had arranged a fruit distribution programme on 26th Jan 92. They distributed fruits to patients in the hospital.

The Yuvathi Mandali has been engaged in deposit mobilisation amongst its members. They also go door to door and encourage people to save money and open accounts in the Bank. This is because the bank is sponsoring all the activities of the Yuvathi Mandali.

Some of the future plans of the the Yuvathi Mandali include arranging a blood donation camp, eye camp where everybody can have a free checkup and treatment, Immunisation camp, Fabric Painting clases, to start an evening school under the Saksharatha Mission scheme.

Interview With Ms.Suman Joshi - Member Of Yuvathi Mandali - Kakawada, Athani Tq. - Belgaum District.

Ms. Suman Joshi, aged 38 years, studied upto B.A., is not yet married. She is a member of Yuvathi Mandali - Kakawada, Athani Tq., from past ten years (from 1982). She is also the Vice President of Priyadarshini Mahila Fedearition of Athani from 1985. Forty Mahila Mandals are affiliated to this Federation. The only information she could provide us about Taluka Mahila Federa-tion was that a creche programmes has been started for which 120 women, 13 doctors and 5 supervisors are working. Suman Joshi is also one of the Directors of district women's multi purpose co-operative society from 1989. She is also working as an honorary worker in Women and Child Welfare Deparment, Athani.

The Yuvathi Mandali, Kakawada was established in 1982 with the intention of creating awareness among the members regarding the schemes available at the government level. There are 30 members in the Yuvathi Mandali between the ages 20 years and 40 years. All of them are literate.

Some of the activities of Yuvathi Mandali include running a Balwadi for which they collect funds from among themselves and utilize this for the maintainance of Balwadi. A family Councelling Centre is established by Yuvathi Mandali.

Immunisation Programme is implemented in the village by the them where they inform the parents about the benefits of child care measures and nutrition.

The Yuvathi Mandali members attend the Grama Sabha meetings that are held once in six months, and gather the information about various schemes and inform about these to the villagers. An effort is made to identify the Devadasis in the area and provide them information regarding Family Planning, AIDS.

Achievements

A procession was taken to KEB Office Athini and Mandal Panchayat, to protest aganist continuous power cut in the area. They sucess-fully obtained two water tanks for the area.

Two women whose names were recommended by the Yuvathi Mandali to the Mandal Panchayat, obtained IRDP loans. Twelve widows got widow pension sanctioned, 5 people benefitted by oldage pension scheme, and 7 people received handicapped pension through the Mandal Panchayat. Twelve women were dissuaded from practicing Devadasi system. They now earn their livelihood as wage labourers. Their children are enrolled for sponsorship programme through an NGO called Vimochana.

Awareness programmes for women about establishing Mahila man-dals and making use of the government programmes. Training pro-grammes for income generating activities.

Election of educated and trained women to the Panchayats on 'no party basis'.

Interview with Smt. Padma Maride at Malabad, Athani Taluk, Belgaum District.

Smt. Padma Maride is thirty years old, illiterate, once a devadasi (not following it any more), has a ten year old son. Padma was forced to become a devdasi by her grandmother.

Padma is aware of the schemes available for the rehabilitation of devadasis. "The Government has announced incentives in the form of cash for men who come forward to marry a devadasi. Men also are selfish. They get married with a devadasi, receive the incentive and then leave her in a much worse condition, 'Married Devadasi' which means she will neither be in a position to earn her bread by continuing the devadasi system nor can she enjoy a married life".

She further says that only a few devadasis are successfully leading a married life, while others get married only to get deserted. According to her, "some men push them into prostitution after marrying them. So, why should the Government try to introduce such a programme which is not suitable for us. Instead, why cannot they provide us some trainings such as weaving, through which we can earn our bread." Asks Padma.

She is now aware that the devadasi system is bad and has decided not to follow it any more. 'Vimochana' a CCF project is striving to organise these devadasis and are now holding meetings in their village.

Padma is also a member of the 'Mahila Sangha' which was formed two months ago with an intension of rehabilitating devadasis. There are 21 members. From the past two years she is not practicing the evil system. Her son is being sponsored by the Organisation.

With the help of Child Development Corporation, Ghata Prabha, the CCF Organisation is trying to impart training in weaving.

The mahila sangha has been named as 'Neslambari Mahila Sangha' which was established in Jan '92.

During the meetings the members are provided information about health, childcare etc. Women's problems are discussed and an effort is made to convince these women not to follow devadasi system anymore.

Interview held With Smt. Shabakka Dattaje Rane - Secretary Of Mahila Mandal - Uchchgaon - Belgaum District.

Smt - Shabakka Dattaje Rane, aged 50 years, educated upto 9th std (Marathi medium), unmarried. She is the Secretary and tailoring teacher of Mahila Mandal - Uchchgaon - Belgaum District.

In 1968, she started a Mahila Mandal in one of her younger sisters house who is married to a person of the same village. Her younger sister became the Chairman of the Mahila Mandal and Shabakka, the Secretary.

The activities of the Mahila Mandal are as follows :

1. Tailoring , embroidery and knitting: The Mahila Mandal had only 2 sewing machines in the begining which is now increased to 8. These were provided by the BDO and one industry based in Shahpur. About 1000 girls belonging to different villages are trained in tailoring. The students pay fees of Rs. 50/- per year.

More than 500 women in embroidery and 300 women in nitting are trained by Shabakka through the Mahila Mandal. Women belonging to labour class were trained during night after 9.00 p.m.

2. Literacy Classes and Balwadi centre: Literacy classes were held for 3 years . The classes were held during the night times, and 3 batches with 30 women per batch between the age group of 17 years to 25 years attended and benefitted by this. For 14 long years, a Balwadi was run and maintained by Shabakka without any financial support from outside. About 100 pre-schoolers per year benefitted by this Balwadi. A poultry was also established by the members (1975 - 1980). Rs.2000/- was obtained from the BDO which was invested on the poultry and the eggs were distributed to the pre-schoolers of the Balwadi. The profit which was saved during that period is now being utilized for the Mahila Mandal functions. Baby shows are held once in 3 or 4 months when the doctor from PHC is invited and health check-ups for the babies are conducted through Mahila Mandal. Demonstration classes to cook nutritious food :Discussions are held among members regarding new recipes and methods of preparing low cost and nutritious food.

Shabakka reports that many Mahila Mandals have stopped functioning due to lack of funds. They also do not have any information regarding obtaining funds from the government or any other sources. According to Shabakka she was able to implement many programmes when she was a member of old Grama Panchayat. The village enjoyed the privilege of obtaining a school, and drinking water during her tenure in Grama Panchayat. Later on, when the Mandal Panchayat elections were announced, she had no interest in participating in politics and did not contest in the elections. Shabakka feels that due to the politicisation of elections to the governing bodies ,the purpose of development work gets defeated.

Interview held With Smt.Sulochana Shankar Kadam-Ex-Member Of Mandal Panchayat - Uchchagaon, Belgaum District.

Smt.Sulochana Shankar Kadam, aged 40 years educated upto 6th std. (Marathi medium), married.Her father-in-law was an active member of Congress I party. During the electiuons in 1987, her father-in-law forced her to contest as there was no opportunity for his son to contest through Congress -I party. Hence under the reservation category sulochana forwarded her application for candidature to fight Mandal Panchayat elections. She reports that she did very little of canvassing as she was very sure of winning the elections. After winning the elections she was instructed by the male representatives (Congress -I party) not to speak anything in the meetings. She was nervous when she attended the first meeting. According to her, " As the Pradhan also belonged to our village, he was aware of the problems of these people and used to try to solve them. Only my signature was received whenever necessary" she says.

Though she represented 7 villages, she says that neither she visited them nor people approached her for any help during these 5 years tenure. She stated that due to the differences among people belonging to various political parties, no development effort has succeeded so far. During her 5 years tenure in Mandal Panchayat, 5 women obtained widow pensions. Ten women received maternity allowance of Rs.300/- each. One women obtained oldage pension. She is not a member of the Mahila Mandal of her village due to lack of time.

Sulochana did not make any attempt to organise women or create awareness among them as she had no information about this aspect. Sulochana strongly feels that reservation for women is very essential as women have their own problems to share with women representatives who can help them find some solutions.

During Mandal Panchayat meetings a member of Mahila Mandal (usually the president), the doctor of the PHC, an official of the Electricity Board, and an official of Telephone exchange were invited to be present to listen to the complaints of people.

Smt. Sulochana Shankar, president of Mahila Mandal wanted to introduce solar cookers in the village which was welcomed by the members of the Mandal Panchayat but didnot take concrete shape as women mostly cook during very early in the mornings and late in the evenings .

There were 6 women representatives in the Mandal Panchayat. Among them, 3 women representatives belonged to Congress -I party and 3 women representatives were supported by Maharashtra Ekikaran Samithi. According to sulochana all the women representatives were given prior instructions as to for which aspects they should not. Women members were asked to sign on papers whenever essential.Sulochana is not aware of details like - how Mandal Panchayat and Zilla Parishats obtain funds, the source, etc.

Interview held with Smt. Susheela Lakshman Patil, Zilla Parishat Member, at Sulga, Belgaum District.

Susheela is about 50 years old, done her matriculation, she has 3 children, one boy and 2 girls. Susheela Patil is the Mahila Mandal Adyaksh. The Mahila Mandal was started 25 years ago. But it was closed for 5 years in between she says from 1981 - 86.

As Zilla Parishat member she gave importance to education and water. She saw that all the villages that came under her had sufficient water. Either a tap was put or a borewell dug. And also most of the villages have more than one school.

Susheela says that she enjoyed her work as Zilla Parishat member. She had good support from the people as well as the Adyaksh [ZP] she could talk about her problems in the meetings which she always did and did not let any other member over ride her. She always saw that she got work done by the government departments. But, she says she had a lot of language problem as she cannot speak Kannada. It so happens that Belgaum being situated near the Maharashtra border, has about 75% Marathi speaking people there. The official proceedings always were in Kannada at the ZP meetings and she found it extremely difficult to follow what was being said.

At the Mahila Mandal meetings issues like family planning, household problems, water were taken up.

Some of the activities of the Mahila Mandal are, Balwadi, which was started with the membership fees of Mahila Mandal now the Balwadi get Rs.200/- from Mandal Panchayat. Adult education where quite a few women learnt at least how to sign their names, tailoring classes where about 350 women learnt stitching and sports, singing cooking etc. Competations sponsored by LIONS CLUB, Health awareness, Immunization camp.

People contributed and canvassed and she won the elections. She is quite happy about the whole ZP movement. She is satisfied, says she has no disappointments she had success in every work she took up. She got pension for at least 50 people after she became ZP member.

Interview held with Jayashree, President of Channamma Nagamma Mahila Samaja, Aldur, Chikk Tq. Chikk Dist.

Jayashree is the President of Channamma Nagamma Mahila Samaja, she is 40 years old, has 2 children. Her husband is the member of District Karayakari Samithi. This Mahila Samaja was started in 1963. Jayashree has been the president since 1983. There are about 18 members, none attend meetings. Their ages range from 35 to 65.

The main aim of the Mahila Samaja is to provide training to women in crafts like tailoring, knitting, cane work, crushing/canning, by way of which they can supplement family's income.

In fact even to learn not many of them come. They come only when stipend is given along with training because they do not want to lose a day's earnings which amounts to nearly Rs.50 per day during season. Six months tailoring classes are conducted. 30 to 50 people in each batch. 10 batches are over and about 50% are earning.

Cane work classes were conducted by Samudhaya Polytechnic. Stipend 75 Ps per day for people within town limits and Rs.1 to Rs.1.25 for people who come from villages were given. Sixteen people were trained. Canning and crushing (Fruit juice making) courses were also conducted.

Funds to run the Mahila Samaja are collected through donations from various sources for example plantation owners, students etc. She says, "we want the women to come forward, to co-operate, we can run it free. They have not applied for any grants, because whenever they approach (Karnataka State Social Welfare Advisory Board, Social Welfare Board, etc.,) ask for auditing Statements which is not available because the previous president did not keep any accounts. She was not aware that she had to keep accounts so how they are stuck there.

About 6 years ago, a Yuvathi Mandali was started. At least the girls are coming forward. There are about 30 members, aged below 30 years. Youth service centre is supporting the Yuvathi Mandali, and encouraging them to participate in various activities. They are better than Mahila Samajas, says Jayashree. They collect Rs.2/- from the parents as fee per child. The teacher's salary is paid by Mandal Panchayat.

Future Plans :

Jayashree and a few others are planning to force the Mandal Panchayat members to attend the Mahila Samaja meetings, in fact make all of them members and in turn take some help them.

Interview Held with Nagamma, Mandal Member of Aldur village,

Chikkamagalur Tq. Chikkamagalur Dist.

Namma is married and has 3 children, 2 daughters and one son. She is 34 years old and has studied upto 4th standard. Their family occupation is weaving. She was encouraged by some political leaders in the village to contest for elections. She had done door to door canvassing and about Rs.40,000 were spent for elections. Some of it was contributed by Cong-I and some funds were donated by people.

She was not aware of how to function in the Mandal, in fact she had no idea what the set up would be like. Also, there was no training of any kind given for Mandal members. Only pradans and upa-pradans had gone to Bangalore for some training .

As a Mandal member she had taken up some of the issues related to street lights , housings , roads , bore wells, oldage and pensions and also IRDP loans.

Namma covered 3 villages, i.e., 3 villages came under her Mandal Panchayat namely Nojepete, Kumbarahalli, Kandar kaspē. She accomplished the following tasks

Street lights. She got 7 street lights in Nojepete 5 in Kumbarahalli, and 8 in Kandarkaspē installed. She got a metal road of 2 kms length from Kumbarahalli to Aldur made. She reopened a school in old Aldur (primary school) which had twenty eight students. She got IRDP loans sanctioned for about 60 people. SC/ST Corporation loans for about 40 people to start cottage industries. Shishuvihara where 35 children attend was repaired at the cost of Rs.20,000/- Also two water taps installed.

Namma is of the opinion that mandal panchayat has done better work because people had the power to implement their programmes and also they took pride in serving their village. Village Panchayat did not do such things. Therefore Mandal Panchayat is necessary. She is in favour of having more females in Mandal Panchayat. She has issued green cards for women only. And also whenever she and some members found discrepancies in accounts, they objected. She thinks everybody who wants to participate should be given a chance. So therefore if she is contesting, Namma doesn't want to contest. Otherwise she says she definitely wants to contest and win and do a lot more for her village.

Researcher's Observations

She seemed quite an enthusiastic member. She has even achieved quite a bit, although she had no prior input/training.

Interview held with Sharadamma, Mandal Panchayat member, Beekana-halli, Chikmagalur Tq., Chikk. Dist.

Sharadamma is 48 years old, has studied upto 8th standard (L.S.), has four children. Sharadamma is not a member of mahila Samaja, she says she does not have time. Earlier she was a member unani-mously elected for the Village Panchayat.

She was encouraged by Mallappaih of the same village to contest for Mandal Panchayat elections. She had absolutely no knowledge of Mandal Panchayat, also, she's quite ignorant and did not have any information. "Everything was managed by Mallappaih," she says. He was also a member of Mandal Panchayat. She says, "Mal-lappaih yella madsu, nanna hathra sign thogothidru", (Mallappa used to do everythin and take signature.)

There were 18 members in this particular Mandal. Four belonged to Cong - I, four were Independent, ten belonged to Janatha. The president was from Janatha Party.

Mallappa it seems said, "we'll push her, she's harmless. Kelasa madsko bahudu. You are educated you can contest". Sharadamma won by 60 votes. Her opponent Rudramma, who belongs to Janatha party, got 95 votes whereas Sharadamma got 155 votes.

Sharadamma had no idea what Mandal Panchayat was. She thought it will be like Village Panchayat, but later found out that the rules were different. She was not aware of what she was canvass-ing for, all the , she canvassed, she did not promise anything.

They cover 18 villages. Grama Sabha is held once a year. It is represented by Secretary, President, all the and villagers. Villagers talk about their Problems and give letters regarding their problems.

At first, since the system was new, the Pradhan took things slowly, explained what can be done, and told all the members to find what is essential in their respective villages. There were four women members. One from Cong - I, One from Janatha, two Independents. All the members of the village, though they be-longed to different political Parties, were co - operating with each other.

Sharadamma says that she didnot really get any facilities done for herself. And whatever was done (like pensions etc.) was done during the time of mallappa who passed away a few months ago. Most of the time, when people came asking for something, she wrote the letter and delegated the work to someone (mostly some man). She says, " only i'am a bit dumb here, everyone is quite O.K. and are educated".

Interview with M.C. Kasturi, President of Pavithra Yuvathi Mandali, Maylemoney, Chikk Tq. Chik Dist.

Kasturi has studied upto 10th standard (S.S.L.C.). She was encouraged by a Betterment committee member, Eeramma, for up bringing of village women. The main intention of starting the Yuvathi Mandali was to conduct classes to continue their education for the school drop outs; to encourage young girls to participate in sports activities, to learn tailoring and embroidery, etc. The yuvathi mandali was started two years ago. There is an advisory committee consisting of 5 women between 30 and 40 years, who are all educated upto primary level. There are about 40 members in the Yuvathi Mandali with ages ranging from 16 to 25 years.

Tailoring and embroidery classes are conducted by Samudaya Polytechnic. Yuvathi Mandali members motivate women by going to their houses, to attend the night school.

The Yuvathi Mandali was established also with the help of Dist. Youth Centre. They are registered at Youth Services Centre. They have a meeting once a month. At they meet at the Mandal Panchayat office. Earlier they used to meet at a building which had two rooms. When they started the Shishuvihara, one room was used for it, later when Balwadi became Anganwadi the other room was also given to use as store room. The teacher was paid by Mandal Panchayat earlier and now that the anganwadi is running, the salary for the Anganwadi worker comes from that agency itself. When asked what the Yuvathi Mandali has done for the village, she says that they had not taken up any common, village issues, that most of the members are students/agriculturists, they have problems, also there are no funds. Kasturi says the village issues are taken up by ZP/MP, like water, roads, transportation and housing etc. Water problem is still very acute. The Mandal Panchayat has not done anything much.

When asked whether any of the Yuvathi Mandali members will contest? and if they have attended any suitable training? Kasturi says firmly, "No! not at all, we are all away from politics". Also, she was not aware of reservations for women in Mandal Panchayat elections.

Future Plans

(a) N.Y.K. has agreed to give Rs. 15,000/- for the building. but for the rest of the funds and place, when they approached Mandal Panchayat, they agreed to provide earlier, but later, the facility went to a different village. They are determined to follow -up the issue.

(b) They all have a keen interest in sports and Kasturi says they'll conduct /participate in sports events. So far, about six batches have been conducted.

Interview with K.K. Pushpa Gowda, Mandal Member, Malalur, Chikk Tq. Chikk Dist.

Pushpa is 33 years old, has studied upto P.U.C. is married and has two children. Her husband is a member of Raitha Sangha.

Mahila Samaja in the village is functioning since 12 Years. She was President of Mahila Samaja from 1982 to 1987, for five years still continuing as member. She's been a member since nine years. There are four executive members - President, Vice - President, Secretary and another Secretary. The membership fee is Rs.15/- Mahila Samaja has some funds, which she is not sure how or where it came from. She says that, perhaps it was collected from all the houses in the village some years ago.

Mahila Samaja Activities : They have bought two sewing machines. Tailoring classes are conducted in the balwadi room. About 200 women/girls have learnt till date.

TRYSEM : Four batches, 8/10 girls per batch has been conducted. Under RAP, Rs. 200/- stipend is given, under SAP Rs. 200/- and under TRYSEM Rs.300/-. Earlier the Balwadi used to be run by village panchayat then Mandal Panchayat took over and is still running it. The Mahila Samaja members used to earlier participate in sports.

They meet once in 6 months. Issues that are discussed are : Sewing machines, functions, games, furniture and collection of donatons.

MALALUR MANDAL PANCHAYAT :

She was elected to Malalur Mandal Panchayat. Five villages came under her. They are : Malalur, Sirgapura, Kallahalli, Thimmenahalli and Beikimane. There are sixteen members, four from Janatha, Five from Cong - I, five Independents, and two Nominees.

She was compelled by the people of her village to contest for the Mandal Panchayat elections, and therefore she stood. Since her husband is a member of the Raitha Sangha, she was not interested in other political parties like Janatha or Congress. She contested the elections as an Independent Candidate. For canvassing she went walking all round the villages. She had no idea what Mandal Panchayat was. The first few meetings she was only watching the proceedings. There was a training given for 3 days but she is not clear what training.

Gram Sabha used to be held once in 2 or 3 months. All the villagers and the Mandal members used to gather, tell their problems, give applications regarding their problems and also discuss.

People used to approach Pushpa for IRDP loans, electricity, and even for road repair work, roadside drainage.

Interview with Kallamma, Member of Mandal Panchayat Mailemoney, Chik Tq. Chikk Dist.

Smt. Kallamma, aged 38 years, educated upto 4th standard, belonging to Scheduled caste, is the member of Mandal Panchayat, Mailemoney. She is a wage labourer who earns Rs.15/day and her husband also works as a wage labourer and earns the same amount. She has four children. Her eldest daughter is married, first son who has studied upto SSLC recently fought with his father and has left to Bombay in search of a job. Her younger son is a student studying in 6th std, and younger daughter, a drop out of 3rd std, works as a maid servant in the coffee planter's house, where as Kallamma and her husband work in his farm.

Though there exists a Mahila Samaj in the village, Kallamma has not enrolled herself as a member. She says that she is very busy and cannot spare her days's wage to attend the Mahila Samaja's meeting.

Kallamma reports that she was forced by Mr. Siddaiah a local leader and Mr. Sabir Ahmed a coffee planter to contest for the Mandal Panchayat elections. She is neither aware of the political party through which she contested for the election, nor the name of her opponent.

She went along with Siddaiah for canvassing and spent Rs.2,000/- for the same. She observed Mr. Siddaiah promising people that he would get them street lights, Borewells, and the loans and imitated him.

After the elections when she was informed that she has won the elections, Kallamma says she was very scared as she had no information about Mandal Panchayat and her role as a member. She went to the first meeting and when the Secretary introduced all the members to the Pradhan and read out the rules and regulations for the members. "I was not able to understand anything" - says Kallamma. All the lady members sat together supporting each other psychologically.

During the subsequent meetings also, she was sitting quietly - "maathu summame koothkondu alsidhe. Naavadilla. Bhaya Aaitu" - (we just sat and heard the discussions. We were scared and hence never spoke anything) - reports Kallamma .

She further explains by telling " Naavu Bari Sign Maadodhu, Avaru Maathadhu Namage Kanoonu Gothilla. Maneli Mathaddhange Maathadakagalla. Enara Thappu Maathaddhange. Ellaru Nagthare Antha Sankocha. Ellaru Voppi Sign Maadidhre Naanu Maadthiddhe". We (ladies) only signed the papers while they (men) spoke. We were not aware of the rules and regulations. We knew that we cannot speak in the meetings as we do at home. We hesitated as we were scared that everybody would laugh at us if we talk some non-sense. When all the members agreed and signed the papers, I also signed. she feels "Jaasthi Vodhidhavaru Kanoonu Prakara Maathadhare.

Namagenu Gothagutthe? - Those who are well educated can speak according to the rules and regulations. What do we know" ? Kalamma wonders.

Though not aware of the rules and regulations, and her role as a member, Kalamma has helped her neighbours by recommending their names as beneficiaries for the available schemes at Mandal Panchayat.

Three people were able to get Janatha Houses.

Five borewells were sanctioned for her colony (Schedule Caste people live separately in a colony of their own) Hence water scarcity problem was solved.

Electricity connections were extended to all the houses of her "beedhi" (Street). Earlier they all lived in the dark without a single bulb in their house.

Regarding loans, Kalamma says nobody approached her for getting loans and she was not aware of such facilities. She never heard about IRDP. Thought Kalamma represented six villages - she reports that she never visited any of these villages. Grama Sabhas was a new word for which she needed an explanation. Later she revealed that, such a meeting was never held in her village.

She gives a clear picture of how women's participation in such areas are discouraged in a village atmosphere. "Meetings of course, are held only during the occurrence of incidents leading to disharmonious situation in the village. Even for such meetings only men are invited and women's participation is discouraged". Kalamma also feels this is not an unusual thing.

People with any sort of problems would approach the Pradhan during the meetings of the Mandal Panchayat and would submit applications regarding the same. After which, the Pradhan and Mr. Siddaiah w/o is also a member of Mandal Panchayat would do a spot inspection and sanction the amount essential for that particular work. Kalamma has missed only two or three meetings of Mandal Panchayat due to her illness.

The only incident when Kalamma joined her other women counter parts and spoke aloud was when the sanction was not granted for a water pipe connection and a water tank for Hukkunda village." We fought to-gether and got it sanctioned" reports Kalamma.

Kalamma has an intention of contesting again for the Mandal Panchayat elections, but....." Nodana Jana Enanthare Antha". Let me see what people will say at that time - she expresses her hesitance.

Researcher's Observations

Kalamma's case gives a clear picture that reservation for SC candidates means a chance for the rich men to exploit the poor, innocent women. This interview reveals the result of empowerment

wi thout enlightenment - the policy adopted by our government.
In creasing the reservation without providing essential informa-
t ion may lead to a worse condition than this.

She hesitated to even speak to us. It was very clear that as a
wa ge labourer, and belonging to Schedule Caste she was never
ex posed to a situation to speak with strangers - not about the
Ma ndal Panchayat atleast. It was only after two hours she felt
co mfortable and shared her experiences.

Interview with Sunitha Shankar, Member of Dalith Sangharsh Samithi, Chik. Dist. Chikkamagalur.

Smt. Sunitha Shankar, aged 24 years, is educated upto 9th standard. She resides at Vijayapura, where there is a Mahila Samajand only rich women are involved in it. Sunitha feels she cannot afford to distribute large amounts as donations for the Mahila Samaja.

She worked as a volunteer teacher at Vijayapura for the Adult Education Programme for seven years. A honourarium of Rs. 50/- was paid by Nehru Yuva Kendra. Eighteen (18) members benefitted from the scheme and became literates. Later she left this job and started working as a Home Guard.

She is also a member of Dalit Sangharsh Samithi for the past seven years. The members render their service during disasters. They also fight for their basic rights by organising processions. Meetings are held once a month and a fine of Rs. 15/- is charged from those who do not attend the meetings.

Ten ladies and twenty five men have enrolled themselves as members of the Dalith Sangharsh Samithi. Sunitha feels that it is not easy to organise dalit women together. She tried to form a group but failed to bring them together. They hesitate to come out of their shells. She feels women should be provided with essential information about the advantages of forming themselves into a group.

Sunitha feels male representatives are better than women representatives because women feel proud of themselves after winning the elections. They do not understand our problems after they obtain a good STATUS.

According to Sunitha, " The poor, first of all, have to be organised and awareness has to be created. Women in Panchayats and Zilla Parishats should be trained and they inturn should help the needy in time." Suggests the Lady Home-Guard. She feels that this method may help the women to overcome fear and participate in the activities of Panchayats.

During the last municipal elections her husband forced her to contest for the post of counsellor. But Sunitha hesitated. She had an inferiority complex and thought she could not answer the questions that she might have to answer as a counsellor.

Interview with Smt. D. Sudha, Secretary of The District Mahila Federation - Chik. Dist. Chikkamagalur.

Smt.D. Sudha, aged 40 years, completed her Pre - University. She is married and has two children. The District Mahila Federation acts as an information disseminating centre to the Taluka Mahila Federations.

The objective of District Mahila Federation is to disseminate information through the Taluka Mahila Mandals and to provide essential guidance to the Taluka Mahila Federations.

The financial support they receive from the Social Welfare Advisory Board for conducting seminars or workshops is not sufficient and the District Mahila Federation has to make arrangements either by collecting donations or by conducting some programmes, like Dramas, Exhibition etc. In addition to this the Dist. Mahila Federation also works in co-ordination with local NGOs. Through the BDO they receive Rs.500/- for the maintenance purpose which again is not enough.

Some of the activities of Dist. Mahila Federation include the responsibility of distributing the iodised salt to the villagers through the Dist. Health Officer. Rural women who hesitate to approach the counselling centre, are motivated and brought to the counselling centre for counselling with the help of Mahila Mandals. Self employment loans for women were distributed through the DMF.

Some women were given training to manufacture leather goods. The raw materials were supplied through the DMF by borrowing Rs.5000/- from the Co-operative Society. Women who benefitted by this training initially, stitched 140 leather bags (school bags). Not even 10 bags were sold. The reason was that the designs didnot cater to the latest choice of the people.

In 1986 Dist. Women's Co-operative Society was established through the DMF. They make a profit of Rs.4,000/- by supplying food to the hospitals. They also collect the money through shares. The profit thus obtained is re-invested.

Fifteen women who were trained by DWCRA in preparing nutritious food for Pre schoolers were identified as not working properly. They were instructed to close their manufacturing units. But the members of DMF approached the ZP and convinced them to retain these candidates at CFTRI - Mysore for 2 months. They launched complaints against the police for ignoring the complaints launched about women's abuse and wife battering, dowry etc.

Future Plans

They are planning to extend their service of supplying food to the Hostels, Jails and Remand homes with two main intentions : 1. Increasing the profit., 2. Correcting the misuse/mishandling of food materials at these places.

Interview with Thayamma, Mandal Panchayat Member, Haladkeri, & President of Jagadamba Mahila Mandal, Haladkeri, Bidar Tq. Bidar dist.

Thayamma is 45 years old, married, has seven children, four sons and three daughters, all of them are studying. She is also the President of the Mahila Mandal in the village.

The chairman of the village, Mallappagiri encouraged her to contest for the Mandal Panchayat elections. She is from the Janatha Party. She said that she was quite nervous at first, but later got confidence. Two Gram Sabhas have been conducted so far. People from Haladkeri village and also the other villages that come under this Mandal Panchayat attended along with all the members. And they would discuss as to which of the facilities benefitted the people most and then decide what to get.

She has got two people loans to buy buffaloes, six people have got loans to start poultry, two people have got loans to rear sheep. She got the roads in her village repaired through the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. Got a school, and Anganwadi for the village. The village had water problem earlier, now that they get sufficient corporation water and a few borewells were installed, there's no water problem.

Thayamma feels that things have happened in the village after Mandal Panchayat came. Asked if the Mahila Mandal proposed her to contest for Mandal Panchayat elections she answered in the negative.

The Mahila Mandal was started eleven years ago. There are 52 members in the Mahila Mandal, ages ranging from 18 to 50. Approximately 20 are educated. She has been the President right through.

Funds : They mobilize funds by renting utensils to big functions, marriages etc., collect Rs. 1 per month from each member, run chit funds, and also try and get some donations.

Activities : They conduct their activities in co-ordination with Family Planning Association of India. They conduct meetings once in six months. Competitions are held during festival seasons and during independence day celebrations, baby shows are conducted, also once in six months. They used to run tailoring classes. Eight girls learnt. But they got married went out of the village. The tailoring teacher's salary came from the Central Social Welfare Board. They had two sewing Machines but now that the classes are not conducted they've been taken away. the Mahila Mandal members also encourage Family Planning among women of the village. About 25 of the women have got Copper - T inserted.

Talking about Social problems, she agreed that girls need to become more aware of them and how to deal with these problems. They sometimes get resource persons and arrange talks in the village, with the help of FPAI.

Interview with Gujjubai, President, Mahila Okkuta, District Mahila Federation, Bidar

Smt Gujjubai is the president of the District Mahila Federation and also the president of Rudrambika Mahila Mandal Kamttana. The latter was started by her in 1979.

When she started the organisation, there were 25 members in the Mandal. They started classes in tailoring and knitting and paid stipend to the trainees. The Mandal now holds health camps, eye camps twice a year in coordination with the concerned health centres. In each village they conduct awareness for 10 days. In villages they try to mobilise women from surrounding villages as well and discuss about the importance of education to children, health and hygiene and financial management. They also implement the government programmes and work in coordination with the Department of Women and Child Welfare. It is now a belief among villagers that if a woman is aware and educated, the entire community benefits from it.

The Mandal gets most of the funds by collecting membership fee of Rs.2/. In villages through Mahila Mandals they organise and perform dance and dramas and sell tickets as well as collect donations from MLAs and rural rich. The Mandal has started a Counselling Centre and employed professionals to work for them. Eighty percent of the funds are obtained from the Central Social Welfare Board.

With the assistance from BIRD - a local NGO, Gujjubai started a Taluka Mahila Federation. In 1987 she contested for the Zilla Parishat elections but lost. Even then she is able to get benefits for her Mahila Mandal. She opines that education and awareness are essential ingredients to enhance the participation of women in development programmes meant for rural upliftment.

Interview with Khajubi, President of Kasturba, Mahila Mandal Malloor, Bidar Tq. Bidar District.

Khajabi, is 36 years old, educated upto 7th std, she was earlier teaching tailoring to Mahila Manadal members. The previous president resigned after 5 years and after that, all the members called for the meeting and elected her as the president.

The Mahila Mandal was started in 1982. Their aim was to bring the girls together, help them to get some training and then earn a living since they are all poor.

Activities : She and the secretary learnt how to make agarbathis and came to the village and taught 30 women. The training was for four months, supported by NYK and stipend of Rs.250/- given to all the 30 women who learnt. Tailoring training was given by Khajabi herself.

The Mahila Mandal organised a training in papad making. About 16/17 learnt to make papads, but due to the problems in marketing the activity flopped. Through a Madras Khasagi Bank eight people got loans to start poultry. About 20 of the women became members.

Khajabi also provides information about Family Planning and motivates women to adopt small family policy. She gathers this information from the IPP and FPAI. Each year atleast 2 ladies are motivated to undergo sterilisation. Family Planning camps are organised with the help of FPAI.

They have a meeting once a month. There are 47 members. Some people give membership fees, some donot. The topics covered during the meetings range from increasing the age for marriage of girls and educating them so that they can get employment.

Immunisation : They highlight the importance of children's health in the meetings and check if the children are immunised on time.

For the past three years, FPAI has been supporting their meetings, financially, and also by giving them more information by sending resource persons to talk in the meetings.

Future Plans

About twenty people have come together. They want to start a dairy co-operative. They have even given their application to Central Social Welfare Advisory Board, Bangalore. They want to follow up the issue.

They want to market the clothes that they stitch. They want to take some help from CSWAB, Bangalore, and open a Showroom for ready made garments.

**Interview With Ayeshabi, Mandal Member, Miloor, Bidar Tq.
Bidar District.**

Ayeshabi is about 40 years old. She has studied upto 7th std. She has been the secretary of Mahila Mandal for the past 6 years. Ayeshabi worked as a nurse for 9 years. After becoming a member of Mandal Panchayat, she left the job. In 1982, a Mahila Mandali was started by Ayeshabi and others. Smt. Ratna Kushnoor a local leader motivated the women to establish a Mahila Mandal in their village. She also provided the essential guidelines to establish a Mahila Mandal.

The Mahila Mandali took up this responsibility and started providing various types of training like agarbathi making and papad making. Ayeshabi herself trained 12 women but there was no marketing facilities available around their area and hence this activity was discontinued after a few months. A private Bank provided financial help to the MM, to encourage poultry farming. Twenty ladies benefitted from this.

There are 47 members in the MM and the meetings are held once in a month. Issues like Family Planning, Child Care, Nutrition, Immunisation etc. are discussed in the meeting.

Ayeshabi's brother who was a chairman of old panchayat, forced her to contest for the Mandal Panchayat elections. She contested through Congress Party against Shantha and won the elections. Grama Sabha was held once in a month and she being a representative of the village says that it is very easy to identify the problems of the village as people approach her.

"Two meetings are held in the Mandal Panchayat in a month. The male members fight among themselves to get the schemes sanctioned to their villages as they can make money easily. I'll laugh at them," says Ayeshabi.

Ayeshabi perceives that it is the pradhan's duty to enquire about facilities that are essential for the villages represented by women members. There are 7 women representatives whose villages were neglected, while the male members fought for the schemes among themselves.

Ayeshabi was able to get street lights for the entire colony (she lives in a muslim colony). as well as water to the village through the Mandal Panchayat. Five borewells were installed in the village and 5 more are yet to be installed. House loans were sanctioned for ten people and twenty members received loans to buy rikshaws. Small shop keepers and vegetable vendors were also given loans. She was trained by FPAI for carrying out the administrative work in the village. The Mahila Mandal gives a feed back to the Mandal Panchayat as to what commodities are essential in the village. The streets and roads are thus repaired, drainage facilities are now demanded for.

She is confident about winning the next elections. Her future plans are to establish a milk co-operative and a showroom to sell the stitched garments.

Interview with Smt. Lakshmi bai Deshmukh, Chairman of Mahila Mandal, Chairman of Taluka Mahila Federation, and Mandal Panchayat member, Aurad, Aurad Taluk, Bidar Dist.

Lakshmi bai Deshmukh is about 50 years, has studied upto 5th standard (Telegu medium). Husband is a land lord at Aurad, owns over 200 acres of land.

Mahila Mandal was started 20 years ago. Lakshmi bai says that the main intention of starting the Mahila Mandal was to help women to become self-reliant. There were about 200 members when they started, now there are more. They conduct meetings once in a month. All religious groups attend, infact every body wants to abolish Caste/Creed differences. She's been the chairman for the past 8 years. They have elections every year and also once every five years. She is quite an aware person and capable of going to any office in any department and getting things done.

Funds : They collect membership fees from all those who can give, also accept donations. They get a grant of Rs.3,000/- from the government.

Activities : In the meetings they talk about family planning, harrasment of girls and problems related to dowry.

They run tailoring classes, machine were given by industrial training centre, hand work classes where they teach basket-making They gather every week for a bhajan session also. She has got loans for about 30 people through BIRD to rear cattle and start poultry.

The Taluka Mahila Federation was started 8 years ago. Through the Federation they get all the other Mahila Mandals that are affiliated, to come together. This way she comes to know what the problem is in very region. Also, she personally visits these villages. She has got loans for women who are in these Mahila Mandals, widow pensions, sewing machines, housing loans from HUDCO. About 50 widows from the surrounding villages have got pensions and about 100 in Aurad proper.

Mandal Panchayat : Lakshmi bai was forced by all the people in her town to contest for Mandal Panchayat elections. Lakshmi bai contested through Cong - I party. Cong - I did not give any funds to meet election expenses. All the women canvassed. The Adyaksh (president) of this particular Mandal Panchayat is from Janatha Party who has to heed their discussions. She stated that not many women are willing to do what she is doing as they feel politics is not their domain.

She calls for meeting, gets all women together, and informs about all the schemes and facilities. Also, inspite of women still shunning elections and such things, she encourages them to come forward, contest elections and work for people, mainly for women.

Interview with Rathnamma, Mandal Panchayat Member, Bagdhal, Bidar dist. Bidar.

Smt. Rathnamma, aged 30 yrs, literate [attended adult education classes conducted by Samakhya], married. She and her husband work as wage labourers. They live in the SC colony, situated outside the village.

Rathnamma is the member of Mahila Sangha formed/ organised by Mahila Samakhya with an intention of creating awareness among rural women regarding their basic rights. There are 20 members in the Mahila Sangha between the age range of 30 years to 45 years. All are married and literates. They hold meetings once in a week and discuss about issues such as getting the IRDP loans, spreading literacy, mutual support, social problems etc.

The Mahila Sangha gets financial assistance from Samakhya. Samakhya helped these women to gather information about schemes and facilities for the poor.

They went in a group and fought with the Mandal Pradhan for not providing them the drinking water facilities. Immediately they were assured of water facilities by him and they did obtain water the next day itself. They also approached Zilla Paraishat demanding for borewell in their colony as they did not have one. They approached the KEB to provide them with electricity. Women are fighting to get what is due to the villagers.

In the meetings they are informed about health and hygiene, nutrition, child care, education, and its importance etc.

Rathnamma feels that the Sangha has helped her in many ways and does not plan to leave it. Explaining the then prevalent caste system and its influence in the village she feels that it is being eradicated in the village.

After enrolling themselves as members in the Sangha, Rathnamma and other women approached the Mahila Mandal members and discussed about working together. But the members of the Mahila Mandal refused telling that there should be only one Mahila Mandal in the village and that they cannot let the SC ladies work along with them in the Mahila Mandal.

The members of the Mahila Sangha are not invited to the Grama Sabha. They are not informed about Schemes that are available for the poor. But, based on the information they receive from Samakhya, women are approaching the Mandal Panchayat and are demanding for their rights and implementation of the programmes, that are available for them. " Many a times our demands are neglected because we are poor and we are women " - regrets Rathnamma. She expresses her hopes that one fine day world will realise women's strength.

Interview with Smt. Vitoobai - member of Mandal Panchayat, Bhagdai, Bhagdai taluk, Bidar District.

Smt. Vitoobai, aged 50 years, illiterate, married and has two sons. There was a Mahila Mandal in the village which was inactive. When Vitoobai asked them to hand over the incharge of the Mahila Mandal to her the members refused. So they started a new Mahila Mandal.

There are 30 members in the Mahila Mandal their age ranges from 25 years to 50 years. All the members are illiterate. The Mahila Mandal hired 2 sewing machines and 8 girls were taught tailoring. The teacher's salary was paid by the Mandal Panchayat. They meet once in 2 months. - Vitoobai regrets she has no information regarding other activities which could be conducted by the Mahila Mandal.

The villagers who were aware of the reservation facilities for women in Panchayats, forced her to contest for the Mandal Panchayat election through Janata Party. The first meeting she attended was the Mandal Panchayat meeting. Vitoobai was very scared as she was neither aware of her role as a member in the Mandal Panchayat, nor she knew the rules and regulations.

She observed other members for 3 months and then spoke about the problems of her village. There were 23 male representatives whose political background she was not aware of. But all the 7 women representatives in the Mandal Panchayat belonged to Janata Party. The Pradhan also was from Janata Party.

"The first grama sabha held in the village after the Mandal Panchayat elections led to serious discussions and confusion among the crowd. During the 5 years tenure only 3 grama sabhas were conducted and people fought for the schemes available through Mandal Panchayat. The number of poor people in the village is more but the number benefitted by the schemes were only few. because of limited schemes sanctioned by the Zilla Parishat.

She says that 3 male representatives were also illiterate like her. The Pradhan being one, required the help of the Secretary to read the agenda, the details of the schemes available etc. But the details of the amount sanctioned for the schemes, accounts etc., were not read out during the meetings. "whenever I asked the Secretary to read the details of the accounts, the Pradhan asked her to keep shut. Hence I stopped asking for the details of accounts. She feels that the programmes should be implemented properly.

Now that she has gained some experience Vitoobai feels confident enough and wants to contest in the future elections. As a member of Mandal Panchayat, Vitoobai helped 13 people get IRDP loans, 2 persons received loans from othe BCO [Backward Community Office]. A borewell was sanctioned and water connection was extended to the SC colony. Widows were identified and recommended for pension.

Interview held with Smt. Lakshmi Bhatt, member of Mandal Panchayat, Parkala, Udupi Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District.

Smt. Lakshmi Bhatt, 38 years, educated upto PUC, Treasurer of Taluka Mahila Federation, Ex-Secretary of Parkala Mahila Mandal, President of Priyadarshini Mahila Mandal, Badagabettu, Member of Mandal Panchayat, Parkala. Her husband is a lab technician in KMC Hospital, Manipal. Lakshmi is a mother of 2 girls and a boy.

Lakshmi's mother was an active member of Mahila Mandal, Hubli. Her father was a business man, and an active member of Congress party. She had actively participated in all the programmes and hence was aware of the activities of Mahila Mandal. She got involved in social service in 1980 by imparting training to women in stitching. She made her entry into the Mandal Panchayat due to the active support lent to her by the people who had by then recognised her contribution to social service. She was helped by the leaders of the Cong-I to contest the elections. She also attributes the reasons of her success to the cooperation she received from her husband. Despite the state of politics which has degenerated, Smt. Bhatt is clear about her ideology and role in politics. She involves herself as a social worker and not as a party person.

She regrets that this male dominant society does not allow women to gain higher positions. She opines that reservation for women at the Executive level in Mandal Panchayats and Zilla Parishats is very essential. In 1987, during the Zilla Parishat elections, male members opposed the idea of electing a woman as Upa-Adyaksh and women members are now hesitating to relate themselves to the male Adyaksh and Upa-Adyaksh. Unity among women is very essential to combat such situations. She also feels that along with the reservation facilities, there should also be a criterion that only educated women are eligible to contest in the elections.

Lakshmi's future plans include meeting all the lady members at the Mandal levels, and Zilla Parishat levels, to discuss about the steps to be taken in motivating young women to participate in politics. The activities of the Mahila Mandal are conducted by the amount collected from members as membership fees and donations. The Mandal Panchayat - Parkala consists of 30 members. The major activities are:

Literacy Programme : Under the Saksharata Programme, 80% of the population in our constituency has benefitted. A muslim lady is being motivated to teach alphabets to her husband. Those using thumb impressions have now been taught to sign.

Activities Of Mahila Mandal : Tailoring, participation in competitions like sports, drama and debate, creating awareness about child care, nutrition, health and hygiene.

Interview held at Badagabettu with Smt.Gunavanthi, Member of Mahila Mandal, Badagabettu, Udupi Tq. DK Dist.

Ms.Gunavanthi, 27 years. educated upto 7th std. married and has three children, her husband is a farmer. She is the defeated candidate of the Mandal Panchayat elections.

She was pressurised by the Janatha Party and her husband to contest for the elections. The Janatha Party leaders, who contested and lost the elections did not have a chance to contest for the Mandal Panchayat elections due to the reservations for women. Hence they supported Gunavanthi and forced her to contest.

She explains the reasons for her failure due to lack of support by the the villagers who had more confidence in Congress Party and hence elected Lakshmi Bhatt, her opponent, who was new to the village. She expresses her unwillingness to participate in the future elections. Gunavanthi feels that politics are not for women, only men who can adjust to all the mal-practices like goondasim and can survive in this field. She feels that there should not be any political party at the panchayat level. She spent only Rs.800/- for her election canvassing. She expressed that women are expected to obey their elders, especially men like husbands, fathers or brothers, whenever they are faced with a problem. She was even hesitant to speak in front of her husband.

She reports that she did not have any information about Mandal Panchayat or the elections. She is not aware even now, after having contested for Mandal Panchayat elections. She feels that she has lost her respect by jumping into the elections and prefers to stay at home.

Rural Development :

Gunavanthi blames the Mandal Panchayat for not doing any good to the village and not providing the basic infrastructure to them. She blames the politicisation at the village level for it.

The Mahila Mandal was started four years ago i.e., on November 4th 1988, with an intention of organising women's groups. Gunavanthi also became a member in 1988 as the executive board members such as the secretary and the president forced her to join the Mahila Mandal.

The Mahila Mandal has not been receiving financial aid from any source and the activities with the help of membership fees. There are 67 members between the age group of 14 to 40 years and all the members are literates.

Activities of the Mahila Mandal include tailoring, participating in camps and competitions, to work in Co-ordination with the NSS students of Miagres college, Kalyanapura in repairing the roads. Gunavanthi accepts that though she has been a member of Mahila Mandal, she never participated in the above programmes actively as she had no interest.

Interview with Ms. Aravidakshi Adyanthara, Secretary of Mahila Mandal, Kaup, Udipi Tq. Dakshina Kannada District.

Aravidakshi is 35 years old, educated upto SSLC (10th std) and is a house wife. Her husband is a doctor. They have no children. Aravidakshi joined the Mahila Mandal six years ago as a member and is now the secretary since two years.

Aravidakshi is not aware of the objectives of the Mahila Mandal, Kaup. But she knows that the Mahila Mandal was started 30 years ago. She reports there are 90 members in the Mahila Mandal. All are residing in different directions, and only 10 to 12 members attend the meetings. The meetings are held once in six months.

Activities :

The activities are confined to : -

1. Tailoring Classes.
2. Balwadi Maintainance.

Twenty five students attend the tailoring classes and Pay Rs. 5/- per month each.

Twenty five children in the age group of 3 months to 3 years attend the Balwadi and Rs. 15/- per month for each child is collected as fees.

Aravidakshi reports that the poor and the labour class members find it difficult to attend the meetings as they can't afford to lose a day's wages.

The Balwadi teacher co-orinates between members and organises the monthly meetings.

Ms. Aravidakshi admits that she has not heard of Panchayati Raj at all.

Researcher's Observations

Ms. Aravidakshi shows no interest in the activities of Mahila Mandal. She is involved in the Mahila Mandal because her husband is a doctor.

Interview held with Ms. Sumathi -President, Yuvathi Mandali, Padubidri, Udipi Tq. Dakshina Kannada District.

Ms. Sumathi, B.A., aged 22 years, unmarried, worked as a volunteer in literacy programme for one year, president of Yuvathi Mandali - Padubidri. She belongs to a Bestha family (fishermen).

The Yuvathi Mandal was started because the girls wanted a group of their own. The people who were already familiar with Sumathi's work as a volunteer in the 'Saksharata Andolan' chose her as the president of the Yuvathi Mandal which was formed 3 months ago.

There are 50 members in Yuvathi Mandal, and 6 members among them are degree holders, and 3 and beedi workers. All others are semi-literates/school dropouts. At present the Yuvathi Mandal is depending on the membership fees collected from its members.

Sumathi perceives her relationship with the Mandal Panchayat' as the tricky plan of the members to trap her as she has good contact with the poor and needy which she has developed during her participation as an active volunteer in the literacy programme'. Though she attends the meetings, she regrets that she has no power to participate. However, Sumathi identifies the poor and needy and recommends their names and she reports that through her efforts, women who were recommended for the IRDP loans were able to obtain loans.

Women representatives are participating in the meetings for the name sake. They are conditioned to agree to everything - suggestions, recommendations, fund allocation etc. As an observer, she wonders why her recommendations are not considered by the pradhan in distributing loans and other facilities to the poor.

According to her, women representatives as observed by Sumathi, sit together and show no interest in the meetings because they know that they are not expected to participate and their contributions are not welcome. In spite of the discouragement, there is no dearth for ideas, zeal and enthusiasm. Of late only she is being invited by the Mandal Panchayat as she is actively working for the poor. However she is allowed only to attend and not participate in the meetings. Her recommendations are not taken note of. She feels that the corruption is too rampant among the officials and the benefits therefore doesnot accrue to the needy. Sumathi's future plans include contesting for the elections and supporting the cause of poor and needy of her village.

According to Sumathi poor people who did not receive any facilities from the Mandal Panchayat keep approaching her to pressurise her to speak for them during the Mandal meetings. She regrets that her efforts in this regard were not successful as the members divide all the funds allocated for different schemes among themselves.

Interview with Ms. Premalatha, Secretary of Mahila Mandal, Badagabettu, Udupi Tq. Dakshina Kannada Dist.

Premalatha is 24 years old and is educated upto II PUC. She is not yet married. She is the secretary of Mahila Mandal, Badagabettu.

The Mahila Mandal was started 4 years ago i.e. in 1987 with an intention of providing opportunities for women to participate in different activities such as sports, competitions, developmental activities etc. Premalatha was motivated by Lakshmi Bhatt, a local leader who started the Mahila Mandal.

There are 67 members all between the age range of 14 years to 40 years. All the members are literates.

Funds :

The Mahila Mandal does not have any financial help from any source. The activities are conducted from the funds raised among the members as membership fees and donations.

Activities :

1. Two members participated in leadership developmental camps for youth.
2. Two members participated in the debate conducted by Rotary Club of Udupi and have won prizes.
3. Twenty members went for a picnic to have a expense or recreation.
4. The members volunteered themselves and repaired the damaged road in their village. They worked in Co-ordination with the NSS group of students of Milagres college - Kalyanpura.
5. Six poor women are given the responsibility of stitching the doctor's coat, for the Manipal Hospital.

The Taluka Mahila Federation has been distributing the work to the Mahila Mandals. The Mahila Mandal select the poor women for this work, so that they can earn something.

Nutrition classes are conducted once in a year. Meetings are held once in a month and issues related to dowry. Women abusement etc. are discussed. The members narrate such incidents they read in the news papers and discuss among themselves about the awareness to be created among women to protest such things.

Premalatha says, " so far nothing has been done specifically for the upliftment of the poor. We are learning from our president, - Lakshmi Bhatt who is an active woman in the field.

Interview With Ms. Sheela Shetty, President Of Mahila Mandal, Ermalu, Udupi Tq. Dakshin Kannada District.

Ms. Sheela Shetty is 45 years of age, she has studied upto 9th standard. Her husband is a businessman. She is the president of Srinidhi Mahila Mandal, president of Mahila Morcha of BJP, also Secretary of Taluka Mahila Federation. She has been the President of Mahila Mandal for the past five years. She and a few others members together constructed the building for their Mahila Mandal with their own efforts. They collected funds from their relatives and friends and despite the opposition from the male members of their families, they formed their own team of 'Yakshagana' - a folk dance drama of South Canara. The team has completed 25 performances all over the district and is very popular. Ms. Sheela writes the dialogues herself for the 'Yakshagana' and even participates along with other members.

The Mahila Mandal was started by Mr. Narayanachar of Mysore 7 years ago. A balwadi was started at that time, and the nutrition programme was introduced which was maintained without any help from outside. The rent and maintainance was paid by Mr. Naryanachar. Later they approached the government and obtained the financial aid for Balwadi. The KSSWAB provides Rs. 7000/year for the Balwadi and nutrition programme. The CCF organisation working in the area pays the salary of the teacher.

Activities : Two years ago they constructed a building for Mahila Mandal by collecting funds from their relatives and friends and also contributing their personal money. Bright students are identified and prizes are distributed to encourage them. Mahila Mandal also provides an opportunity for women to overcome the stage fear by arranging various activities like dance, debate and drama competitions. The remaining amount from the funds collected is deposited in the bank and the interest that is thus obtained is utilized for various activities such as buying sewing machines for the cultural programmes, for the salaries of the teachers etc. The Mahila Mandal owns 47 sewing machines and conducts tailoring classes for women. The Taluka Mahila Federation, Udupi has also distributed the stitching work of house coats for Manipal Hospital to the Mahila Mandal, Ermalu. Twenty two members were identified as the eligible beneficiaries for bank loans. The Mahila Mandal is currently engaged in establishing a milk co-operative and a ration society for women. The members recommend the names of widows and old people for pensions to the Mandal Panchayat, recommend eligible students for scholarship and sponsorship facilities to an NGO (CCF).

So far no woman from the Mahila Mandal has contested for the elections. However, the president feels that there is a need for training the women to prepare them to participate in politics. As a secretary of TMF Ms. Sheela Shetty regrets that the TMF is not showing any interest in providing marketing facilities for the women who produce papads, craft products etc.

Interview with Smt. Shabari shetty, member of Mahila Mandal, Kaup, Udupi Tq. Dakshina Kannada District.

Smt. Shabari Shetty, aged 36 years, educated upto SSLC(10th std.) is married. She has three children. All of them are in primary school. her husband is a businessman.

Shabari became a member of Mahila mandal three years ago because she was forced by her neighbours who were already members of the Mahila Mandal. She is neither aware of the objectives of the Mahila Mandal, nor the date of establishment. She does not also know how many members are there in the Mahila Mandal.

Activities :

Regarding activities, Shabari says that there are two or three activities that were conducted. Ten women were given training in making plastic flowers, wire baskets etc,. Later ten members also were trained in television servicing. Teaching tailoring is another activity that is being conducted for the past three years and 30 women members attend this class. A balwadi is established by the Mahila Mandal. Literacy classes were conducted for the non-literate women. She does not know the source of funds of the Mahila Mandal to conduct such activities.

Shabari says she does not attend the meetings regularly because none of the members are interested in participating in the meetings. Mahila Mandal meetings are held once a month. During the meetings, the members are informed about the visits of the expected guests, accounts with respect to the maintenance of Balwadi. According to her the womwn have no interest in contesting for the elections.

Researchers Observations

The Mahila Mandal Kaup was one of the 'active' Mahila Mandals as identified by KSSWAB field officer. We found that the MM at Present is not active. The only activity that is conducted by them is the Balwadi Programme.

Interview With Smt.Sumithra S.Karanth, President Of Mahila Mandal, Koteshwara, Kundapura Tq. Dakshina Kannada District.

Smt.Sumithra Karanth president of Mahila Mandal Koteshwara, Ex-Mandal Panchayat member (resigned) ex-secretary of Janatha Party Mahila Wing.

The Mahila Mandal was started in 1963 by a school teacher Jayalakshmi with an intension of organising the women in the area and to start a tailoring class. Sumithra joined the Mahila Mandal three years ago as a tailoring teacher, but soon became the president.

The Mahila Mandal gets funds from KSSWAB and the members also donate money. --The Yuvathi Mandali receives funds from foreign funding agencies like Oxfam.

The Janatha Party leaders suggested Sumithra's name for the Zilla Parishat elections as she was well known in the area as a tailoring teacher, in Asha Yuvathiu Mandali. She contested for the Zilla Parishat elections in 1987, as a Janatha Party candidate.

Sumithra had to face lot of problems as a member of Mandal Panchayat because most of the members belonged to Congress Party. Hence her views were not considered. When she raised her voice, she was suppressed. She was harassed in an open meeting by a Congress leader after which Sumithra resigned her membership in the Mandal Panchayat in 1988. She is planning to resign her membership in Mahila Mandal next year. She feels the activities of Yuvathi Mandali helps in promoting the leadership qualities among the youth which is most essential for participation in Panchayati Raj. She expresses her confidence that the youngsters who are trained by their organisation would definitely prove themselves as good leaders. She is confident of winning the next elections. She opines that there should be no party back ups for the candidates in the Panchayati Raj, and women should be treated as equals to their male counter parts.

Some of the activities of Yuvathi Mandali include conducting tailoring classes for women. They also have learnt doll making, embroidery etc for which Mrs.Karanth regrets there is no market. Awareness is created among the youth regarding the schemes available through government for the poor, old and widows.

The Yuvathi Mandali was registered in 1986. The main objective of Yuvathi Mandali is to spread education among the people. She says that it would lead to proper implementation of developmental programmes.

Interview With Nagarathna, Vice-President Of Mahila Mandal, Yeshwanthpur, Malur Tq. Kolar District.

Ms. Nagarathna is 28 years old, has studied upto 7th std. She has 2 children. Her husband is a farmer. She contested against Shamsunnisa in the Mandal Panchayat elections and lost the elections. She has been the Vice-President of Mahila Mandal, Yeshwanthpur for the past four years.

Nagarathna was forced by her uncle to contest in the Mandal Panchayat elections. There was no other support extended to her either through any party or group. She was scared because her own friend Shamsunnisa was contesting as her opponent. Nagarathna contested through Janata Party.

According to Nagarathna, the pradhan and Shamsunnisa spent a good amount for the canvassing and gained the votes. More over, they had the party's support.

She now regrets for contesting in the elections without any preparations, and feels that this would have been one of the reasons for not being elected. However, she now has no intention of contesting for the forth coming elections. She also is a good friend of Shamsunnisa.

There are 70 members in the Mahila Mandal. But only a few of them attend the meetings - due to lack of time, reports Nagarathna. Moreover the wage labourers cannot spare their day's earning to attend the meeting and the resource persons cannot wait till evening till the working women retire home.

Funds : There is no building for the Mahila Mandal. They meet in one of the members house. The FPAI - Malur helps the Mahila Mandal financially, and also is an information disseminating centre. Membership fees and local contribution is utilized for the programmes.

Activities : The Mahila Mandal imparts essential knowledge to the women about nutrition, hygiene and child care. The other activities conducted are : tailoring and craft classes, motivating couples to adopt family planning etc.

**Interview With Ms. Shamsunnisa, Mandal Panchayat Member, Presi.
of Mahila Mandal, Yeshwanthpur Malur Tq. Kolar District.**

Ms. Shamsunnisa is 36 years old, she has studied upto 8th std. She is the President of Mahila Mandal Yeshwanthpur and Mandal Panchayat member, Madivala.

In 1985, a Mahila Mandal was started and Shamsunnisa joined the Mahila Mandal as a tailoring teacher. She also was elected as the president of the Mahila Mandal in the same year. The current pradhan and the people forced Shamsunnisa to contest for the elections in 1986, thus Shamsunnisa entered into politics.

Activities : TRYSEM Scheme is implemented through the Mahila Mandal and 7 women have benefitted from the scheme. Local candidates are paid Rs.100/ month as stipend and other outside candidates who attend the tailoring classes are paid Rs.300/ month as stipend. The tailoring teacher's salary is paid by the Zilla Parishat. Contraceptives and iron folic tablets are procured from FPAI and health inspector Kolar and distributed through the Mahila Mandal. An Anganwadi centre is established in the village. For this they obtained Rs.20,000/- from the CDPD for the building. The place was donated by a local leader. Women are motivated to adopt family planning methods.

After winning the elections, she also became a member of Malur Sudharaka Samithi (MSS) in 1986. In 1989 she was elected as the Treasurer of Taluk Mahila Federation Malur. In 1990, she became a member of district co-operative union, Kolar. She is also the Taluk leader of District women's multi-purpose co-operative society.

Restriction were laid by muslims not to continue in the Mandal Panchayat. But with the support of her husband and the head of the community, she continued her work. Shamsunnisa is also creating awareness among women regarding family planning. She also collects the available medicines from FPAI and other sources and distributes them to the villagers.

There are 70 members in the Mahila Mandal, among whom 50 have been benefitted by the loan facilities provided by a voluntary foreign organisation under David Philips scheme.

Achievements : Under the Trysem Scheme, 7 people have benefitted. A lot of community development has been accomplished by Shamsunnisa. Some of them are : repairing of roads, construction of a community hall, IRDP loans for the needy. Under the HUDCO scheme, 14 poor people were sanctioned loans for constructing houses, under the Rozgar scheme drainage system was introduced in the village. A link road connecting the village to the main road is being constructed.

She insists that Yuvaka Sangha (Youth Club) existing in the village should also extend its co-operation in creating awareness among the people.

APPENDIX II

District: Almora

Block: Garur

Village: Sayali & Chatia

Interviewee: President, Mahila Mangal Dal.

Smt. Bhagwati Rawat, 25 year old and educated upto 12th Standard was elected as the President of the Mahila Mangal Dal of the village Sayali. Her name was proposed by the Panchayati Raj Officer. She was also given the responsibility to form other Mahila Mangal Dal. She feels lucky for having being elected for this post as there are many educated ladies in the village. She finds no difficulty in carrying on her duties. Her father-in-law is the Gram Pradhan of Sayali Village.

The different activities of this Mahila Mangal Dal are adult education, non-formal education, anti liquor campaign, construction and maintainance of drains, roads and water supply sources. Mahila Mangal Dal meeting is held every month and it is essential for every member to attend this meeting. In the meeting they discuss various problems and issues of their concern and the different programmes implemented by the Government. They plan proposals for development programmes which should be implemented in their village. This is done with a view to place these before the Block Development Officer.

According to Smt. Bhagwati Rawat, due to Mahila Mangal Dal's regular meetings, women do not hesitate to talk about their problems: they come forward to discuss them. Earlier she used to find it difficult to organise women, make them come out of their homes, but it has become a routine for her now and she enjoys organising women, helping them out and solving their problems. Due to the excellent work, she has done, she has been appointed as Organiser by the Block Development Officer and is supposed to organise Mahila Mangal Dal in the other nearby village. She has organised four Mahila Mangal Dal which are yet to be registered.

There is an Anganwadi in Chatia village but no Balwadi. There is also a non-formal school in Chatia run by Meenu Mehta. There are 10 pupils in this school who appeared for class 5 exams and out of these only 2 students could get through. They are now preparing for 8th grade exam. Smt. Bhagwati Rawat has informed that in this village there is provision of supplementary food and immunization for pregnant women and children. She feels that education is the key factor in her success. Also she gets lot of support from her family to do all this social work. She has to donate so much of time towards organising women being an organiser and she is unable to look after the activities of the Mahila Mangal dal of which she is the President. In view of this she has offered her resignation and proposed some graduate's name for Presidentship who is happened to be a graduate.

Village: Jaser Block: Garur

Registration No.: 203 Date of Registration:

Interviewee: Bhagirathi Korga, Ex President Mahila Mangal Dal.

The Mahila Mangal Dal in Jaser village was organised with the help of the officials from the Block Office which is not active anymore. Smt. Bhagirathi Korga, an active social worker, educated upto 11th standard, a mother of 2 children, was inspired by the Panchayati Raj officer to organise women, and make them aware of the Government Programmes. The Mahila Mangal Dal was formed under the leadership of Smt. Bhagirathi Korga. She remained as President for 2 years. During her tenure she used to organise meetings, and discuss women's major problems, as well as their day-to-day problems etc. and make them aware of the various issues. A school was established in the village and roads were repaired wherever necessary. Mahila Mangal Dal was able to run adult education centre, non-formal education centre. Besides establishing these centres, they were able to make arrangements for supplementary nutrition and immunization for pregnant and lactating mothers.

According to Mrs. Korga, she had no difficulty in her work as the people are very cooperative. This Mahila Mangal Dal has never received any financial or material help from the Government Institutions.

After 2 years of active work as president of Mahila Mangal Dal, Smt. Korga has become a member of Block Development Council and Mrs. Kanti Devi has taken over as president of the Mahila Mangal Dal, who is an ex-member of Block Development Council. She is too old to work for Mahila Mangal Dal, hence the Dal has become very inactive.

The group is unable to get any information about the funds or various schemes available to them from Government. Smt. Bhagirathi is of the view that younger generation is literate and willing to work for the development of village and specially for women. But they do not get any guidance from Kanti Devi. Also, they do not get any assistance from the Government.

A CASE STUDY ON MAHILA MANGAL DAL

District: Almora

Block: Kapkot

Village: Shaaa

Interviewee: Anandi Devi, President, Mahila Mangal Dal.

Mahila Mangal Dal situated in Kapkot Block was registered in 1990. The dal consists of about 24 women. A few of them are literate. Anandi Devi is the President of the dal. Dal meets occasionally to discuss about the day to day problems of the women.

Mahila Mangal Dal used to organise training programmes for women in weaving, spinning which helped them to make carpets, dasan etc. They had also started a adult literacy programme but they could not run the same for a long time since they were not given any help from the BDO's office. In this village there was no Balwadi earlier. Mahila Mangal Dal made an effort towards this, and with the help of Himalayan Parvavaran Sanstha, a Balwadi was organised. It is still functioning. Mahila Mangal Dal was able to construct roads, and the children of this village now have a separate place to play. A separate shed has been provided for this purpose. All these have been possible since women are very active in this group.

This groups also keep giving awareness to the households regarding sanitation and immunization.

Anandi Devi, President of the Mahila mangal Dal, is also a member of the Panchayat. She attends the Block Development Corporation meeting regularly. According to her they raise many issues which are of the concern to their village. Once she proposed for opening a nursery school in the village which was approved by BDO, but somehow, it never came through. She intends to organise again training programmes for women in making carpets and Aasans. She is also interested in making women aware of employment generation programmes. This year she has been awarded a prize for her good work ~~by~~ the UP Government.

District: Almorā

Block: Kapkot

Village: Atiat

Interviewee: President, Mahila Mangal Dal.

Mahila Mandal Dal of the Atiat village was registered in 1970 and is still active. There are about 20-25 members in it, and Smt. Kalawati is one of the members. Out of the 25 members of the Mahila Mangal Dal, 5 members are educated upto high school. Some of these members have also undergone agricultural training.

In this village there is no co-operative society. However, a Balwadi was established by the Grameen Uthan Samithi. Smt. Kalawati takes great interest in the Balwadi work. She has no idea about the kind of issues which are discussed in the Panchayat meeting since she has never been invited to attend one. As a representative of the Dal she has approached th Block Development Officer many times and apprise him about the different problems of her village. But nothing has happened so far.

The meeting of the Dal is held after every 3 months but there is no fixed date for this meeting. Usually, the meeting is held either in the fields or in the forest where the women go for work. The issues discussed in the meeting are Sanitation problems, water problems, environmental issues, issues related to Agriculture. During 1976-77 Mahila Mangal dal started an Adult Education Centre in the village but it was not successful and had to be closed soon.

District: Almora

Block: Takula

Village: Thapla

Interviewee: President, Mahila Mangal Dal.

Smt. Saroja Lohani, a teacher in the Anganwadi, was initially motivated by the Block Development Officer to organise the women. Later, the women's group was registered as society and Smt. Lohani was made the president of the dal. The Mahila Mangal Dal consisted of 70 members. Each member pays Rs. 2/- as membership fees. The date for the monthly meeting is fixed. The collected money is utilised to purchase tailoring and spinning material, books and utensils. The activities of this Dal consist of holding literacy campaigns, non-formal educational programme, and training for Udyog. The other activities include training in prevention of diseases, immunization of children. In this village there is no Baiwadi. Regular home visits are made by the members of the Dal to discuss "family planning". Mahila Mangal Dal provides supplementary nutrition to the pregnant women. This Dal is very active and has been awarded with a machine and cash amounting to Rs. 1020/-.

District: Almora Block: Chaukutia (Village)

Interviewee: President, Mahila Mangal Dal.

Mahila Mangal Dal of the village is a registered one. It consists of 22-25 women members of which 3 members are educated upto high school. Mahila Mangal Dal meet regularly once a month. The membership fee for the women depends on the economic status.

Nandi Joshi is the president of the Dal. She attends the meeting of the Gram Pradhan. Gram Panchayat only looks after the litigation affairs. The decision is taken jointly by the elected members of the Panchayat. Present Mahila Mangal Dal is also working towards Family Planning Programme. The main difficulties of the villagers are the water connections, road and irrigation related issues.

District : Almora
Block : Kapkot
Village: Kapkot
Interviewee: Kum. Devaki Verma, President MMD

The Mahila Mandal Dal was formed in 1991 and has not been registered as yet. Kum. Devaki is the president of MMD and holds a master's degree in sociology. She is also a member of Gramin Uthaan Samiti- a voluntary organisation at at Kapkot. All the 25 members of the MMD are literate and some have passed high school. Gramin Uthaan Samiti is an active organisation and has undertaken the responsibility of many developmental activities in the villages nearby. The MMD works in close collaboration with the voluntary organisation and runs 2 balwadi centres in the villages. The GUS has also been inspired the women to undertake plantation work and has also trained 4 women to run balwadi centres. The MMD on its own launched health and sanitation campaign. There is a health centre which is frequented by village women to seek counsel regarding family planning measures. A cooperative society having 10 members is selling ration, cloth, manure etc. at controlled rates.

Kum. Devaki feels that since there is no woman member in the Gram Panchayat, most of women-specific issues remain unresolved. The Gram Panchayat is usually engrossed in settling problems common to the village. As far as organising women in the village is concerned Kum. Devaki finds it a hard task because most women consider it as an exercise without tangible gains. Although there is a lot of support from the local area, the MMD is not able to do much due to lack of financial resources. Kum. Devaki is on her own and meets the BDO often to discuss problems and issues related to women's development.

District :Almora

Block :Bagashwar

Village :Bahuli

Interviewee : Smt.Devaki Devi, President, MMD

Smt. Devaki Devi who is the President of the MMD has passed the inter class and was nominated for the post by the Sabhapati of Bahuli. The MMD was registered on 4.11.90 and has a total strength of 15 members out of which 7 women are literate. Since the organisation is only a year old there has not been much done by the women's group so far. The MMD has a Vice President, Secretary and Deputy Secretary to take up activities in the village.

A balwadi centre was started by the block and women have now started handling its activities. A cooperative society based in the village helps people to procure food items at controlled rates.

The village has a Gram Panchayat where various issues related to village development and resultant problems faced by the villagers are taken up for discussions. The decisions taken in the village are by mutual consent of the Panchayat and villagers. There is local support for women's activities but women themselves have yet to come forth to participate in meetings at the village level. There is no woman representative in the Panchayat.

Distt - Almora
Block : Dwarahaat
Village: Dharamgram
Interviewee: Smt. Ganga Papne, President, MMD.

Dharamgram is at distance of 3 Kilometres from Dwarahaat. The MMD here was formed in 1989 and has more than 30 members and all of them belong to the same village. Most of the members have passed high school. The President of this group is Smt. Ganga Papne who has been active in running a balwadi in the village. Because of the reasonably high rate of literacy in the village, the need of an adult education centre is not felt. The women are now running programmes on health, sanitation and family planning and the results obtained have been encouraging so far. The objective of transferring information about various schemes and promotional programmes is usually obtained with the help of village assemblies. The women in this village have been involved in promoting schemes for children and pregnant women. Under JRY women have been imparted training in fruit preservation and social forestry.

There is a Panchayat in the village, whose head is a Pradhan. Smt. Ganga Papne is also a member of the Panchayat and gets enough support and cooperation from village men and women. Those problems which are common to all are usually voiced in the meetings. However, women's opinion is also considered before taking up a decision.

Smt. Ganga Papne feels that there is a need for setting up vocational centres in the village in order to uplift women economically.

Distt : Almora
Block : Bhikiasen
Village : Badikot
Interviewee : Smt. Revati Devi, President, MMD

The Mahila Mandal Dal at Badikot was formed in 1988. Smt. Revati Devi is President of Mahila Mandal Dal and has passed middle school. The Mahila Mandal Dal consists of Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary among other members which total 40-50. Smt. Revati Devi was nominated to this post.

As far as developmental activities are concerned. Mahila Mandal Dal has made some contribution in child development schemes whereby they get some money from the BDO and buy provisions for children. A non formal education centre run by the block is being made use of by village women and they have been receiving training inputs in kitchen gardening, knitting, embroidery etc. An appreciable role has been performed by women members in disseminating information about family planning programmes. The villagers have shown positive reaction towards these welfare activities.

The village authority is Gram Sabha which holds meetings with BD Council occasionally. The questionnaire revealed that there is no women representative and the village women do not approach the head of the village for any problem. The issues discussed mainly centre around common problems in the village. But whenever the members of Mahila Mandal Dal have tried to reach out to women in other villages, they have received cooperation from the head and other villagers, which is a positive trend in the village.

Distt: Almora
Block: Kapkot
Village: Ritha Chaura
Interviewee: Smt. Uma Pandey, President, MMD

The village of Ritha Chaura has a Mahila Mandal Dal which was formed in 1989 and consists of 9 members who come from 3 different villages. Smt. Uma Pandey is the President of the Mahila Mandal Dal and like most other members has read upto the 10th standard. The Mahila Mandal Dal has a Vice President, Secretary and Deputy Secretary as prominent members.

The organisation is 2 years old but the women have done commendable work in the field of adult education, health and hygiene and family planning programmes. Besides this, the Mahila Mandal Dal has been organising women through meetings where they raise relevant issues and bring to their knowledge various beneficial schemes.

The village has a Gram Panchayat of which Pradhan is the head. The villagers are often assembled for discussing common problems which always get a priority. Although there is no female members in the Panchayat yet villagers often approach either the Pradhan of Mahila Mandal Dal to apprise them of their problems. Often their opinion is taken into consideration. Most members of Mahila Mandal Dal work on a voluntary basis as the only source of money is the membership fee. These women are getting constant encouragement from their family members. Their efforts were appreciated by the ADM office, Almora from which they got a sewing machine and amount of Rs. 500.

Distt: Almora
Block: Kapkot
Village: Sumagarh
Interviewee: Smt. Parvati Joshi, President, MMD

The two governmental programmes IRDP and JRY are operative in Sumagarh. Under IRDP the villagers benefitted by constructing water channels for irrigation purposes.

There is a Mahila Mandal Dal in the village which was formed with the support of Mahila Uthaan Samiti - a NGO headed by Shri. Umesh Joshi. He worked to organise women and at present there are 20-25 members in it. 8 out of them are literate.

So far the Mahila Mandal has not had much impact on the developmental activities of the village. One of the reasons is that women have to spend most of their time in collecting fuel and have no time for MMD activities. Unless the problem of supply of fuel is solved not much is likely to happen in the years to come. There is no women representative in the Panchayat and it is felt by the President, MMD, that the decisions taken by the Panchayat are embiased although women have access to the Panchayat yet women have not time to attend meetings and raise issues of concern. There is therefore, lack of development programmes in the village and also little interaction of woemn with the Panchayat, Zila Parishad.

Some years back Mahila Uthaan Samithi opened a vocational training centre fro girls but due to scarcity of time they stopped going and it was eventually closed down. At times the MMD get involved in promoting health and sanitation measures.

Distt: Almora
Block: Sayalde
Village: Jaspur
Interviewee: Kum. Leela Bhandari, President, MMD

The Mahila Mandal Dal in Jaspur village was formed in 1989 and consists of 11 members. Kum. Leela Bhandari is the President of the Mahila Mandal Dal and is literate 12th standard like most other members. There is a Vice President, Secretary, and Joint Secretary in this women's group. Kum. Leela Bhandari is a stenographer and was trained for this vocation in Sayalde block.

Since the organisation is 3 years old there has not been much output so far by it. There is no scheme for women under implementation. The only activity which came up was related to forestry under which 1500 saplings were planted by women. About 4 women have taken up some training. But the women's group has not been active so far.

Jaspur has a Panchayat of which Pradhan is the head. Meetings and discussions with E.D. Council which are attended by the members, mainly feature the village problems. Although women's participation is dismal, it is strongly felt that women need to get organised to make use of the schemes that they can benefit from. Faucity of funds has proved a hinderance to their activity. But woemn members have expressed that their self-confidence has enhanced and the MMD can go a long way if properly organised.

Kum. Leela Bhandari feels that there should be adult education centres, balwadi, social forestry programmes run in the village. According to herr most of the villagers in Jaspur donot know of Mahila Mandal Dal and related activities and although the government has formed similar groups in the block but there is no follow up of the programmes. There is no agency to guide and monitor the activities of Mahila Mandal Dal.

Distt: Almora

Block: Garur

Village: Baijnath

Interviewee: Smt. Basanti Goswami, President, Mahila Mangal Dal.

Baijnath is a village in Garur Block and has one of the largest Gram Sabhas. It has more than 200 households. This village has one Mahila Mangal Dal and one Yuvak Mangal Dal working.

The Mahila Mangal DAL, was organised one year back and the members of this group include:

President : Smt. Basanti Goswami

Vice President : Smt. Kaushalya Goswami

Minister : Kumari Geeta

Vice Minister : Kumari Kamla

Treasurer : Smt. Lakshmi

There are 30 members working in this Mahila Mangal Dal which is in its nascent form still. However, they have made contributions towards creating awareness regarding sanitation and hygiene in the village. They have also taken some steps towards plantation of trees and plants in the premises of the temple.

According to Smt. Basanti Goswami, there is complete lack of promotional activities in the village. Facilities of Anganwadi, Balwadi, library, adult education centre, cooperative etc. are virtually non-existent, Government and non-government agencies have not made any inroads in the socio-economic sphere of the village.

It was understood that all the members of the MMD are literate but most other women in the village according to Smt. Goswami, are not. Due to social customs prevailing in the village, women are not encouraged to participate in development activities. There is not only lack of financial support but also poor representation of women in the Gram Panchayat. She expressed that women groups should establish links with groups in other villages and collectively work towards full participation.

Distt: Almora

Block: Garur

Village: Aayartoli

Interviewee: Smt. Janaki Devi Takuli, President, Mahila Mangal Dal.

Aayartoli, a village of about 50 households in Garur Block is situated at a distance of 8 Kilometres from Garur. The gram sabha at Aayartoli consists of one Mahila Mangal Dal and one Yuvak Mangal Dal. The MMD formed in 1980 has the following as members of the Managing Committee:

President	: Smt. Janaki Devi Takuli
Dy. Secretary	: Kum. Neelu Takuli
Secretary	: Kum. Bimla Bisht
Jt. Secretary	: Kum. Geeta Takuli

The total number of members is 15-20. The chief activities of MMD, have been:

- (a) Restriction on and marketing of narcotics for which MMD launched a door to door campaign.
- (b) Cleanliness of roads and drains of the village.
- (c) Setting up of a non-formal education centre which is managed by Kum. Geeta Takuli. So far, 8 students have got enrolled.

The efforts of MMD were appreciated by the ADM office and a reward was given to them in the form of a sewing machine and Rs. 300/-.

The MMD made appreciable moves towards making family planning programme popular. After an initial hesitation on part of the people to pick up proper measures, it has now started coming up and people are now adopting it in a substantial way.

There are a number of problems that the MMD has to face. Firstly, it lacks financial assistance and in order to meet administrative expenses, they charge Rs. 2/- as membership fee. Secondly, the Panchayat is located in a distant village of Tilsaryari and remains inaccessible to most women. Kum. Saroj Takuli is the only female member in the Panchayat. The MMD meetings generally touch upon various promotional schemes like IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA etc. for women. But the village women do not participate much and this is one of the reasons why no developmental activity has started in the village so far. There is an utter lack of interaction between MMD and Gram Panchayat.

Distt: Almora
Block: Chaukutia
Village: Aadigram Phuloria
Interviewee: Kum. Champa Phuloria, President, MMD

The Mahila Mandal Dal was formed in 1991 and has 50 members all from the same village. Kum. Champa Phuloria, an undergraduate is the President. The village can boast of higher literacy rate. Kum. Champa does voluntary work.

The Mahila Mandal Dal is a young organisation but has taken up activities related to health and sanitation, cleaning of roads, plantation and kitchen gardening. A Balwadi running in the village was closed down as there was no one to manage it. The family planning programmes are making a headway as the members of Mahila Mandal Dal carry a door to door campaign. The Mahila Mandal Dal conduct meetings on 15th of each month to disseminate information about promotional programmes.

The women's group also makes use of other meetings as a ground to further their activity and cause. The Gram Panchayat is the governing body and usually help settling disputes and discussing ways to promote asset creation in the village. According to the President of MAhila Mandal Dal, the interaction with women in the village is growing and they also approach women in their own way and consider any opinion out forth by them. Their interaction with the Panchayat is limited.

Distt: Almora

Block: Bhasiachena

Village: Palyu

Interviewee: Kum. Anita Pandey, President and Organiser, MMD

The MMD was established in 1981 and consists of 14 members and all of them belong to Palyu village. Kum. Pandey is the President as well as the member of the Panchayat. All the members of MMD are literate. The President of MMD alongwith other member underwent a training in spinning the block the mmd members of MMD also undertook sanitation programme on cleaning of roads and drains. They have also made efforts to popularise Family Planning Programme by imparting information about various measures during meetings.

There are no balwadis or cooperative societies in the village but programme on forestry, poultry and beekeeping are in progress. A participatory approach is adopted in order to solve village problems. The villagers are brought together and priority list is drawn up to focus on major problems of the vilage. The local factors and situations are assessed before finding solutions.

The MMD sustains itself on collections made by members and the money earned through awards. Though the organisation is only a year old, its achievement are noteworthy in recognition of which they, have been awarded Rs. 1000 and one sewing machine.

The MMD is also working towards highlighting social evils like dowry and liquor consumption. The women are being apprised about benefits of small saving schemes and older women were assisted to procure Old age pension.

Distt: Almora

Block: Lamgarh

Village: Lamgraha

Interviewee: Smt. Sudha Gunwant, Organisor/President, MMD

The MMD was established in 1989 and has 31 members belonging to 4 villages. Smt. Sudha Gunwant is the organisor and President of the MMD. She is also a member of a cooperative society which has enlisted 100 members and manages the marketing of milk. Since the last 2 years 15 women members have been actively helped in running the activities of MMD. Smt. Sudha has educated around 30 women under the adult education scheme. The MMD has also participated in the literacy mission and in generating awareness about cleanliness and sanitation in and around houses. Family planning programmes have been popularised through door to door canvassing. The MMD is also involved in afforestation, horticulture beekeeping and polutry programmes.

The women in the village approach the President, MMD to have their problems solved and there is interaction between the Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. Two women are also members of the Gram Panchayat. According to Smt. Sudha there should be a provision made for opening a primary school, anganwadi and also a wool bank for women. The KVIC has promised them space for storing wool if they organise wool and machines. But no headway to get this done has been made so far.

Another proposal has been submitted to the horticulture department to set up a fruit preservation factory so that the fruit produced in excess is properly utilised. At present, the village is devoid of any such facility and a lot of fruits get wasted.

She also felt that the MMD should be provided some financial help because the meony collected through registration is grossly inadequate to start any constructive activity.

Distt: Almora
Block: Tarikhet
Village: Simari
Interivewee: Smt. Prema Papne, President, MMD

The village Simari is about 8 Kms away from Tarikhet. The MMD was formed in 1990 and has 16 members from 4 other villagers. Smt. Prema Papne is the President of this group and was nominated to this post. Other prominent members include the Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. All the members of the MMD are literate.

The MMD is one year old. So far the major areas of concern have been health, sanitation and family planning measures. A balwadi funded by the Block is being managed by the MMD where nutritious meals are served to the children. The ADM Office, Almora has given them a reward of Rs. 1000/-.

The village has a Panchayast headed by the Pradhan. Smt. Prema Papne has acquired training in agriculture along with two other women who also received training inputs in forestry and kitchen gardening. Though village assebmilies where common problems are discussed, MMD also finds an opportunity to spread information about programmes/schemes specific to women. The village Panchayat's emphasis is on general welfare schemes. According to Smt. Prema Papne, their group is able to get local support for carrying out their activities. The MMD has been getting a positive response from people in general and women in particular.

District : Almora Block : Garur Village : Galoi

Interviewee : Gram Pradhan

Smt. Nandi Bhandari, 45 years old, is Pradhan of village Galoi. Her husband is retired from the army. She has four daughters.

Smt. Nandi Bhandari had been elected by the gram sabha members. There are 188 households in the Galoi village according to 1981 census. There are seven members in her executive body (Panchayat). Before becoming the Gram Pradhan she was an active member of the Mahila Mangal Dal of that village. Her educational qualification is Higher Secondary. She is also taking classes for the non-formal neo-literates for which she is paid Rs. 100/- per month.

She regularly attends the Block Development Officer's meetings and also puts forward her proposals. When asked about the preparations done prior to the meeting, she said she never consults other women about the issues that need to be raised in the meeting.

She showed little or no awareness of the governmental programmes existing for women and children of the rural areas. She knew that loans have been given to people but she did not know under which scheme. She had not heard about DWCRA.

According to Nandi Bhandari the training programme in stitching and tailoring would be successful and would fulfill the needs of the women of her village. Apart from these, the other income generating activities can be fruit preservation, agarbati making and products of soyabean.

There is a Mahila Mandal existing in the Galoi village. There are 35 members in that Mahila Mangal Dal but for the last 2 years there has been no meeting. This means that the Mahila Mangal Dal is not active. For the last 4 years there has been no gram sevika in the village which might be a reason for the inactiveness of the Mahila Mandal Dal.

Nandi Bhandari regularly attends the Block Development Council meeting. Discussions with her revealed that the only priority according to her is the construction of roads and nothing else. Under Jowahar Rojgar Yojna, this village was allotted 10 thousand rupees. The roads were constructed by employing men and women on daily wages. Men were paid Rs. 40/- per day where the women were paid only Rs. 30/- per day, the reason being that men work harder than women as they also break the stones but the women only carry them to the place where the roads are being constructed.

District: Pithoragarh

Block: Dharchula

Village: Kutti

Interviewee: Smt. Shanti Kutiyal, President, MMD

Smt. Shanti Kutiyal is the President of the MMD as well as the Vice-President of a Cooperative Society which was started by the block some years ago. The MMD was registered in 1990 and has about 25 members in it and she was encouraged by the villagers to lead the group. The scheme for women includes ICDS under which a balwadi is being run in the village. Smt. Shanti Kutiyal is also involved in promoting tourism as she feels that the area has a great potential for it. All the members of this group are literate and some of them have a graduate degree. These women have started a non-formal education centre in their village. Some of the women members have also received training in carpet weaving.

There is a Panchayat in the village but there is no woman member in it. Most of the discussions in the Panchayat meetings centre around common problems facing the village like lack of drinking water facilities, poor roads and absence of civic infrastructure.

The MMD organises meetings through which they disseminate information and try to build awareness among women. These women are actively involved in projects on social forestry, horticulture, poultry and bee-keeping. The meetings are also used as a base for solving the problems of women. Whatever money is collected through donations and membership is channeled for productive purposes like buying assets. The women in this village try to prioritise the programme and often seek cooperation from local leaders to solve their problems. The MMD feels that the local support is encouraging but if there is proper support from the block then this group can go a long way in bringing about changes. They also feel that women's representation in the Panchayats is necessary to bring women into the mainstream of economic development of the region.

District: Pithoragarh

Block: Dharchula

Village: Garbyaang

Interviewee: Smt. Kusum Garbyal, President, MMD

Smt. Kusum Garbyal is the president of this group and is 45 years of age. She has passed 10th standard and has been associated with women's work for the past 20 years when it started as a very small group. This MMD was registered in 1986 and has 23 women as members in it. This village is not benefitting from any scheme for women. Some years back the women tried to build a women's centre in the village but were not able to procure assistance of any kind from the block so the plan got shelved. Under ICDS these women are running a balwadi centre and serving mid-day meals to the children. A cooperative society which was functioning in the village has now been closed. All the members belong to the same village but if some activity demands outside help then women from surrounding areas join in. Some of the women received training in carpet weaving. For the past 5 years this group has been involved in health and sanitation programmes going on at a local level. The women also involve themselves in projects on social forestry, bee-keeping and kitchen gardening.

The Panchayat meetings are held regularly and sometimes women also attend them but there is no active participation in the discussions. Most of the meetings discuss common problems being faced by the villagers. She feels that having a strong representation will give women a chance to speak out their mind openly.

Although she feels that the MMD has been getting encouraging support from the local people yet there is dearth of financial resources to start any activity. There has not been much help forthcoming from the block.

District: Pithoragarh
Block: Munakote
Village: BISA Bajair
Interviewee: Smt. Balmati Devi, President MMD.

The MMD was organised by Smt. Balmati Devi in 1984 and has a total membership of 50-60 members and represent different villages. All the women are literate and passed primary level of schooling. This MMD has the reputation of being the most active and successful in this block. Smt. Balmati Devi involves herself actively in all the meetings that are held in the block and towns. Besides this she is also a member of the Kshetra Samiti and cooperative society there. Along with the MMD even the Yuvak Mandal Dal has been assisting the local Panchayat as well as MMD to run programmes efficiently.

Smt. Bhagirathi Devi is the sole woman representative in the Gram Panchayat for which she was supported by her family and other villagers. The MMD is involved in running an adult education centre which is being attended by 30 women. About 30-35 women have been made literate in the village. The women's group has also started running a training centre where they train women to make products like smokeless chullahs and later sell the products in the market. The group also participated in making health family planning and sanitation programmes popular in the village.

At the village level meetings are held and attended regularly and the local women also celebrate national festivals. The meetings are used as a ground to discuss various issues of concern to the villagers and also those related to women in particular. It is during such meetings that women representatives put forth proposals. In this context proposals have been made and submitted to the EDO for setting up of a library cum reading room, building of roads and civic infrastructure in the village.

In order to raise resources the MMD has undertaken projects related to forestry, kitchen gardening and poultry. Some amount of money is also collected through membership fee ranging from Rs. 2-5. There is no other source of financial support. Because of its active participation in village development programmes and meetings the MMD has earned a good name for itself in the village and outside it.

District: Pithoragarh
Block: Gangolihaat
Village: Chittgal
Interviewee: Smt. Bhagwati Pant, President, MMD

Smt. Bhagwati Pant who is 40 years old is working as an assistant in a balwadi centre and was nominated to the post of the president. All the members are literate. The MMD was registered in 1990.

Under ICDS scheme the village has a balwadi and anganwadi centre. The village has a cooperative society which was started a number of years back provides food items at controlled rates.

The village Panchayat meets often to settle disputes among people and is attended mainly by men. Women participation in such meetings is minimal. She feels that a woman member would have made some difference and looked at matters other than those on property. The members of this MMD are not aware of what role they are meant to play hence their participation in development programmes is limited. They also do not receive much assistance from the block.

District:Pithoragarh
Block:Kanalicheena
Village: Gweta
Interviewee: Kum.Ashalata, President, MMD

The MMD was formed in 1988 and there are 25 members in it out of which 20 of them are literate. All of the belong to the same village and there is a lot of cooperation among them.

The MMD is not benefitting from any scheme like IRDP or TRYSEM. An anganwadi centre was started by the block where the interviewee teaches. A cooperative society was also started by the block which provides fertilizers and seeds at controlled rates.

The main task of the Panchayat is to solve the difficulties of the people and make their lives easier by making basic provisions available to them. She feels that inclusion of a woman member in such a body would be desirable as she would look at women-specific issues like employment opportunities for them and so on. The MMD makes efforts to educate women on various issues of health, sanitation and family planning. The MMD also assists other people in carrying out projects like social forestry. The interaction of the MMD with the Panchayat is almost negligible.

Distt: Pithoragarh
Block: Didihaat
Village: Haatharp
Interviewee: Smt. Chandra Kafliya, President, MMD.

Smt. Chandra Kafliya is the President as well as a member of Krishi Charcha Mandal. The MMD was formed in 1989 and there are 40 members in it, all belonging to the same village. About 15 of them are literate.

There are no development programmes running in the village. There is a cooperative society which supplies items like fertilisers and chemicals at controlled prices. There is a panchayat in the village which meets to discuss some of the problems faced in the village.

The MMD is not involved in any of the development scheme and there has been no effort on their part to initiate one. Although they are locally supported by people but due to the constraint of time (women find it hard to spare time for MMD) and money the MMD has been inactive. The awareness is low among women.

District: Pithoragarh

Block: Bin

Gram Sabha: Bisad

Interviewee: Smt. Amba Bhatt, President MMD

Smt. Amba Bhatt who is the president of the MMD is also a member of Krishi Charcha Mandal and has passed high school. This group was formed in 1990 and has about 20 members in it. Smt. Bhatt was nominated for this post by the Sahapati. She is running an anganwadi successfully with the help of the Gram Sabha. There is a Karyakarni Samiti in the village which is a kind of cooperative society and gives loans for agricultural purposes at a low rate of interest. Besides, there is a training centre for bee-keeping which is being run by the Khadi Board.

All women members are literate, some have completed intermediate while as some have even read upto the master's level so education finds a high priority in their list. This may find evidence in the fact that there are 12 adult education and 12 non-formal education centres in the village. The other scheme is TRYSEM and women are provided financial support in the form of stipend to get training in weaving carpets, tailoring and knitting.

The Gram Sabha is headed by a Sarpanch and Gram Pradhan. The Panchayat meetings focus on major problems facing the village whereby a general consensus is obtained. These problems such as drinking water are also common to women in the village who have to walk distances to fetch it.

The president of this MMD also tries to raise awareness among women through meetings where they also try to disburse information about family planning, health and sanitation measures. So far most of the women are doing voluntary work as the only source of money is through membership fee which is Rs.5/-. The President confessed that they don't have enough support from the block although the local villagers are happy with their efforts and give all possible encouragement. The major constraint is money because of which they are unable to translate their plans into reality. According to Smt. Bhatt women's representation in the Panchayat is important as women can get an opportunity to express their own problems in the meetings.

Distt: Pithoragarh

Block: Berinag

Village: Thal

Interviewee: Smt. Yashoda Devi, President, MMD.

Smt. Yashoda Devi (50) is the President of MMD which was formed in 1987 and registered in 1991. There are 50 members in it and most of them are literate. Under various development programmes implemented by the block there is a *balwadi* in the village. *TRYSEM* is another scheme through which Smt. Yashoda trains 25 women every month. The MMD also got a pucca road constructed in their village. She organises meetings once in a month and tries to educate women about various development schemes. The money collected through membership is utilised for buying some asset for their own need. *The women are trying to protest against liquor addiction which the women feel thwart their efforts to promote anything for the well being of their society. The women feel that there is a need to open vocational training centres so that women earn some source of employment and become self-reliant.*

District: Pithoragarh

Block: Kanalicheena

Village: Paali

Interviewee: Smt. Hemvati Digari, President, MMD

Smt Hemvati Digari is the President of the Mahila Mangal Dal as well as a teacher in a balwadi centre. She has read upto the tenth standard. This group was organised at the behest of the block officer incharge of Panchayati Raj. There is no woman member in the Panchayat. Most of the village women are restricted to their homes and seldom participate in the development activities of the village. The group was formed two years back.

According to the president women hesitate to come forward although the Gram Pradhan tries his best to have their participation in the village meetings. Some of the women are receiving benefits under the IRDP. Most of the members are involved in promoting cleanliness in the village. There is no financial support provided to them and the only source is the membership fee which is a meagre 2 rupees. One of the major reason of low participation of women is that their domestic responsibilities leave little time for other activities. According to Smt. Hemvati Digari after the formation of Mahila Mandal in the village not much has been done to involve them in the development programmes or monitor their activities.

District: Pithoragarh
Block: Gangolihaat
Village: Pokhari.
Interviewee: Smt. Jayanti Joshi, President, MMD

This MMD was formed in 1990 and there are 20 members in it. As part of development programmes a balwadi centre is being run in the village. This also takes care for educating children as there is none existing nearby. There is no NGD in or near the village. The village is very backward and one of the reasons for it is the poor communication network with the surrounding areas as also difficult terrain.

The Panchayat is mainly engaged in settling disputes among people. However, she feels that having a woman member in the Panchayat would be useful as it can lend a different dimension to women's problems. According to her women are leading a tough life in the village because it is bereft of basic amenities. Not all the members of the MMD are literate. Some women who have been identified as poor are benefitting from the IRD Programme being implemented by the block but there are many women who do not fall within this bracket and have no source of income. Even if women wish to take up some constructive activity they cannot as there is no such provision for them in the block.

Smt. Jayanti Joshi was encouraged by her family and other people to take up the responsibility of women's programmes. All the members are doing voluntary work. According to her, liquor addiction among men is a major complaint of women who suffer at the hands of these men. The MMD does not interact with the panchayat and they hardly have any support from them.

District: Pithoragarh

Block: Munsyari

Village: Nanasen

Interviewee: Smt. Usha Devi, President, MMD

Smt Usha Devi is the president of the Mahila Mandal Dal in this village and has read upto the primary school. She is about 50 years old. The MMD organised by the block has 20 members in this group all of whom belong to the same village. The MMD which was formed three years back consists of a vice president, secretary and treasurer. The only source of financial income is the membership fee which depends on the capacity of each member. The money collected is usually used for buying assets for the activities of the group. The women are not involved in any programme run by the block. Some of the women are members of Mahila Samuh - an organisation of women formed by the block to implement DWCRA scheme and these women are given some money during the training programme.

This MMD was in the past involved in some training programme - weaving durries etc. This group also join hands with a women's group in an adjoining area and launches successful campaigns against liquor consumption and dowry. The MMD organises meetings every month and listen to the problems posed by other women and try to find a solution. According to the president women receive a lot of support from the local villagers. The women often reach out to the Gram Panchayat and make them aware of their difficulties and problems.

District: Pithoragarh
Block: Munsyari
Village: Bunga
Interviewee: Smt. Narayani Devi, President, MMD.

Smt. Narayani Devi who is the president is 56 years old and started working in the organisation since 1983 but at present is leading a retired life. Smt. Parvati Devi is the Secretary of MMD and carries out most of the activities which has a membership of 42. This MMD is very actively involved in promoting development but does not receive adequate support from the block office. The members have been contributing according to their financial capacity and with the money collected they have built a common hall where they conduct meetings regularly and perform cultural programmes.

The MMD is very active in bringing the anti-social elements to book and they protested against the corrupt and malpractices of some police officials. This women's group has also made serious efforts to put an end to liquor addiction and this they did by raiding the breweries and smashing the bottles. Besides this the women also fought to get a teacher to join the school who had been appointed but didnot report for his duty.

The MMD of this village has also helped in afforestation projects. A peculiar feature of this group is that they employ traditional methods like beating drums to gather people for their meetings and to spread their word around. Smt Parvati Devi was also a member of BDC and is able to motivate many other women and share her experience with them. So far they have managed to make legitimate demands like opening up of a school, construction of roads etc. and the demands are carried to the district level. This group has been exceptionally active and outstanding in its achievements.

District: Pithoragarh
Block: Pithoragarh
Village: Chaama
Interviewee: Smt. Asha Devi, President MMD

Smt. Asha Devi who is the President of the women's group of the village has passed 10th standard. This MMD which has 19 members was formed in 1988. All the members are literate and belong to the same village. The MMD consists of a Vice President, Secretary, Deputy Sect. but for the last two years there has not been no substantial contribution from them in any of the village activities. The MMD is existing for the sake of it.

As far as developmental activities are concerned this village appears to be far removed from it. There are no nonformal centres or vocational training centres operating in the village. No effort has been made by this group to take up any activity whether related to family planning or health care.

The village has a Panchayat but there is no representation of women in this decision-making body. The MMD has no source of financial income and all the women work voluntarily. It appears from the field report that this organisation is not actively participating in promoting developmental work and does not seem to be keen to get down to it in near future.

Profile of Women Zilla Parishad Members

The term "weaker sections" by definition includes various groups such as women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and also economically backward groups (see Kihlberg, 1969).

Women constitute nearly half the population of the State, and hence should be involved in an institution such as the Panchayati Raj. The 1983 Act incorporated a feature that was revolutionary in scope and content : reserving 25% of all seats in the democratic institutions of the Panchayati Raj for women. This reservation takes note of certain aspects of political life in India: i) Women in general do not actively participate in the political activities of the country, including Karnataka, and ii) This state of affairs could have continued indefinitely, if no measure like the reservation of seats was introduced in the Panchayati Raj Act.

The reservation of seats also provided a sort of counter ideology to the prevalent one which confines women to their homes, to carry out household chores and look after the children. Women are generally less educated than the men of their families. They are not encouraged to take up economic occupations outside their homes unless they were compelled through dire necessity. There was a definite disapproval to women participating in politics through contesting elections and holding positions as elected members of political institutions. Thus, reservation of seats in the PRIs ensured that the political parties, at least, would exert themselves, to fill these seats with supporters of their own parties.

While the functioning of women in the Panchayati Raj is being considered, a factor that should be kept in mind is their lower social status and their position vis-a-vis the men of their families as well as in rural society. Rural societies, as is well known, are usually relatively conservative in their outlook when compared to those who live in urban areas, and this factor also affects the functioning of women in the PRIs. While the reservation of seats has given an opportunity for women to take an active part in the political processes of the State and rural areas in particular, that fact by itself is not going to immediately change their status either in society, or give them extraordinary political power through these institutions. A conservative society changes slowly, and even the introduction of major changes would take some time to manifest themselves in the form of higher status for women, and providing substantial political power.

For an effective role of women in these institutions, what one would ideally expect is a set of characteristics which enable them to take part independently, and articulate the needs of women in society (and the rest of their constituencies). However, they in fact face several handicaps, which hampered and restricted their effective functioning in these institutions (PRIs). It has been said often enough that rural women usually take up gainful occupations only when their families are relatively poor. Further, it is the members of the "lower" castes who are more often forced to enter into wage labour, while the upper caste women usually desist from taking up employment outside their homes (see for instance Srinivas, 1977). Women also do the more strenuous work in and around their homes (see Bardhan, 1985; Agarwal, 1988). When it concerns public affairs, women are definitely discouraged by members of their families as well as other men of the villages, to keep away from politics (see Omvedt, 1987). As a rule, the only political activity that women participate in voting at the elections to various political bodies. These features are perhaps discernible throughout the country, with differences in degree rather than quality. It is in the context of their recent entry into public affairs that we should consider the role and participation of women ZPMs. Described below is the profile of the women elected members of the ZPs.

Information was collected from 218 women ZPMs out of 231 in the State. A team of researchers interviewed them in addition to administering a questionnaire. Researchers also attended some meeting of the Zilla Parishads in order to observe the nature of participation of the women elected members. The data presented in this chapter refer to the period when they were collected, and effects of major political changes that occurred since then are not noted here. However, some observations made from recent visits to ZPs are mentioned in the last section of this chapter.

Caste

For the State as a whole, upper caste dominance in the political process holds good for women's representation too. It is now well known that since independence, Lingayats and Vokkaligas have played a prominent role in Karnataka politics (Manor, 1989). Any expectation or hope that such a dominance may be reduced in the PRIs is belied by the fact that together the Lingayats and Vokkaligas have more than 60% women representatives (see Table 1). Overall, these two castes include 50.61% of the ZPMs. Thus, from the point of view of caste identity, the dominance of Vokkaligas the Lingayats in the State politics is replicated in the political institutions at the Zilla Parishad level also.

Further, the caste distribution of women members is closely related to the concentrations and distribution of these castes in different regions of the State. In keeping with this, we find a greater number of Lingayat women representatives in regions where their caste is numerically preponderant, e.g. northern Karnataka, while Vokkaliga representatives are more in number in southern Karnataka. The category of "others" and the non-Hindus too follow a similar trend in representation to the ZPs.

The 1983 Act has a provision for at least one Scheduled Caste woman to be represented in each ZP. It is noteworthy that in some ZPs there are more than one SC woman represented. While

this indicates that SC women have contested in a slightly larger number than the absolute minimum, it probably just indicates that

the political parties could not find any other women to contest as their party candidates. None of the women ZPMs has contested in a general constituency and won. All of them had contested in a constituency reserved for women.

Age

With respect to the age of the women members, our findings show that there is a predominance of younger members. This is even more evident if we compare them to the ages of the male members. More than three-fourths of women ZPMs were below 45 years of age. Indeed, more than half the members were in the age group of 25-35 (the minimum age for contesting in the elections is 25 years) (Table II). This assumes greater importance in the light of the fact that the youth of Karnataka were allowed to vote in these elections if they had attained 18 years of age. Thus, younger people have been brought into the political process among both the electorate and the elected members. It is quite possible that women of younger age groups were easier to persuade to contest in the elections rather than older women (who are also presumably more conservative and less likely to enter politics even if a family member wanted them to do so). With regard to women contesting in the elections, we were informed that political parties had considerable difficulty in finding a sufficient number of candidates. Very often the women were relatives of political leaders or party supporters who persuaded the women of their families to contest.

While it may be a welcome feature that the PRIs are now represented by women of younger age groups, it also suggests that most of them would have relatively less of political experience as elected members of any political institution. This constrains them from effectively fulfilling their role as members. However, this relative inexperience would not remain a negative feature of women representatives, and with time, their effectiveness as elected members would improve. Perhaps, the traditional position of women in relation to men would also improve, once they show that they can take up responsibilities in the public domain, and represent their constituencies in the public domain, and represent their constituencies in a manner more in keeping with the expectations of the framers of the Panchayati Raj Act.

It is inevitable and hardly surprising that the election of so many women in the PRIs has caused some discomfort to both the elected men and the elected women. Rural society does not provide many opportunities or situations where men and women, not of the same families, to work together in any enterprise. Political institutions such as the PRIs do have this necessity incorporated within their structure. However, the women were diffident in their performance in the ZPs, and in fact most of them hardly talked during the monthly meetings. Their physical mobility in the constituencies too was limited, and therefore their contact

with the people who live in them was less than what a grass-roots representative may be expected to have. Thus women ZPMs (most of them) were playing a subordinate if not an altogether passive role. But in comparison with the elected women of Mandal Panchayats,

the women ZPMs appeared to be relatively more vocal, and more aware of their responsibilities.

Political Participation and Party Affiliation

In keeping with their age, the women members were by and large new entrants to the political process. Apart from having exercised their franchise in a few elections earlier, almost all members had no experience of active politics in any way. This was the case with nearly 80% of the women ZPMs. For the others, there had been an earlier political experience of varying periods, as members of the erstwhile village panchayats, taluk development boards, while two women had been MLAs (see Table III).

As noted above, finding women to contest elections was not an easy task. Usually a male family member was instrumental in persuading the women to contest, and they later also influenced their political decisions in several ways. During the election campaign, these women were projected as someone's wife, or mother, or sister, or widow, as the case may be. When asked as to what they attributed their winning the elections, almost none mentioned their own potential or promises, but it was due to either the political party (and its leader) or the status of the male member of the family. Family connections being used to win elections is not necessarily confined to women members, and men too have on occasion used this means to get elected. As is perhaps with the election process in general, relative abilities of the contestants were rarely at issue in the elections for PRIs, more so since the women candidates were by and large unknown in their own right. It is therefore not surprising to find that the number of seats won by women candidates affiliated to the two major parties, Congress-I and Janata Party proportionately corresponds to the total seats won by these two parties. Interestingly, though it was the Janata Party which had taken the initiative in reserving 25% of the seats for women, it had won only a few more seats than the Congress-I (see Table-IV).

The present women ZPMs, however, did not seem to be as sensitive to party identities and loyalties as men ZPMs. During our interviews with women members, many of them said that they were not interested in party politics, while most of the men were. In several districts it was also observed that most women were not active in the day to day happenings in the party to which they were affiliated.

In the meetings of the ZPs, it was often found that women members addressed the person sitting next to them rather than the chairperson. If they had any issue to be raised, (Usually concerning award of a work order, or release of funds for the work completed in their constituency) they chose to speak about it to the Adhayaksha (President) or the Upadhayaksha (vice-president) after the meeting was over and when the male members were leaving the

meeting hall. Usually a male member would also be present to support the request made by the female member. But, so far as participation in meetings of the ZPs were concerned, there appeared to be a noticeable difference in the levels of participation of the women in the different regions of the State. For instance, the women of the southern and coastal districts of the State appeared to be more vocal and articulate in ZP meetings than those of the northern districts. This could be due to the greater exposure to the urban environment in the southern and coastal areas of the State (Bangalore, Mysore and Mangalore) than in the northern districts.

Interpreting the nature of participation as indicated above for the State as a whole, it may be said that it is in keeping with their relative inexperience in active politics, the social distance in the presence of men, and an uncertainty as to whether or not what they say would be supported by the male members of the ZPs. Understandably, they were particularly hesitant to express any views that were contrary or in opposition to views expressed by dominant and powerful male members of the ZPs.

Most women members did not usually visit the offices of the ZPs except whenever there was a meeting convened. It was not common, but occasionally happened that the male escorts of the women ZPMs sat in the meeting hall and prompted them to speak out. A ZP Chief Secretary informed us of an incident when the husband of an elected woman even wanted to speak on behalf of his wife. As though to confirm this anecdote, we encountered several women members who preferred that their husbands answered our questions during the interviews.

Education

Women elected members lagged behind men in educational levels, which is comparable also to the situation in the rest of rural society. While there was a substantial proportion of men (21%) who had professional and post graduate education and degrees, among the women those with such educational qualifications were just five percent. It is not surprising that only a small proportion of the women ZPMs had professional or post graduate education. Women with higher education were more likely to pursue careers which were akin to their educational qualifications than to enter politics. There is an interesting feature with respect to the caste and educational background of women ZPMs. While in general it was found that members of upper castes tend to have higher educational attainment than the lower castes, there appears to be some difference in the context of the educational levels of women. Among those with a relatively low level of education - middle school and below, nearly half the Lingayats (46.8%) and SCs (47.6%) were found in this group. The Vokkaligas had 37.7% of their caste ZPMs in this group, and the "other" castes had 40.8%. Considering that the Lingayats are regarded as a more prosperous, upper caste, the fact that they have a similar number of poorly educated women members as the SCs, may suggest that educational levels of the women candidates were a more or less irrelevant factor in their selection as candidates. This may to some extent have been the case with the men too.

Occupation

We have seen that women members have at least three handicaps in their social background as indicated above. As we would see below, their occupations were also a further hindrance to a more effective participation in the ZPs. There were three occupations that the majority of women had listed: agriculture, "housework", and social work. However, most members had also listed politics as their occupation, perhaps prompted by the fact that they are now elected members, or they had been earlier (only a few). It is, however, noteworthy that while some women chose to cite agriculture, or social work as their occupation, most women had indicated that they were housewives, i.e. they had no other independent avocation.

In the traditional ethos within which most women continue to live, household chores usually take precedence over whatever other occupations that they may undertake. The entry into politics has brought some change in this traditional set-up, to the extent that they now have much less time to accomplish their housework, which is considered as "women's work". Under the circumstances, women have more responsibility now, with both their household work and as elected representatives, where one or the other would possibly suffer from a lack of time to do it. Some women found the conflicting demands in these roles a strain on their physical resources as well as their sense of well-being. Thus, in their inclination to better fulfill their responsibilities as elected representatives, their housework had suffered, and they claimed this was a "sacrifice of their home life." This had also caused a feeling of guilt that they had not been able to fulfill their traditional obligations to their families. While the men of rural society as a rule do not help in housework, this situation is bound to continue. The women would have to make some compromises in relation to their different roles, in family, and in their political life. Under the circumstances, their sense of guilt too would have to be faced. It is conceivable that with the rise in status of women as a consequence of their election to the ZP that some allowance would be made in their responsibilities regarding their housework, but this seems unlikely. As we found through our research, most women were less involved in political activities connected with the ZPs, and presumably had all the time they needed to perform their housework. The men of their families, usually their husbands, were more involved "on their behalf" in taking up the responsibilities of elected representatives.

A few women had indicated that social work was one of their occupations. However, we have reason to believe that this was a way to avoid saying they were "unemployed" (in the sense of gainful employment) rather than to indicate that they were earning an income or engaged in some work outside their homes. In the typical connotation that this occupation had, it was connected with service towards others. But, at present in rural areas, 'social work' is associated with the role of 'middle-men' where they act as intermediaries in transactions between the villagers and such institutions as co-operative banks, for instance, in

arranging loans for them. In these transactions, the 'social workers' do receive some income. However, when the women said that they were social workers, it is extremely unlikely, given their difficulty in traveling around their constituencies that they could perform the economic role associated with present day 'social workers'. In contrast to men, and in keeping with the general social status of women, almost all women members had no independent sources of income through their occupations. This in turn meant that women members did not have their own resources to enter or participate in the political process. In fact, there were many women ZPMs who said that one of the problems they faced in traveling around their constituencies was that they did not get any allowance from the ZPs for this purpose. This only added to their dependence on the men of their families.

Overview

The brief examination of the social background of women Zilla Parishad members was made with the intention of seeing the connection between the social background and their functioning. It is no accident that a person's antecedents would have a decisive effect on their performance in a political institution such as the Zilla Parishad. We observed that this is indeed so. Evidently, the traditional status of women has had an effect on not only their functioning as members, but as we found, they were also clearly influenced to a great extent by the men of their families. This was also due to the fact that they had had no previous political experience, and were understandably dependent on the men of their families to advise them on political matters. While it is vital that democratic institutions particularly at the grass-roots have greater representations and participation of women, this study found that rural women in particular are yet to acquire the necessary experience to function effectively as elected representatives. There seem to be more powerful social and gender based constraints which inhibit an independent role performance. Not only were there not many willing candidates, but the parties had to literally look for women contestants to be sponsored. In this connection it is pertinent to mention the possibility that in the case of several women members, another inhibiting factor may be a lack of motivation, which also affects their role performance as representatives. There had been a few cases where we found women being very articulate and vocal even when they had had no prior experience as elected political representatives.

The caste factor which is so closely linked with politics in India also has a role in the election of women members to the ZP. However, their caste identity becomes less important once the ZPs started functioning. We found that while the two dominant castes of Karnataka, namely: Vokkaligas and Lingayats were the majority among the ZP women too, their impact through the women members did not reflect their numerical strength. A possible factor here could be that women of upper castes do not generally (in rural areas) take up occupations outside their homes. They could be said to lack confidence to function in the public domain as elected members. Women, however, are not considered in caste

terms, after they are elected. The fact that they are women takes precedence over all other aspects of social identity. They do not enjoy any special position in the ZPs by virtue of being members of the numerically better represented and dominant castes.

During subsequent visits to the Zilla Parishads (mid-1990), we were able to see some changes in the participation of women members in meetings. For instance, in Mysore and Mandya ZPs, we found that more women were expressing opinions on various matters that came up for discussion. In the earlier visits to these ZPs, at the end of 1988, we had found that most of them were only physically present, but hardly participated in the deliberations of these ZPs. A small number of women had indeed been quite articulate even in the earlier meetings, but the number had now increased. Further, one could also discern a qualitatively improved participation in terms of the contents of their comments, which would be due to their greater experience, now that the Panchayati Raj has been in existence for over three years. However, while they may be said to have acquired more knowledge and experience in these new political institutions, they cannot be said to be functioning totally independently. They were not prone to make comments which were against those expressed by prominent leaders in the ZPs either. There are some factors which still inhibit their functioning and these would perhaps take much longer to overcome. There is hardly any indication that the elected women as a whole either consider themselves or are considered by others (elected men as well as the people of the villages) as equal in status to the elected men (which they are at least in principle). Undoubtedly, certain aspects of rural life, particularly the traditional status of women would change only after some time. Until then the elected women would have an ambiguous position - they are important in one sense as elected members, but they also suffer the traditionally lower status accorded to women.

The grounds for optimism in the functioning of the women members lie in the fact that more of them now speak in the meetings, and they also appear to take interest in acquiring a better knowledge of the functioning of the ZPs and their role in them. This, and the slowly widening group of women who are active participants in the PRIs may indicate that the participation and performance of women representatives would, over time, greatly increase and improve.

Table - I

Caste Distribution of Women Zilla Parishad Members

Sl.No	Districts	Brahmin	Lingayats	Vokkaligas	Others	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Non- Hindus	Total
1.	Bidar	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	4
2.	Gulbarga	-	9	-	2	-	-	-	11
3.	Raichur	1	6	-	2	-	-	-	9
4.	Bijapur	-	11	-	4	2	-	-	17
5.	Belgaum	-	8	-	3	1	-	-	12
6.	Dharwar	-	8	-	7	1	-	-	16
7.	Bellary	2	6	-	2	1	1	-	12
8.	Chitradurga	-	6	-	1	3	-	1	10
9.	Tumkur	-	6	-	1	1	-	2	10
10.	Bangalore (R)	-	3	9	2	1	-	-	15
11.	Kolar	-	1	7	1	1	2	-	12
12.	Mandya	-	-	12	-	1	-	-	15
13.	Mysore	-	-	8	-	1	-	-	9
14.	Shimoga	-	6	2	-	1	-	-	9
15.	Kodagu	-	6	1	6	1	-	-	14
16.	Hassan	-	1	3	2	1	-	1	8
17.	Chikmagalur	-	3	5	3	1	-	1	13
18.	Uttar Kannada	-	1	4	1	1	-	-	7
19.	Dakshina Kannad	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
TOTAL		4	79	53	49	21	3	9	218
Percentage		1.8	36.2	24.3	22.5	9.6	1.4	4.1	

Table - II

Districtwise Distribution of Age-Sex

S.I No.	District	Male 25-35	Female	Male 36-45	Female	Male 46-55	Female	Male 56-65	Female	Male 66 & Above	Female	Male Total	Female Total	Total
1.	Bidar	9	3	7	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	17	6	
2.	Gulbarga	15	10	15	3	5	1	-	-	-	-	35	14	
3.	Raichur	4	4	24	7	6	-	-	-	-	-	34	11	
4.	Bijapur	17	10	10	3	10	2	3	-	1	-	41	15	
5.	Belgaum	12	12	24	6	15	-	1	-	-	-	52	18	
6.	Dharwar	14	3	21	5	11	2	1	2	-	-	47	17	
7.	Bellary	4	4	8	2	9	2	1	-	-	-	22	8	
8.	Chitradurga	8	5	8	3	9	2	4	1	-	-	29	11	
9.	Tumkur	9	4	11	5	14	5	4	-	-	-	38	14	
10.	Bangalore (R)	6	6	7	2	11	1	1	-	2	-	27	9	
11.	Kolar	7	7	13	6	10	-	4	-	1	-	35	13	
12.	Mandya	4	6	12	2	7	1	3	-	3	-	29	9	
13.	Mysore	12	10	20	4	6	2	4	-	4	-	46	16	
14.	Shimoga	10	5	10	4	8	1	2	1	-	-	30	11	
15.	Kodagu	3	4	13	0	3	1	-	-	-	1	19	8	
16.	Hassan	10	5	9	2	1	3	6	-	-	-	26	10	
17.	Chikmagalur	3	3	5	2	3	-	3	-	-	1	14	6	
18.	Uttar Kannada	9	5	4	3	2	-	2	-	1	-	18	8	
19.	Dakshina Kannad	8	6	20	5	6	2	5	1	2	-	41	14	
TOTAL		154	117	241	67	137	27	44	5	14	2	600	218	818

Table - III

Distribution by Age-Sex and Political Experience of Zilla Parishad Members

S.No	Political Experience	Male 25-35	Female	Male 36-45	Female	Male 46-55	Female	Male 56-65	Female	Male 66 & Above	Female	Male Total	Female Total	Total
1.	MLA	-	1	2	-	4	-	3	-	2	1	11	2	
2.	MLC	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	1	-	4	-	
3.	Taluk Board	5	1	47	4	45	-	22	1	6	1	125	7	1
4.	Gram Panchayat	15	2	70	9	70	4	16	1	8	-	181	16	1
5.	Others	62	12	74	5	48	4	16	1	4	1	204	24	2
6.	None	66	101	36	48	19	21	10	3	-	1	201	174	3

Note: This table shows that some members have the political experience of holding more than one office.

Table - IV

Political Parties of Women Zilla Parishad Members

Janata	Cong(I)	CPI	Independent	Total
110	104	1	3	218
50.46%	47.71%	0.46%	1.38%	100.00%