

**Seminar**

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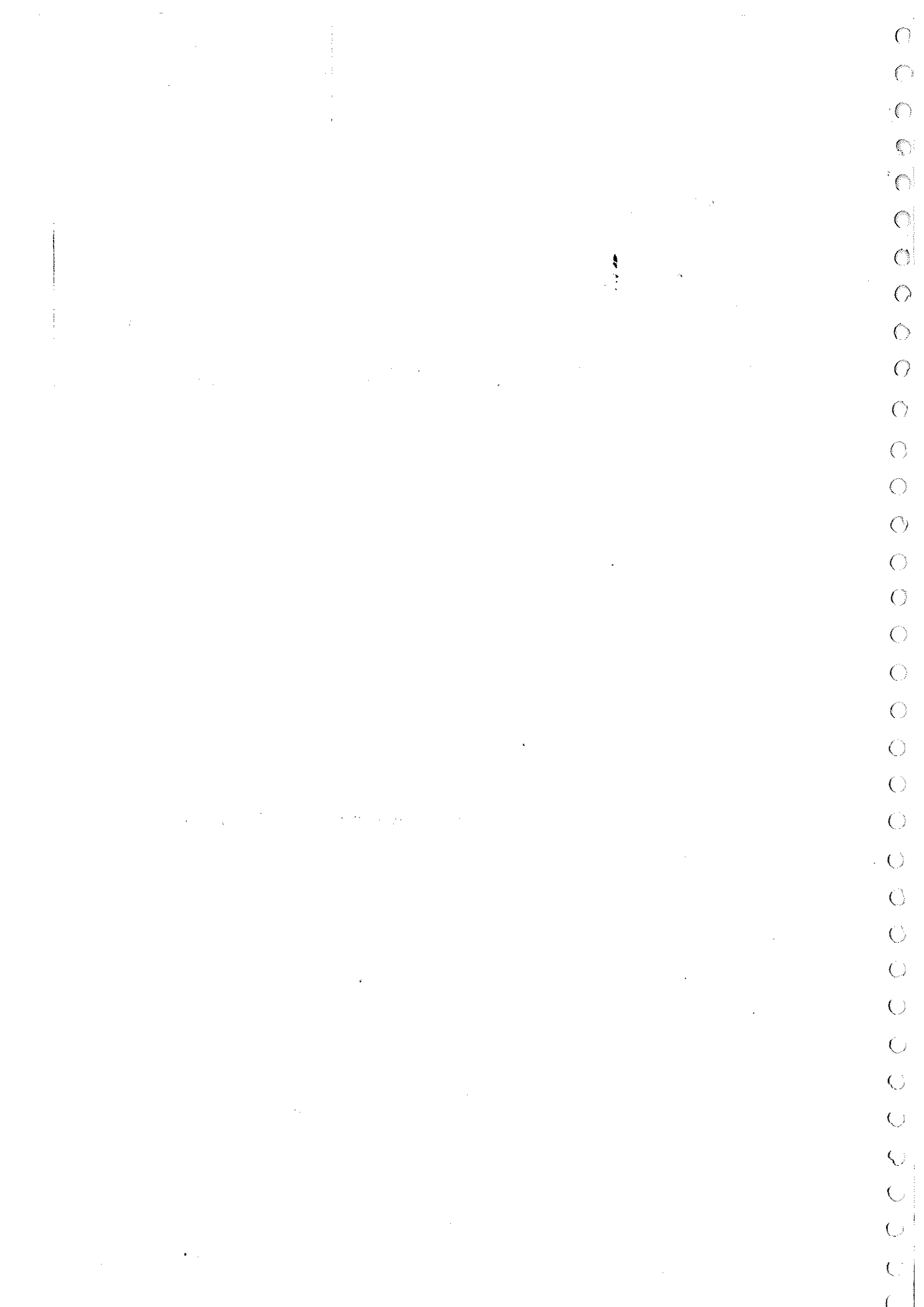
**Women in Local Governance:  
Experiences and Effective interventions in Andhra Pradesh,  
Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu**

**1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>, June 2000**

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## Day 1

### Inauguration:

The Director and Associate Director of the Institute of Social Studies Trust welcomed Her Excellency V S Ramadevi, the Governor of Karnataka.

**Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay, Director, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)** rendered the welcome address. She expressed her gratitude to all the participants assembled in the hall for being present despite their busy schedules. She welcomed Her Excellency V.S. Rama Devi for accepting the invitation to inaugurate the Seminar; Mr. Srinivas Murthy, Secretary of State, Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, for agreeing to deliver the key note address; Sharanavva and the other elected women representatives for coming to share their experiences as members of Gram Panchayats. She also welcomed NGO friends, activists and researchers present from all the southern states.

Dr. Mukhopadhyay gave a background to the seminar, with a brief introduction to Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), its objectives and projects undertaken, also referred to the Women in Local Governance Project and its Resource Centre at the Bangalore office, its activities and this seminar being a part of this endeavor. Utsahi Mahila Abhyudaya (UMA) is a national level Resource Centre set up in 1993 to cater to the needs of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Panchayat Raj. UMA aspires to strengthen the solidarity and enhance the capabilities of women in politics by fulfilling the need for information exchange and networking among individuals and organisations in Panchayat Raj. The Research unit at UMA conducts and undertakes research on various issues related to women in Panchayat Raj in partnership with other field level NGOs. The research findings and other issues related to women's empowerment are documented and disseminated through the resource centre.

With Taluk and Zilla elections in the offing and a new set of women elected to gram panchayats, it is extremely important that lessons learnt in the past five years are not ignored. It is vital that we collect the combined wisdom of past experiences, which would

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guide us in future endeavours. ISST has been forging partnerships with all organisations working with women in local Governance. The Seminar hopes to provide all those involved in facilitating women elected to Panchayats with a strategic thrust towards new initiatives.

The seminar was formally inaugurated by Her Excellency, The Honourable Governor of Karnataka V.S. Rama Devi who lit the lamp along with Sharanavva, an elected woman representative of Keribhosga Gram Panchayat, Gulbarga.

**Mr. Srinivas Murthy, Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj** delivered the keynote address. He said he was specially privileged to present the keynote address when women representatives from 4-5 states gathered to deliberate on problems faced in Panchayat Raj Institutions. He mentioned that it was appropriate that the meeting was held on the eve of the Taluk and Zilla Panchayat elections. The recently completed Gram Panchayat elections had selected more than 78,000 members to 5600 Gram Panchayats. 4000 more would be elected to the Taluk and Zilla Panchayats. What was most significant in this was that most of them would be women.

Mr. Srinivas Murthy said he was proud to be Secretary of the State where the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department was the first to lead the way in the matter of reservation for women to the local bodies. In 1986 December and 1987 January before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment was passed, it was Karnataka which had reserved 25% seats for women to the Panchayats. After the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, 33% was reserved for women. In fact before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, the Karnataka Government had already drafted its Panchayat Raj Act and so it was the first state to pass the legislation after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in 1993. 33,000 women in the Gram Panchayats and 1500 women have been elected to the Taluk Panchayats. Apart from this, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the offices of President and Vice President have also been reserved for women – 1900 in Gram level, 60 in the Taluk level, and 9 in the Zilla level. The Constitution and the State Panchayat Raj Acts have given women an opportunity to play an important role in local governance but the important question is whether we have equipped women to make use of these opportunities. Women have to face specific problems because they are not only less literate but also have less exposure to public life. In

a state where 67% of the men are literate, only 44% women are literate and the difference is higher in rural Karnataka. While 9% of elected male representatives are illiterate, 35% of elected women representatives are illiterate. There is the added handicap of many first timers among both men as well as women representatives

But for reservation, women would not have become members of the Panchayats. Now 45% of Gram Panchayat members are women with 33% of SC /ST seats also reserved for them. In cases where there is only one seat for SC or ST it automatically goes to a woman. So he said that virtually 75-80% SC/ST seats are for women – this positive discrimination has been the sole reason that there are so many women elected to the local bodies in Karnataka.

However, there are specific problems when it comes to women's participation in local bodies.

- ❖ When women have to bear election expenses, they invariably have to ask their husbands or fathers or brothers for money. This means the men will influence the decisions taken by these women in case they win.
- ❖ Women are virtually proxies especially in cases where they come from politically active families, but because of the seat being reserved for them, the man in the family fields his wife as the candidate.
- ❖ The political system itself prefers less literate women who can be easily influenced as opposed to literate ones.
- ❖ Women are usually escorted to Panchayat meetings by the men in their family – this also restricts their participation in panchayat proceedings. Initially Zilla Panchayat women had the same problems but in course of time they gathered courage and went about their work as good as, if not better than, their male counterparts. There have been many women Presidents of Zilla and Taluk Panchayats as well as women members of the Standing Committees in the panchayat bodies.

Now that there are so many women elected because of reservation we need to see how they can be encouraged to make the best use of this opportunity and how they can add a new

dimension to discussions in the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs). One way this can be ensured is by instilling confidence in them through training.

The Secretary shared plans made by the department of RDPR for women in Panchayat Raj. One of the programs planned with the support of NGOs is to organise satellite training at the Taluk level, which will include 25-30 Gram Panchayats and around 4000 women representatives. Mr.Srinivas Murthy called for the continued support of the Department of Women and Child Development and organisations like ISST to lend their support to this effort of capacity building for elected women representatives.

For women to be truly empowered it is essential that the Gram Panchayats themselves function effectively otherwise it will only serve the interests of the dominant community i.e. the men and the upper castes. The PRIs have to be strengthened so that both men and women can understand their roles and implement programmes successfully. Unless the PRIs themselves are strengthened women's participation cannot be viewed critically. There have been instances where leaders have approached the Secretary RDPR saying "Please do not reserve seats for women in my Taluk!"

Mr. Srinivas Murthy stated that these are the very people who do not like the Gram Panchayats also. Gram Panchayats mean loss of power to people at various levels. The Taluk and Zilla Panchayats alone control a budget of 4,500 crores - an amount that no other state transfers to the local bodies. More than 20 development departments transfer power to the Taluk and Zilla Panchayats in Karnataka. So only when the Panchayat Raj System itself is empowered to function effectively can we have effective women's participation. These last points were referred to and debated by the participants later during other sessions.

**Sharanavva, Elected Woman Representative from Keribhosga Gram Panchayat in Gulbarga Taluk of Gulbarga District** inaugurated the seminar along with the Governor, confidently took on centre stage and shared her experiences during the inaugural session. She is also a member of the Mahila Samakhya sangha in Keribhosga village. Her friends in the sangha nominated her to stand in the last elections to the Gram Panchayats. She stood

and was unanimously elected. She attended the first few meetings but would sit quietly, as she did not know what was happening. Later when she figured how the panchayat functions she decided to take on responsibilities.

The following were some of the instances she shared...

- People in her village were throwing their garbage in an empty plot of land causing a health hazard to all in the vicinity. Sharanavva brought this to the notice of the Gram Panchayat but realised that the men were not too keen to get it cleared. With support from her community and her sangha friends she got the garbage cleared.
- Sharanavva's village was facing severe water shortage. All attempts to bring it to the notice of the respective department were ignored. Sharanavva along with her sangha friends and others in the village staged a 'Rasta Roko'. They sat on the highway, blocked buses and refused to budge till the *Tehsildar* and the Deputy Commissioner of Gulbarga came and promised them immediate water connection. Only after the emergency water connection was in place did the protestors accede.
- The Gram Panchayat (GP) had sanctioned a certain amount of money to repair the local temple. The men in the GP, instead, wanted to use the money to provide uniforms for the school children. Sharanavva and her lady colleagues in the Panchayat ensured that the money was spent for what it was meant.

Now Sharanavva has finished her term as a GP member. The women of her sangha insisted that she contest the second time but she was keen that she should not be the only one who will learn and become '*ushaar*' (smart); she wanted others also in her sangha to benefit from this experience. Another woman from her sangha has been elected and Sharanavva has promised to support her in every way she can.

The Governor, Her Excellency V. S Rama Devi was called upon to confer her inaugural speech and honour the elected women present. The local women governors honoured for their commitment, courage and zealous work were Smt. Ashwathamma Narayan Reddy of Bangalore Rural District in Karnataka, Smt. Sharanavva of Gulbarga District in Karnataka,



Smt. Thresiamma Antony from Kerala and Smt. Margaret Mary from Tamil Nadu were presented a set of resource books prepared and published by ISST and specially made bouquets. Though a small gesture planned by ISST this was quoted by the elected women members as one of the cherished moments in their lives.

In the inaugural address, the Governor Her Excellency Rama Devi expressed happiness to preside over the proceedings. She commended Karnataka's good tradition of holding regular Panchayat elections and encouraging representation of women to the local bodies. While many states had postponed elections for decades it was the states in the South, with Maharashtra and West Bengal which have been committed to local governance. It was only after the introduction of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment that other states reserved seats for women to the local bodies.

Honourable Governor shared her experiences while she was a member of the committee that this Constitutional Amendment, which ensured 33% reservation for women. She narrated how at that time people had asked her "where will you get the women from?" They felt it was a "pious wish" which might not be very fruitful. But the first election saw over 36,000 women elected to local bodies. Though many of them were proxies and had to play second fiddle to their husbands who could not stand, it was just a matter of time before they asked the men to stop accompanying them to the Panchayat. In fact, in Punjab the women made it very clear that they did not want the men to even canvass for them. The women collected the election fund, fought and won the elections – only with the help of other women in their wards. They promised their constituency that they will look into day to day needs like a Primary School, booster pumps, a dispensary and the like, immediately. 3-4 women stood for each seat and all of them knew what they would do for their constituency if elected. Ms. Rama Devi opined that if all those who stood for elections thought the same way, the country would have developed in no time, thereby fulfilling the dreams of our founders.

Nobody is really happy to be in positions of power merely because of reservation. But in a country like ours where men do not really want to share power with women, and the likes of men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy are one in a million, it is only a Constitutional Amendment

which will ensure participation of women in the public domain. The Governor called upon the men to not only lend their support but to also work with women. She reiterated the fact that it was the men who needed to be motivated more than the women.

Quoting the days headlines where the girls of Class 12 had fared better than the boys, Her Excellency added that "Whatever men can do, women can do better." For, it is the woman who knows the immediate needs of her family better – health, water, education. She knows that a smokeless *chulha* will make cooking an easier task instead of dealing with the fumes of a regular firewood stove. The woman is constantly trying to improve her living conditions to make it a healthier place for all.

On the other hand, men do not acknowledge her efforts. Far from it, she is very often treated like an unpaid worker. More than a woman who is a housewife, a teacher who is paid a salary is respected, though in reality teacher may rarely have control over the money she earns. Despite all this it is very rarely that one hears a woman complaining about the treatment meted out to her. The time has come now for women who have been waiting for power. They are no longer merely partners in name but are equals if not better than their male counterparts, and would like to participate as well as them in all decision making processes.

Recalling a conversation with the Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, The Governor shared his fears regarding men. The men, he said worked only with their brains, whereas women used their brains and also listened to their hearts. Men and women if they worked together can only compliment each other as long as the men did not treat women as their enemies.

At a function organised at the Parliament's annex, when the UN official present asked why developing nations were so slow, the President Mr. K. R Narayanan had said that development was not as fast as expected because half of the nations population was not recognised. That woman had to be encouraged to the forefront to allow them to contribute to nation building.

The time has come for women to show their strength by being assertive. There is no need for them to lose their femininity and be aggressive. Let the men do the slogan raising and stone throwing while the women concentrate on work. She praised Sharanavva for her role in ensuring that the Panchayat money was used for what it had been sanctioned. She congratulated all the women in the villages for getting their work done in their own feminine way. She called upon women to be proud of their womanhood and to never encourage feelings of 'Why were we born as women', because there were so many nicer qualities in women which are lost in men.

It is normal for men to be everywhere, but now with women's inclusion in the local bodies, it is up to them to make their voices heard. The Prime Minister apparently faced a lot of opposition in his bid to reserve 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the posts of Chairperson to the Panchayat for women. It took him almost a week to convince his colleagues that it is necessary to have women's representation at decision-making levels instead of mere membership. Women need to work not only for women but also for men and children in their community. They might in the process have to work harder than the men and make more sacrifices, but they should continue to march forward optimistically. Only self-confidence will help and it is no point pitying oneself in the struggle for equal opportunity.

Congratulating the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj and NGOs like ISST for supporting elected women representatives, the Governor encouraged such collaborations in this endeavor. Training will increase women's confidence levels so it is a must. It is up to the women to raise questions in these training programmes and equip themselves to work effectively. If men and women work sincerely there will come a day when Mahatma Gandhi will be proud of his nation.

The Governor concluded her speech by sharing an anecdote about the tussle for supremacy in Himachal Pradesh. When asked whether the *Pradhan* (President) or the *Upa-Pradhan* (Vice-President) was of a higher level, she was told that the *Up-Pradhan* was higher because he had three more alphabets prefixing *Pradhan*. This argument led to the scrapping

of the post of Vice President in Himachal. There are no signs of any such changes in the hierarchy in Karnataka Panchayats.

Ms. Meera M, the Associate Director of ISST, Bangalore delivered the vote of thanks. She thanked Her Excellency for gracing the occasion with her inspiring address and for partaking in this process of profound sharing. She thanked Mr. Srinivas Murthy for his enthusiastic support and for his keynote address. She expressed hope that his commitment towards future long-term collaborations with NGOs will pave way for sustained partnerships that can work wonders towards strengthening women's empowerment in local governance.

Ms. Meera extended a warm thanks to Sharanavva for sharing her experiences as an elected woman representative and so succinctly. She shared that the women members at the frontlines of democracy, in spite of all the obstacles, disadvantages, sense of loneliness and vulnerability, are redefining politics and power plays. Their efforts goes on to encourage practitioners, researchers and all partners in this process of change to strive harder and strengthen 'HER STORY' in its making.

**Session I - Presentations from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.**

**Chairperson: Mr. L C Jain, Chairman, National Council for Rural Institutes, Former Member of Planning Commission**

**Paper presented by Ms. Aliyamma Vijayan, Sakhi, Kerala:**

In her presentation, Aliyamma gave a brief background to women's experiences in local governance in Kerala where the issue of good governance is receiving special attention. The State is going through yet another path-breaking and revolutionary experiment of power sharing, a truly decentralized and participatory development process. The Left Democratic Government has shown the political will to hand over 40% of the budget directly to be spent by the local bodies. The Gram Swaraj, as envisioned by Gandhi and others after him, is slowly becoming a reality in Kerala.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment paved the way for decentralisation of power to local Panchayats. With Panchayat Raj elections in '95, the three tier panchayat system came into effect – there are 990 Gram Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats, 14 district Panchayats, and 55 municipalities and 3 corporations ( 2 more corporations have been recently added). Reservation has made it possible for about 5000 women to be elected to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> posts in local bodies.

The Kerala Panchayat Raj and Municipalities Act 1994 constituted a special cell in the State Planning Board to confirm maximum participation of people in the decentralised process. The Gram Sabha's had to meet at least twice a year to identify local needs, discuss development problems, estimate resources that can be mobilised and prepare project proposals. Task Forces were formed at the local level to develop the proposals into projects. A voluntary technical core team was formed at each local body to study the technical feasibility and viability of these projects. Expert committees at each level would recommend the projects to the district planning committee, which will finally approve the projects. Finally funds were directly handed over to the local bodies. Implementing and monitoring officers helped the local bodies to implement the projects in a time bound manner.

The local bodies have thus become local governments constantly interacting with people and responding to their needs. It has been successful in breaking the contractor-bureaucrat nexus. The Planning Board has been constantly trying to shift people's focus from roads and bridges to productive sectors like agriculture and industry. The programme has had resistance from legislators, opposition parties and employees organisations who feel that their power is threatened and authority eroded.

A notable paradox of the Kerala model was the poor representation of women in politics in spite of high literacy levels and social development. Large number of women could come into the public realm only through reservation. 3954 women are Gram Panchayat members out of whom 375 are Presidents of panchayats, 564 are in the block level and 105 are at the district panchayats. Many women are coming into governance for the first time and they also have to spend time to learn a number of new things like rules, administrative

procedures, project preparation, skills of public speaking, implementation, evaluation and monitoring.

**Some observations:**

- ❖ The planning board has been responsible for this pilot and innovative project but in the board there are no women.
- ❖ Women have been encouraged to participate in large numbers from planning to the execution of the projects.
- ❖ Gender impact assessment is mandatory in the analysis of all projects.
- ❖ Anganwadi teachers have been activated to mobilise poor women who are beneficiaries of the anganwadis.
- ❖ Despite special efforts to encourage women's participation in Gram Sabha's, the overall participation was around 20%.
- ❖ The local bodies have to earmark 10% of their funds exclusively for women. But a close examination of the women's projects reveals many shortcomings. Many of the projects were oriented to enhance the income of women but they never questioned the gender division of labour or the gender discrimination in society. Most of the occupations promoted were those that women could do combining their household responsibilities.
- ❖ A remarkable feature has been the activation of Self-Help Groups (SHG's) and neighbourhood groups. In some places women were able to mobilise 2-3 lakhs of rupees in 4-5 months.

**Experiences of elected women:**

- ❖ Many women felt that in 3 years time their awareness about local government the rules and regulations, skills of planning, writing and public speaking ability to control meeting procedures, deal with bureaucracy etc have substantially increased.
- ❖ Most women had to face a lot of mental tensions having to combine family and work responsibilities and handle prejudices against women.

The educational background, double work burden, expectations from the public in the context of the decentralized planning process, the lack of experience of the elected women

representatives, the problems created by a male dominated political system have all made the life of an elected woman very difficult and demanding. Hence many women opined that they would not want to stand for another term. To make women in political processes effective and responsive, lot of support from concerned women's organisations is a must.

The Kerala experience makes it clear that just by decentralizing power or allocating funds or putting certain mechanisms in place, gender equity cannot be addressed. Kerala has taken a step in the right direction but it needs conscious intervention to progress further. Patriarchy as a system has deep roots in all institutions of society and sustained and long struggles, systematic interventions of all concerned persons, especially of women's organisations and movements only can bring lasting changes.

**P. Manikyamba, Department of Political Science, Hyderabad University** presented her paper on women in local governance in Andhra Pradesh.

**Excerpt from the paper:** Andhra Pradesh is one of the few states to introduce the system of Panchayati Raj as early as 1959. The component of the present three tier system are Zilla Parishads, Mandal Parishads and Gram Panchayats. The Mandal Parishads are smaller than the former Panchayat Samithis and the Mandal Parishads are organised with the objective of 'going nearer to the door steps of the rural public'. Andhra Pradesh is the first state to provide – as early as 1986 reservation of chair positions to women in Panchayati Raj bodies. The state is implementing the provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and one generation of women members and Chairpersons have completed their term.

During the period when 9% reservation of chair-positions was in operation, two women became Zilla Parishad Presidents and 101 women served as Presidents of Mandal Parishads. Of the 101 women Presidents of Mandal Parishads, 3 got elected to positions unreserved for women. These figures indicate a quantitative increase in respect of women's position in leadership roles and this was because of reservations. Selection of capable women must have led to qualitative improvement. It is needless to say that all sorts of manipulations have had their play in the choice of women candidates. But micro level studies made it

very clear that new and young women's leadership had emerged. This is a sign of revitalisation in the context of women's participation in the Panchayati Raj bodies. It is personal interest and initiative that had contributed to their decision to contest. Familial connections continued to have influence on recruitment but its impact was less than what it was in the 60s and 70s. Some women elected as Presidents, performed effective roles with the help of family members and in some cases with the very active cooperation of husbands. A few women Presidents were endowed with the ability to perform independent roles.

#### **Post Amendment Scenario:**

The post amendment phase proved beyond doubt that the women in Panchayati Raj moved from peripheral to leadership roles. Several success stories have also come to lime light. A few example could be given here. Karuna who had completed her term very recently contested and won a general seat in Chimvela Mandal of Nalgonda District and later got elected as Mandal President, a seat reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC) women. This young woman's experience has been one of struggle and confrontation with officials, party leadership and the government at higher level. Cutting across several barriers, she could get benefits to her Mandal, concentrating on problems of drinking water, irrigation and education. She successfully fought against misappropriation, erring officials and a manipulated no-confidence motion. She carried the struggle with remarkable confidence and succeeded both in protecting her dignity and promoting democratic values.

Srinivasa Kumari, Sarpanch, Tadepalli village in Guntur district worked in a totally different atmosphere. This committed young woman has been a very efficient persuader, problem solver and administrator. With a planned and phased programme, she repaid the loan left by her predecessor and mobilised funds for development works. Her focus has been on education, irrigation and other amenities to the villagers. She strongly feels that women are honest and could provide good politics. She said that women concentrate more on meeting the needs than on power, but for men power occupies top priority. Twenty eight year old Sita Mahalakshmi said, "I have accepted the position not for the sake of status and power but to serve people. I strongly feel that development does not come all of a sudden, but takes place in stages".



Fatimabee, former Sarpanch of Kalva village, Orvakal Mandal, Kurnool District received the best Sarpanch award of the state government for her exemplary work in improving the conditions of her village. She also received the Fight Against Poverty Award sponsored by the United Nations organisations. This 39 years old 'tough as steel and soft as silk' lady was initially hesitant and even terrified to take up the role of Sarpanch. When interviewed after becoming Sarpanch, she said, "I had never seen a city before, never sat in a room full of men, much less spoken in the presence of others". But participation in orientation programmes brought about marked changes in her attitude and approach. She gained enormous confidence and has worked for the development of her village. Behind the success of Fatimabee, are the concerted and continuous efforts of a voluntary organisation called *Proddu* meaning Sun Rise, headed by Sankaramma.

Sitamahalakshmi of Cuddapah Mandal motivated a begging community called Budagajangalu to take up self-employment and engage in small business. This Mandal president could get the cooperation of the Women Welfare Department, Nodal Officer and the officials in the collectorate.

The success stories should not lead one to conclude that the outcome of the amendment has always been positive. Attempts to prevent capable women to enter the Panchayati Raj Institutions have increased. New preventive dimensions emerged. These include kidnaps, forced withdrawals, illegal unseating, negative networking, harassment, subjugation and oppression. In a mandal close to the capital of Andhra Pradesh, a woman was nominally placed in the role of President of a Mandal and functionally, it is the husband who is the President. He went to the extent of arranging for himself a chair next to that of his wife in her office. He goes through all the records and puts his initials on the official papers that he desires to be approved. The woman President, who was taught only to sign, fulfilled the formality of signing after seeing her husband's initial. This practice uninterruptedly continued. The members of the Mandal, other than the woman Sarpanch, officials and villagers never questioned the illegality. The Mandal Development Officer, who should function as the implementers of law, allowed the practice to be continued. The point is the official, who should function, as change agents, with exceptions, have become the

perpetuators of male dominated political culture. The protectors of law have become supporters of gender discriminatory practices.

It is well known that the Committee on the Status of Women felt that one purposeful way to encourage rural women to enter politics is the constitution of All Women Panchayats and recommended accordingly. The Committee clearly stated that the proposed statutory women's panchayats are not meant to be parallel organisations to Gram Panchayats and that they are recommended as transitional measures to break through the traditional attitudes in rural society. The Committee hoped that the All Women Panchayats would reduce inhibitions and encourage women to actively participate in local bodies. It should be pointed out that long before the Committee's recommendations, some All Women Panchayats were experimented within the state.

In the 70's, Mattupalli village in Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh had an All Women Panchayat. In Gandhinagaram, a village in Warangal District, an All Women Panchayat was set up in 1981. The intention behind the formation of this panchayat was definitely not encouraging women's participation in decision making. The major factors contributing to the formation of this panchayat had been caste conflict, gender conflict and a spirit of compromise in the final analysis. It had merely a superficial stamp of 'all women' and the decisions remained those of the village leaders. In the period following the implementation of the Amendment, Andhra Pradesh had eight All Women Panchayats. The formation of these bodies was not preceded by real commitment.

Reservations had also opened up new techniques of oppression and exploitation in the context of women. This is not to say that the techniques are newly invented. Promising women were kept at a distance from power positions. Despite the growth of preparedness to fight and assert, women, more importantly dalit women are subjected to several kinds of manipulations and preventive measures. Women heads of Gram Panchayats are often told that their only duty is that of signing on papers and nothing else. Some of are asked to offices to fulfill the formality of signing. The local political leadership or the dominant male members of the panchayats exercise real power. In essence, it is the numbers game that the

patriarchal society would be interested to play. Women, as rightly pointed out by Kumud Sharma, need to go beyond the numbers game to expand their share in political power. Women's movement should seriously question this practice and lodge a big protest.

There are a good number of instances of dalit women being illegally unseated from their positions. Janaki Bai, a dalit woman who became the Sarpanch of Harpura village in Karnataka was allowed to continue in office for one year by the higher caste leadership because, according to the rules, no-confidence resolution could not be moved in first twelve months of the election. She was kidnapped on the day of illegal no-confidence vote against her. Her supporters hoping that there could not be no-confidence vote in the absence of quorum, went on a pilgrimage. But the pro- male and anti-dalit officials managed the show without quorum. She and her husband were beaten up and were freed only after the 'so called' no-confidence vote was passed. A combination of caste and gender politics and gross violation of rules is very much evident here.

The future of women in Panchayat Raj is going to be one of conflict between assertion and suppression, the conflict getting intensified especially when young and capable women enter these bodies. Women's groups should and are going to give tough fight against manipulations outside the family. Parties play a prominent role in the selection of candidates, whether male or female. Conflict between party leadership and women's wings are bound to increase. This should be seen as a positive sign in the process of accommodation and adjustment that will result in an increase in women's component in the decision-making structures of political parties.

Closely related to political power is economic power. Women heads of panchayats are paying increasing attention for facilitating and promoting rural women's economic empowerment. Sitamahalakshmi, President of Cuddapah Parishad said that "women have picked up confidence and courage through DWCRA schemes.. For making men effective partners in the development process reforms, guaranteeing economic security to women is essential. Economic empowerment of women is going to be one of the top priority items on the agenda of women in Panchayati Raj.

Successful implementation of beneficiary programmes, depends among other factors, on the interest evinced by officials. Committed and service oriented women officials could be of added strength to women in Panchayati Raj bodies. Shashi Rekha, the Development Officer of Moinabad Mandal in the Ranga Reddy District of Andhra Pradesh received the best Mandal Development Officer award for her commendable work. She says that if the officers are correct, everything gets done well. She has been instrumental for the successful implementation of governmental schemes meant for women.

Women's groups and all those concerned about the empowerment of women should launch a strong protest against the unjust media – print and audio-visual. Positive roles of women are either relegated to the background or wrongly magnified roles are projected. Both are unhealthy symptoms for society in general and women in particular. Therefore careful watch on the media by women's associations is very much essential.

Identification of success stories and spread of information relating to these is necessary to counter the argument that women have not been successful representatives. Current research should give priority to this aspect and try to expose the manipulations that are taking place.

**Prof. G Palanithurai, Research Professor, Gandhigram Rural Institute** presented the experiences of women in the local bodies in Tamil Nadu.

**Excerpts from the paper:** Never in the political history of Tamil Nadu have the institutions of Governance had such a massive number of women in positions as what we have been seeing in local bodies at present. All the women leaders who have been elected have not volunteered themselves to contest in the election. They are either propelled by the male member of their family, or oriented by the NGOs for this specific task. Some women leaders are oriented by parties and others are recruited by the community. Most of the women leaders are sponsored by their husbands with the support of the political party.

Women leaders have entered into the PRI's without any orientation. Generally it is a

complaint made by all the women leaders that the officials are not cooperating with elected leaders by providing necessary information on time to enable them for completion of their work. Some of them are even ill-treated. The Dalit women representatives are not even provided with a chair to sit in front of a clerk in the offices. Because of this many women don't even think of meeting the higher officials at the district level during their term. Officials who had performed the role in the same office without any interference, now feel that the panchayat leaders have taken up the mantle to whom the officials are now accountable. This new system has pushed them from the stage of a decision-maker and an executive officer. Hence their reactions towards the leaders are always negative. The officials try their level best to establish their control over the leaders by making use of the ignorance of the leaders.

The segments who supported the candidates during elections, have not extended their support after that as their functioning do not indicate that she is working for the people who have voted for her. Even her party leaders at the grass root level are not extending their helping hand towards her activities in the panchayats. In the same way the caste leaders and family members exert pressure on the leaders to yield to their pressures. Husbands are the another problem to the elected women leaders. A large number of women leaders have been recruited to these positions because of their husband's influence in the party.

Managerial skill is an imperative for the leaders to manage the personnel and the resources well within the established frameworks of administration. Here the women leaders lack that capacity. Yet another problem they face in local bodies is the lack of communication skill. The women leaders are not able to communicate their ideas in an effective way as done by the MLAs and MPs. They require orientation in the art of effective communication.

By providing this opportunity to women to work in the local bodies as leaders, women hailing from poor families are facing a number of problems. Their workload has increased, panchayats are not paying them a salary after handing over a variety of responsibilities which are on par with a full time officer. A poor coolie cannot afford to loose her day's wage by attending the panchayat works. It is natural on the part of the women leader who is

a wage earner to hand over responsibility to someone and perform her duties to the family. Panchayat leaders at the Gram Panchayat level have to maintain thirty one records. Most of the women leaders are the victims of the accounting procedure in Tamil Nadu.

Normally women would be sensitive towards women issues and that was the expectation of the leaders who have talked about the one third reservation of seats for women. But in reality, women leaders are not oriented to be sensitive towards women issues. The newly elected women leaders have moved onto the office with a sense of hope, but they have seen a different picture in the scenario of administration. The woman who is a novice in administration has to either yield to the corrupt system or to struggle with the system. If she has chosen the latter, who will help the women leaders is a major question.

The interference of MLAs and MPs with their area development fund in the local body administration is yet another disturbance faced by women leaders. The women leaders requests are not respected by the MLAs and MPs as they feel that women cannot mobilise votes for them in the next general election.

Elected women representatives need continuous training on their roles and responsibilities within the framework of the established political system at the grass root level. Through orientation workshops, their capacity should be enhanced, and they should learn to administer development and social justice. This exercise should not be a one-time affair, but a continuous process where the women leaders can have an opportunity to meet and interact with other leaders. Apart from this, women require the details of the Act, rules, regulations, procedures, government orders, programmes and schemes of the governments to be carried out in their areas.

Women leaders need a supportive organisation that is able to support them during crises. Women leaders are working in a given environment, which is not so conducive for effective functioning of the women leaders. All the women leaders who are upright and committed have to face troubles and tribulations in the society. They felt that a supportive organisation is needed for moral support.

Though they have problems and inadequacies, women leaders are able to perform their roles and function as effectively and efficiently as men. A few cadre based parties and some committed NGO's have been continuously orienting women leaders and extending their support to them. They have been assertive because of which they could discharge their duties more effectively than other leaders. However, other women have been unable to meet the challenges of their role and have expressed their desire to withdraw from public life. There are also some women who have no idea about the functioning of panchayats and they have no aspiration to contest in the next election. They will contest only if their husbands insist again.

Women have come to positions in the local bodies as a provision has been made in the Constitution. Though the outlook of the society towards women has started changing, hurdles are encountered at every stage. They need orientation, sensitization, information and continued counseling, through an organization. The ongoing experiments and experiences suggest that periodical training, orientation, and sensitization encourage women to be more effective. Wherever such interventions are obvious, achievements of the women leaders are substantial and impressive.

**Some points from the Discussion:-**

Dr. Jos Chathukulam asked Dr. Manikyamba about the Janmabhoomi project in Andhra Pradesh and its effect on Gram Panchayats and women's empowerment.

Dr. Manikyamba opined that the Janmabhoomi has mixed results. On the one hand the *Sarpanch* was treated like the clerk of the Collector, but women elected to the panchayats felt it was useful because they could easily get in touch with the officials. She quoted the example of a woman President of Cuddapah in East Godavari who was instrumental in converting a whole begging community into a Self-Help Group Community by ensuring loans through the IRDP and other schemes.

Some of the other points that came up were:

Recalling the Kerala presentation, the fact that middle class, particularly women did not participate in the Gram Sabhas. This was more so in Municipal Corporation where the

residents associations have mainly male members. Also the fact that women's movement in Kerala has stayed away from gender, economic and developmental issues mainly because autonomous women's movement in Kerala is very weak, many women have joined political parties and are forced to toe the party line. There has been no impact on developmental issues since there is no space to take up any issue. In fact there is no planned approach to the allocation of the 10% of the budget for women specific projects.

Dr. Jos supplemented that Kerala being such a highly politicized state, it leaves very little space for women in the public sphere.

Mr. L C Jain concluded the session with his comments that there was an urgent need to deal with the root of the problem. He shared that by reducing the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to one, which merely reserved seats for women, we are completely disregarding the majesty of the Amendment. He questioned 'whether the powers of the local bodies or the lack of it, is any indication of self-government? Does sanctioning of cowsheds for women mean self-government? Then again, does 10% of budget allocation for women's projects constitute self-governance?' He felt there is a need to question this fundamental arrangement and that 50 years of independence have failed to produce the right kind of development and if we wish to weep for the next 50 years as well? He categorically felt that this was no progress instead it has ridiculed and reduced the system to one of co-opting labour, talent and idealism.

Mr. Jain shared his unhappiness that not enough was done to remove the '*kachada*' like Sharanavva of Gulbarga, had done in her village; that it was the prerogative of those sitting in Krishi Bhavan to draw up schemes for the Gram Panchayats to carry out; that most often there is no critical examination of the Panchayat Raj Act to see if in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Constitution, during trainings?

Mr. Jain recalled the meeting he had with the people of SEARCH who claimed that they had trained over 8000 elected women representatives in the last term. 'Trained them for what?' he had enquired and wished he hadn't asked when the reply was 'so that they can approach



the BDO! He felt that there is much to learn from the women whose priorities were far better than state & national leaders who need to be trained on self-governance.

### Session 2 – Experiences From Maharashtra and Karnataka

**Chairperson: Ms. Meera Saxena, Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Karnataka.**

In her opening remarks Ms. Meera Saxena acknowledging that she had only a very brief stint in the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department and therefore was no expert on the subject recalled Mr. Srinivas Murthy's remark that Karnataka was the first state to introduce 25% reservation for women to the local bodies, Ms. Saxena added that the state has a relatively stable socio-political history and has made a lot of progress in the field of decentralised governance since 1987.

She shared that her interaction with newly elected women members in 1987 was initially not a very positive experience. Many women were proxies of the men in their families. But now it's been 13 years and women have learnt a lot not only through the various training programmes that they have been through but also through the kind of experiences they were exposed to. This does not give reason for any complacency and it is important now that we ensure full participation of all the women elected to the local bodies this term.

Recollecting an episode in a recent workshop on legal literacy organised for women councilors, Ms Saxena shared her surprise at the presence of men in the workshop. The men not only accompanied their wives, but also took up the responsibility of meeting the petitioners who had come with their grievances. Such an occurrence in this day and age, and in a capital city like Bangalore where the literacy and awareness levels are relatively higher than the rest of the state cannot be ignored. So it is very essential to put together a detailed and efficient strategy to offset such instances in our attempt to empower women elected to the panchayats.

**Presentation of Maharashtra Experiences by Medha Kotwal Lele, Aalochana, Pune:**

Medha shared her experience of working with women in the local bodies in Maharashtra.

**Excerpts from the paper:** The Panchayat Raj experiment in Maharashtra had propelled a lot of optimistic outpourings from elected women representatives, NGO's working with them and women's groups. But a critical look at the effect shows that women have benefited only marginally by being elected into politics.

The issue before them is 'how to convert the de jure into de facto' because a close examination exposes the fact that women do not have enough authority to be able to make a difference. Their power depends on their ability to control resources, institutions and people of their community. This does not go to say that the empowerment of elected women representatives is a futile exercise.

Maharashtra has a history of social reform, and being an advanced state there is no dearth for finances. The then Congress Government introduced the Maharashtra Panchayat Raj Act that instilled a lot of optimism in those keen on decentralisation. Women welcomed reservation to the local bodies and women with no political backing, money or a family history of participation in politics stood for elections and won. Though the media concentrated on highlighting the participation (or lack of it) of the *biwi* brigades and the panchayat *pati*'s who were thrust into local governance, the Congress Government encouraged the participation of Gram Sevika's, teachers and local level workers who had knowledge of and access to all Governmental Schemes. There was an emergence of many social workers working in slums and others living in slums that had the backing of the Congress party won.

The change of government at the centre to the BJP/Shiv Sena combine created a dent in this structure. The women's movement was further dampened with the influx of criminal elements that enjoyed the support of the various Corporations. There cropped up many differences in people's class/caste/political allegiances. The women's movement was thus not prepared to take up the issue of elected women representatives and preferred to stay out of politics. It was much later that organisations working with women on health and water

issues like Masoom and FRCH took up the training of elected women representatives.

Aalochana, fundamentally a documentation and research institute observed that women repeatedly expressed the lack of knowledge of government schemes and of their roles and duties as elected representatives. They requested to be trained to equip them to function effectively in the Gram Panchayat. Using all available inputs and the study on All Women Gram Panchayats in Maharashtra, Aalochana embarked on a consciousness raising facilitation programme for elected women representatives. Ms. Medha reiterated the fact that no Gram Panchayat can function effectively without NGO or party support because of continued power conflicts in Maharashtra.

“Who will make the Chappathis” – the study on All Women Gram Panchayats in Maharashtra revealed that without the support of the Shetkari Sanghatana who made it part of their programme to encourage all women panchayats they would not have existed. Even the presence of two or three committed individuals along with an efficient *gram sevak* has not proved very effective in many cases. Gram Panchayats, which have managed to make a difference, have definitely been left progressive with no right leanings.

Ms. Lele recalled an incidence where a candidate supported by the NCP opposed an OBC woman. She had to face a no-confidence motion and had to take the case to the court all by herself. She had no support from any organisation. It was the Shiv Sena who finally supported her. In such a scenario how can we make women's participation effective. Interventions strategies could include functioning as pressure groups within the party; work with party support; through individual networks or garnering support from outside.

In Maharashtra, the Coordination Committee of the women's movement, which included women from the autonomous movement as well as women with party affiliations, functioned for ten years. This body is now defunct, and there is an increased need for the formation of a similar Coordination Committee round the issue of liquor. The nexus between the liquor mafia and those in politics is so formidable that in spite of Gram Panchayats banning arrack shops in their village they flourish because of permission from

higher authorities.

The Mahila Rajsatta Aandolan in Vidarba and Marathwada has demanded the authorities to look into the misuse of the no-confidence motion of which women are invariably the victims. They have also demanded that the Gram Sabha should have a minimum representation of 50% women from the village.

The Right to Information campaign in Rajasthan, where the government was compelled to pass an order to make files more accessible to those interested, is an excellent illustration where the bureaucracy is pressurised to be more accountable. This kind of campaign is an essential step towards institutionalising democracy.

**Dr. Revathi Narayanan, State Programme Director of Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK):**

Revathi presented the experiences of working with elected women representatives through their sanghas.

**Excerpts:** Gender and governance is seen as a core issue for Mahila Samakhya. Not only do several sangha women contest and win elections, but their role in politics is seen as a resource for changing women's political consciousness.

Explaining the process she shared that the sangha selects a woman from amongst them to stand for elections. This woman contests elections with the support of her sangha. Sometimes campaign expenses are partly supported by the sangha. If she wins she makes a space for herself and her sangha concerns in the GP. The sangha continues to support their candidate and ensure that women's concerns are represented in the GP. This way they can also ensure accountability of their candidate. The elected woman member co-opts other non-sangha women who have also been elected and encourages them to enlist women's concerns on their agenda. For Eg: Hanumavva, an elected sangha GP member wanted all her women colleagues in the GP to benefit from a training organised by MSK, so she invited them to the training. Even if the sangha woman loses she still learns a lot – the process of politicisation is a very important lesson in itself. She continues as a community leader and

sometimes supports the GP as an active sangha member and demands accountability from those elected to the GP.

Sangha women are also seen as pressure groups on women's issues and take on the responsibility of carrying women's concerns to the Gram Sabha. The Panchayat Raj Committee set up in every sangha acts as a watchdog to ensure that women's issues are represented through their candidate if she wins, or through other women who are elected to the GP. The sangha's have provided continued support to the sangha elected women representatives through the political processes, and thus created an enabling environment. The sangha experience, based as it is on women's agency, has enabled sangha elected women representatives (EWR's) to approach their role and tasks with gender and community interests at the centre. Several of the sangha EWR's have stayed accountable to the interests of poor women, establishing accountability mechanisms for themselves and for the processes of governance in general. They have been able to challenge patriarchy, class and caste barriers in their new roles. The sangha EWRs have challenged corruption, broken negative stereotypes of women and within the sphere of the gram panchayats, redefined political roles. The support structure of the Sanghas has the potential to function as the countervailing force to the co-optation of women Panchayat members into mainstream politics.

Women are articulate and effective in accessing resources for the sangha and community, they are challenging corruption and are creating positive images of women in the community. Eg: Dalit women who were not allowed into the village before are now publically honoured and called upon to hoist flags, and inaugurate occasions and the like.

However, despite being active in terms of accessing resources they have not been very successful in terms of challenging existing 'norms' and 'ideologies'. They are able to access only those resources that are normally available to any member. Their skills of articulation and confidence levels need to be built up. Many women are not effective, male relatives are de facto members of the panchayat.

It is clear by this time that much more needs to be done for meaningful participation of women in governance. The Gram Panchayat itself is powerless so it is vital to break through the isolation of the elected women representative, and equally vital to establish a solidarity network, a support and accountability mechanism for the EWR. These are seen by Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka as fundamental to the transformation of politics.

The 1993 elections saw a total of 209 sangha women elected to GPs. Eleven were Presidents and 13 Vice Presidents. Many of them won unanimously. Most of them were SC seats. Many others did not win because they were General seats. The February 2000 elections saw a total of 225 women from MSK sanghas elected to the GPs. Four were Chairpersons and 2 Vice Chairpersons. Very few women have been re-elected. Although a number of winning candidates has not increased dramatically, the quality of participation has been very different and more meaningful, consciously political.

Sangha women have discussed and negotiated with candidates in general and panchayat election. For example, women in Koppal spoke to the JD(U), JD(S) and the Congress and managed to get 50 bags of cement to repair temple, mosque and sangha. When we asked them whom they finally voted for they said "Why should we tell you?"

### **The Pitfalls**

Some women have had to spend large sums of money for election campaigns in March 2000. Very few women have been able to contest the taluk panchayat elections. Despite a large programme in Gulbarga for sangha women which discussed strategies for women to contest in the Taluk panchayat elections, nobody was given a party ticket.

This reinforces the idea of formation of sangha level committees for Governance and Panchayat Raj. Grassroot, issue based federations at the *ghataka*, Taluk and eventually the Zilla level which are linked to each other should come into being. One such will be the federation of PR committee members.

MSK is hoping to form a federation of both sangha and non-sangha elected women

representatives. They are working with SSF on this prospect. The federation is seen eventually as a nursery for EWRs. Sangha women elected to GPs are already meeting at the Sangha level. MSK hopes to facilitate a cluster meeting of sangha EWRs of 10 villages. Once that process is triggered it will need further efforts to form the Taluk federation.

**Some points from the Discussion:**

Dr. Jos Chathukulam opined that in a state like Maharashtra where political parties play a major role in the functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institutions it is important to evolve strategies to include the critical mass which exists in the panchayat but not in the parties.

This does not necessarily mean leftist or rightist inclinations but cadre or non-cadre leanings. The cadre party structure is rigid with no room for individual discretion, whereas the non-cadre structure allows for more freedom for the same. In Kerala it has been observed that a woman from cadre parties raises more issues than one from a rightist party.

In Karnataka the experiences are just the opposite. Gram Panchayat elections are a non party political process where all parties recognise this is the structure and that strategies have to be worked out differently.

Dr. Medha Lele in response shared that we must recognise the difference between the cadre left and non cadre right parties. The agenda of the right is anti-women so we must decide who is going to be on our side and align with those parties.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan shared that the Mahila Samakhya process is a political one but is based on a concern for women's issues. Conflicts will arise as seen in the Taluk Panchayat elections where it is easier to be bad than be good and to contest if money is guaranteed. The programme is not ignoring political parties but hopes to give a gender perspective to the PRI's through the women elected from the sanghas.

Ms. Aliyamma brought the point that it is not 'who' they are allied with, nor is it who is 'for' women and who is not, but it is what 'use' the political parties make of women and what use 'women' can make of the parties.

Ms. Medha Lele felt that the women within parties should not abandon the party but see how well they can work through it. This she felt was possible with the left parties.

At this point Ms. C.P.Sujaya intervened to compare it to the 'old' debate between the autonomous women's movement and the front of women in parties. The autonomous women's movement is not associated with women in PRIs. There is a thinking in the movement that women in parties are instruments of the parties as both the right and the left cadres used the women during the Independence Movement.

Aliyamma pointed out that ironically it is the BJP that has incorporated the language of women's groups more than any other party so we can't wish away the right cadres.

Suman Kolhar, who is herself a former Zilla Panchayat leader, also active member of a state political party, raised a vital question: "Why shouldn't women use political parties? In Arikere, a Congress strong hold, a woman got a BJP ticket. She agreed to become their candidate if the party listened to the demands of her group. If a village woman can use the party why not anyone else? If anybody knows me it is because of my party. When parties can use us why can't we?"

Dr. Rameshwari Varma felt that the autonomous women's movement should now think more about the politicisation of women.

Prof. Palanithurai shared the point that the interface between the GP and women's groups is a grey area in Tamil Nadu. The Self Help Groups (SHGs) are parallel movement. There was a time when political parties could mobilise women, now only NGOs can. The government realises this and sent a circular to an NGO asking them to encourage SHGs to participate in Gram Sabhas. There was participation so was a lot of conflict. The SHGs see the GP as a developmental institution. The GP on the other hand see themselves as a political institution. They had an agenda, but the SHGs raised questions regarding certain other issues which they were reluctant to address in the Gram Sabha. So, unless their role is clarified there will be conflicts.



Gram Panchayats get party support because they think the SHGs have the support of the NGO. The SHGs have good managerial skills unlike members of the GP, and if they are clubbed together in a harmonious way they can be effective.

Meera Saxena pointed out that GPs see themselves as a part of the establishment so they see SHGs as questioning their authority. The whole country is in the SHG mode, 1 lakh in Karnataka and 2.8 lakhs in AP with 20-30 women in each group is a large number of women. There should be a bridge between PRIs and SHGs so that they work as partners and not adversaries. The women's movement should work their strategies to be more effective. Isolation will not work.

Dr. Jayalakshmi from Andhra Pradesh shared her view that if outside support from SHGs make PRIs more effective, there is no evidence of it in Andhra Pradesh. There are lots of already existing committees like the *Van Suraksha Samithi*, Water users Association, Watershed Committee, Mothers Committee, School education committees in DPEP districts and other self help groups. Some of these committees are operating well in the most backward districts even, but these women are unable to lobby with EWRs even for an anganwadi centre. We must see how best these existing groups can be used to lobby with EWRs.

Dr. Jos Chathukulam felt that apart from the SHGs there are a number of organisations outside the PRIs. The PRIs themselves are rather helpless as they have no power at all. Mr.L.C.Jain was questioning the existing model of self governance. Is it then wise to put all the groups to create more problems for the PRIs? In Rajasthan and Kerala PR Acts, there is a Right to Information clause but no citizen can access information, at least not in Kerala.

Chairperson Meera Saxena concluded the session with her remarks that there are a plethora of committees working, and sometimes even with cross purposes. They are not able to influence decisions of the GP. One of the reasons could be that GPs see themselves outside these groups and another could be that the GPs themselves are powerless. She felt that just as the Mr. Murthy, Secretary, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development had shared the vested

interests that are against women's participation, are against the PRI itself. However, Karnataka is better than most states in the North. Here at least people express their opinions. This might create confusion but at least it indicates a healthy democracy. Fifty years is not a very long time. We are still evolving strategies, which will develop in course of time. In conflict, solutions will emerge. We need to feel more optimistic about the future.

### **Session 3 - Experiences from Karnataka**

**Chairperson : Ms C P Sujaya, Additional Chief Secretary, Himachal Pradesh (on Leave)**

**Paper presented by Prof. Abdul Aziz, Professor & Head, Decentralised Governance & Planning, ISEC, Bangalore:**

Abdul Aziz presented his paper on the experiences of women representatives in Karnataka.

**Excerpts from the Paper:** He opined that reservation of seats and authority positions for women have brought a large number of women to panchayats as members and presidents. The enhanced quota for women (compared to the previous regime) and the category wise reservation also brought into panchayats a large proportion of first generation elected representatives. Though this should be construed as a welcome development, in some quarters doubts are being expressed about the ability of women members to actually deliver the goods in the political space which is considered alien to them. A good deal of literature has emerged decrying "the larger than the life-size role" assigned to women in local governance. Indeed, bashing women members and presidents on this point has become fashionable in many circles even to the point of creating some myths about women's participation in the local governance system. The purpose of this note is to objectively evaluate the real and imaginary positions taken on the issue of women's representation in local governance.

#### **The Problem of Proxy :**

There is a view that since the number of positions in panchayats for women far exceeds the number of women who are competent and willing, the panchayats get packed with inexperienced, illiterate and incompetent women members. And since the seats for women are reserved and rotated there is no chance for the sitting member to contest

elections next time; hence, every election brings in a new woman member who may not have previous experience. To top it all, it is also stated that since many of them are sponsored candidates they actually tend to be proxies for relatives and local leaders. By and large, this is true. Generally speaking women members, when compared with their male counterparts, are less literate and less experienced. In such cases, relatives, especially husbands, and local leaders, especially the big land holders and contractors, serve as proxies to women members and women presidents. A recent study shows that the women members serve as a proxy to husbands, other relatives and local leaders, and that the proxy rate among them rises as one moves from membership of the panchayats to presidentship - for the presidentship the rate of proxy being much higher.

While admitting that the problem of proxy rule by relatives and local leaders is a fact of life, it may be desirable to note the following points:

Our experience is that the proxy phenomenon is not confined to women alone; male members are also subject to this charge especially those coming from the reserved category. A majority of the males in this category are illiterate, inexperienced and incompetent. In their case also, sponsorship has been a common practice in so far as the number of reserved positions are in excess of those who are competent and willing to contest. Under the circumstances, it is strange that so much noise is made about the proxy problem only in respect of women when it exists extensively among males also. This strange phenomenon needs to be understood.

He shared that during an formal/informal sort of discussion they once confronted the male members on the above issue, a point that emerged was that they were not against women becoming members of the panchayats; their objection was to women being offered Presidentship. The objection was based on their perception that women, especially when brought through the reservation channel, would not deliver the goods. The point that this possibility is highly probable even in respect of the male members coming through the same channel is glossed over!

Since women tend to be proxies largely for their family members and relatives, we interviewed some husbands and relatives to get a feel of why they shadowed the women members and presidents. The main point that emerged was the following: since the women are illiterate, elected for the first time and by reason of which are inexperienced they needed help and support from the close confidantes. Husbands and close relatives come in handy to fit the bill. Husbands and relatives also feel compelled to be always on the side of the women members especially with the woman president because if the latter made a mistake or conspired to make a mistake it will be a reflection on the family honour. Hence the relatives of the woman president in particular keep company just in case she needs any help. This is quite legitimate and there should not be any objection to the women members and presidents taking the advice of close relatives or even be guided by them. In fact, when women members came to training programmes, they came with their husbands/ relatives who even sat behind them in the session taking down notes on their behalf and even prompting them to answer a question and seek a clarification. If this is the role they play even back at home in the panchayat one should not have any objection to it. If the levels of awareness, perception and participation are an index of performance, then the performance levels of males does not appear to be too high to warrant creation of a myth that men can do better than women.

He went on to examine its qualitative aspect: Women members are much closer to home - to the immediate needs of the family. In so far as local governments are expected to meet the immediate needs of the family, the quality of women's perceptions appears to be a shade better.

He presented another incident in support of this point. A panchayat in Kolar district was debating a question as to how it can utilise a grant received from an organisation. The male members of the panchayat proposed that an additional dairy building may be constructed using those funds as the present one was congested. Two women members who were present stood up and made an alternative proposal. They argued that the building where the anganawadi children are housed presently was dilapidated and as such it may collapse any time causing death of the young children. Hence, there was an urgent

need to put up an anganawadi building. That the final decision went in favour of the dairy building is a different story. But the fact is that the concern of the women members to the safety of children cannot escape our attention.

Another case was revealing. A Grama Panchayat did not have a panchayat building. So, the panchayat took a decision to put up a building for the purpose on a two *guntas* private plot belonging to a panchayat member who offered it for a price of Rs.20,000. A woman member intervened to make a suggestion. She said that it was atrocious to squander the precious panchayat funds on purchase of land. She suggested that an announcement may be made to the effect that whichever village comes forward to donate two *guntas* of land, the panchayat will decide to locate the panchayat building in that village. If land is thus obtained free of cost, the amount that would have gone by way of price to be paid for land could be used for construction of the building or providing amenities to the villagers. Though the decision taken obviously went against her suggestion, the logic involved in her argument cannot be missed. (Though the awareness levels of women are lower, the levels of their perceptions and participation are not far below those of male members. Moreover, qualitatively women capture the felt needs that are nearer home and the needs identified by them are of immediate nature. However, women members seem to be constrained from having their say in the decision-making process. As a result, they tend to lose out to the male members. This result may be due to their inability to lobby with other members and officials, their low levels of articulation skills, and perhaps due to lack of information. Therefore, it appears that asymmetry of information, inability to lobby and to be articulate act as constraints on them to get the decisions in their favour. If these constraints are overcome by providing them with full information about the panchayat system, training them in the art of articulation and lobbying, they possibly will effectively influence decision-making. This makes out a case for organising special training programs for women to provide them with relevant information and to impart skills of articulation and lobbying.

In a training programme organised by ISEC for 700 ZP members, it was very encouraging to see that 250 women responded. The women chose to sit at the other end because the men crowded around the Resource Persons. It took 2 days before the women participated. He

quoted "the first day women did not speak; the second day a few of them spoke a little; the third day they all spoke and the fourth day they roared". By the end of the programme the women were active participants at the training.

The Panchayat Raj minister once said "I don't know what ISEC has done" and narrated an incident when the lady ZP member requested the CEO to lend his car (a new one) because her old car had broken down. When he refused she seized his car and told him that the ZP administration was the Executive head and she was therefore entitled to the use of a car – more than he was. This CEO status to the elected representatives was a result of ZP members and organisations lobbying with the Chief Minister to bring back the old system instead of the 1993 Act where the CEO is the Chief Executive of the ZP. This is a small victory but their term has been reduced from five years to 18 months.

**The paper concluded with the following points:**

Training is an important strategy to ensure qualitative participation of the women elected to Panchayats. It should not be a 'hit and run' affair but should be sustained on a continued basis.

Elected women representatives have to be encouraged to link up with NGOs and self help groups and other local groups. This is essential not only to enlist their support but to also get a feed back from the community they represent.

**Paper by Dr. Shanta Mohan, Fellow, Gender Studies Unit, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore**

Shanta Mohan in her narration drew attention to statements that though women have been elected to local bodies, their participation is limited, that they have been less effective than men and that they have not made much of a difference to PRIs. She shared that women have not performed simply because their priorities are very different from men's priorities, and so far norms of 'effectiveness' have been asserted by men.

At NIAS, she said they were interested in evolving strategies to effect engendered governance. Good governance is not necessarily gendered governance. Engendered

governance not only includes awareness, perception and participation of elected members but also encourages transparency and accountability to the community they represent. Another important aspect is resource mobilisation and activation of people in the community by their representatives.

- ❖ Men don't think they need to be accountable or transparent about their dealings while carrying out projects of the GP.
- ❖ Through our field experiences in NIAS we have learnt that the strongest difference between men and women is that women are less corrupt and therefore more accountable and women want to deliver and therefore more transparent.
- ❖ If we look at their priorities as far as resource mobilising is concerned, during elections men were seen mobilising money for liquor packets, and women were mobilising human resources. They were encouraging other women and youth to vote for them. Some of the young respondents were confident that women can deliver the goods.
- ❖ If we consider their expectation from the community its always a top down flow of perception from man to man. Whereas a woman cuts caste/class barriers in her approach.
- ❖ The rotation system has made it almost impossible for a woman to re-contest from the same constituency. It means losing her constituency. The way to tackle this issue is to strengthen community support not necessarily local organisations – but other groups in the community should be encouraged to have a good rapport with the elected woman representative (EWR). She must be equipped with the necessary skills to take their views to the GP.
- ❖ One question we have to ask is how is it that the MLAs have the freedom to contest from the same constituency every time? Why is there no rotation for them? Women who were articulate because of the support of organisations like ISST, SEARCH were not allowed to re-contest saying they should give another woman a chance. Why is it that women are the ones who are expected to give another woman a chance? Do men operate like that?
- ❖ Last elections many women were elected unanimously. Then local dynamics played a very important role. But some women who were unanimously elected said, "at least

we're elected". They knew they were a force to reckon with once in the GP. This time around women who were articulate and had some visibility were not allowed to re-contest.

This time again many women have been elected unanimously. But the parties played a major role in the just concluded elections. When men were asked how they will connect with the community they said they will ask the party. But when we told them that the GP is supposed to be apolitical there were no comments. A new dilemma was expressed – GP members who do not belong to the same party as TP and ZP members find it difficult to get their work done through their offices. It is that much more difficult for an elected woman who lacks lobbying skills and does not have organisational support to tackle the TP and ZP members.

The community on the other hand is aware of their representatives' strength and weaknesses. In fact during one of our field visits they would suggest the names of elected women they felt we should meet. One of the reasons cited by men for accompanying their wives to GP meetings was the fear that she will be harassed, some even feared rape. One woman who was fed up of being chaperoned said, "Please ask him how many times he has beaten me?".

Finally we should not ignore the rich experience that exists in the earlier members. We should facilitate that resource to support women who have been newly elected. It is essential that a network of elected women both past and present is formed which will be a constant force for women to draw strength from.

#### Some points from the Discussion:-

Dr. Manikyamba responding to Prof. Aziz she said that the tenure of Chairpersons to the Gram Panchayats in Andhra Pradesh was five years, unlike one year as it is in Karnataka. She recalled a proposal put forward at a Delhi seminar which appealed that women contest from the same constituency for at least two terms ie. Reservation for women members and for women Presidents should be for two terms.



Women's literacy levels are low compared to men. Added to that some of them also lack lobbying skills. Another important aspect is that men do not like sharing power. Efforts have been made by parties to prevent capable women from participating. Despite all this women have made a difference.

Citing an example of how a sensitive Mandal Development officer can make a difference Manikyamba said that when elected women representatives were called for a training programme, many men attended instead of their spouse. She ignored excuses that women would not understand the proceedings of the training and sent back the men asking them to send the women who were elected.

Dr. Jos Chathukulam agreed with Prof. Aziz that women require lobbying skills to function in the gram panchayat. However, in a panchayat where women are a minority it is ultimately a question of numbers while making decisions. He added that in Kerala, the Principles of Subsidiarity is followed, where despite the linkage between GP, TP & ZP, the GP has well defined functions. Just because it is the lowest in the ladder it is not under the control of the Taluk and Zilla Panchayat. Only if issues are not settled at the Gram Panchayat level they are taken to the TP and there again if it is not addressed it goes to the ZP.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan congratulated Dr. Shanta Mohan and specially commended Prof. Aziz for his incredible presentation. She agreed with them saying women would make a big difference to good governance but it will take time. Men have messed around in the name of governance in the past 50 years and it is unfair to expect women to make a difference the very first term. When one is talking about good governance the yardsticks should define what is effective and what is not. When one is thinking about a federation vertical linkages are very important as they can either play a positive role or can create stumbling blocks.

Aliyamma felt that the issue of engendered governance is not at all viewed as an issue by political parties. It is kept outside the mainstream. In Kerala, 40% of the budget is with the GPs, the rest is still with the government. For example, Kerala despite being a small state has 3 airports and the 4<sup>th</sup> one is being built. If the government wants to take up development

projects the GP is not consulted because they have already made their deals with the MNCs and have made their own decisions.

The 'in-thing' with the foreign funders is SHGs and micro credits. Just as in Karnataka where there will be 1 lakh SHGs this year, Kerala is also organising women to form SHGs. Other women's issues are invariably not on the PRI agenda.

Prof. Palanithurai drawing his experiences in Tamil Nadu felt that on the issue of proxy, when men are helping women by taking notes it can be welcomed but occupying space created for women is very bad. Some elected women representatives in Tamil Nadu expressed their hesitation to participate in their husband's presence despite the fact that they have managed PR activities. A government order was passed in Tamil Nadu which prevented the presence of the husband in the GP meeting when the wife was a member. Women have to try and make the best of their presence in a decision making body.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan shared that the problem with the new SHGs is that they are setup within 6 months with no socio-development leaning and are economically better off than the sanghas which have evolved after years of women organising themselves. These women still have problems getting loans, whereas banks seem much more accessible to the new SHGs. A meeting with women from SHGs in Kerala revealed that they had managed to get water supplied to their area by mobilising the members of their ward. In that meeting, 9 women were absent. When the visitors enquired about their absence they were told that one of them was unable to come because of being beaten by her alcoholic husbands. The point here is that the SHG did not think they could use their strength to tackle issues of domestic violence – they felt it was a personal issue and that women should sort out their own problems at home. Also SHGs do not necessarily attend the Gram Sabha.

Dr. Rameshwari Varma felt that if SHGs have to be vehicles of social change, some kind of social change attitudes have to be included. They have followed the Bangladesh pattern, but merely recipients of money from above cannot bring about social change. In fact they will be more a nuisance.

Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay shared that Economics is a dismal science. In our study of the status of women in economically advanced households we saw that most of them were involved in income generation activities. As donor agencies are tripping over each other to start SHGs it is seen that dowry demands have also gone up. SHGs have been co-opted by the huge international community, which is making a mess of things. Unfortunately a lot of money and power is involved in these transactions.

Meera M. narrated her meeting with a few officers of the RDPR department where ISST was confronted with the only omnipresent question " what economic activities do we promote and if we don't that we better add that as one of the components because the current priority is SHGs! However effective programs we may conduct but for the government to take it seriously SHG must be a part!

She drew from her earlier experiences with economic empowerment programs right from like the new SJSRY Scheme way back to DWCRA and such others and felt that even when the schemes envisaged a clear social agenda it finally looked good only on paper and not really reached the lives of these SHG members. She shared that the most humorous part was when in fact an offer was made then and there to ISST for training GP members with a 'solid' economic module.

Manikyamba felt that there should be an extension of 2 terms for reservation to Chairpersons post. C.P.Sujaya added that two terms for the change in roster needs to be recommended.

Dr. Jos Chathukulam supported the view and felt the same seat should be reserved for 2 terms otherwise women have only 2 options to either migrate to another constituency, or field themselves from the General seat.

C.P.Sujaya added that the roster problem prompted Madhu Kishwar to prepare an Alternative Bill. We should look into it and lend our views to this effort.

Manikyamba suggested that to prevent proxy, the officer concerned should take up the responsibility and ensure that men do not sit in the meetings where their wives are members. She felt that women's groups are not too interested to go to villages. There is a lot to learn from women in the grassroot so it is necessary that women's groups associate themselves closely with them. Elected women representatives should also network with large groups outside their immediate sanghas.

Dr. Shanta Mohan felt that SHGs in Andhra Pradesh show that a poor woman's money is given to the NGO which is associated with the SHG. The NGO in turn was lending her money to her husband. Ultimately the woman is held responsible when it is pay-back time. So SHGs might in fact be working opposite to their very purpose. As far as rotation is concerned, it is impossible for a woman to compete from another constituency when her mobility is so restricted.

Prof. Aziz opined that there is no hard statistical data to prove whether men shadowing women to the GPs actually helps or works oppositely. In response to Palanithurai's concern whether men are just helping if they are taking the decisions Prof. Aziz narrated an incident. The Ford Foundation had given a grant to 7 GPs in a Taluk in Karnataka. A member of a big village persuaded an elected woman representative of a small village to give her money to put up a shop in the big village. The money earned through rent could be used by the small GP. Though the woman initially agreed, she changed her mind after she discussed it with her husband. In this incident what role did the husband play? Did he just help his wife or did he take the decision himself? Ultimately, participation is the responsibility of the group which will benefit from the decision made. Reacting to Dr. Jos's point he said that the number of women cannot be changed is very relevant at a time when the Parliament is still debating on the reservation at the MLA level. In that case, can we replicate All Women GPs? But there also the example of Andhra Pradesh shows that it was ineffective because men manipulated it for their benefit.

C.P.Sujaya in her closing remarks as the chairperson felt that Mr. Murthy's point that for women to be effective, PRIs should be effective is worrying. Women should be seen as a touch-stone to look at the quality of PRIs. That is sufficient for now. We can't wait for the PRIs to be effective to allow women to make a difference.

## DAY II

### Session 4 Experiences of Elected Women Representatives from Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Chairperson : Prof. Abdul Aziz,

#### Experience Sharing by Thresiamma Antony, President, Amboori Gram Panchayat, Ernakulam District:

"I belong to Amboori Gram Panchayat, Neyyattinkara. I was elected during 1995 September election from a women's reservation ward. In Kerala, because of the high political involvement, I had to contest with 7 other candidates from all parties. I have an MSc. Degree in Mathematics. As a student I was an active member of the Student's Federation of India, was the Vice-Chairperson in college, was a member of the KSSP and was part of the People's Science Movement. Politics was not new to me.

Amboori has a population of 20,000 people. My ward has a 1600 population. It is a 60% ST sector and the most problematic ward of the Gram Panchayat.

I did not make many promises when I stood for elections. To go to my ward, I had to cross a river through ferry boat which was in a very damaged shape. During the first year of my tenure, another woman from the UDF was the President. In the first meeting I asked her to get the ferry boat repaired or replace it. She did not do anything about the problem and in fact made comments as to why a Communist party person was elected as peoples representative. Because one of the ferry boat was fully damaged, people tied bamboo logs and tried to cross the river but one day it turned over and a woman died. This was the saddest incident that occurred during my tenure. Within a month a no-confidence motion was passed against that President and I was elected. The first thing I did was to use the Rs. 1 lakh we received to buy two ferry boats.

The People's Plan Campaign started only in 1997. Only after that I could get involved and solve problems. The first year we received Rs. 26,65,000. We convened a special gram sabha and presented a development report. Projects were formed according to priority by the

people. Second year we received Rs. 37,80, 000 and by the third year we got Rs.45 lakh. This year we received Rs.42,46,000.

Now if there is any urgent problem, the panchayat is able to solve it. Plan preparation needs some academic expertise. Task forces meet and discuss how to allocate funds for different sectors according to requirements.

The People Plan Campaign aims at enhancement of productivity, eradication of poverty and elimination of corruption. During the first phase, it was said that there would be a special woman's consideration in all projects. The Second year, a government order said 10% of the budget would be reserved for women under the Women's Component Plan, but GPs had no idea how this could be used to enhance the status of women. Now women are in a better position than they were earlier, as women's organisations under the block were not effective. Now the focus is around 14 Anganwadis, new women's groups have been organised, awareness campaigns are conducted and cultural activities/competitions are organised for women to expose their talents.

I have formed 20 Self Help Groups to remove economic backwardness of women. They hold weekly meetings where not only savings are done but they also involve in problems of women. To welcome the millenium, 500 women from the neighbourhood groups went on a rally. This was the first time that the GP was encouraging visibility to women. Men now ask that they also should have projects to elevate the status of men. Because of systematic planning the Best Panchayat award went to Kunnathukav Panchayat and the second Best Panchayat was my Panchayat.

I am very satisfied with my work as the President of my Panchayat. There have been days when I have worked till 3 o'clock in the morning. My panchayat managed to stop the control of the bureaucracy. A Secretary was suspended because of mal-practices. We have managed transparency in beneficiary selection and in eliminating corruption.

As a woman headed panchayat we have managed to construct a new building for the panchayat, a veterinary hospital, housing for the people in our panchayat, 400 latrines and have supplied electricity to tribal hamlets among other achievements..

Kerala government has shown political will. People's Plan Campaign brought in a new development perspective. The Women's Component Plan is new so we need a lot of support from NGOs and women's groups".

**Margaret Mary, Union Chairperson, Attur Block, Dindigul District,  
Tamil Nadu**

The present DMK government in Tamil Nadu under the leadership of Dr. M. Karunanidhi has given life to the PRIs. It has ensured 33.3 % reservation for women to these institutions.

When I was asked by my party to stand for elections, I was initially reluctant as I could not dare speak in front of a gathering. Standing before a mike terrified me. But it was the local minister who encouraged me to contest and with the help of women in my community, I got elected. Despite the fact that I was always friendly and 'social' with people around me, I was still inhibited to interact with men. However, once I was elected and knew I had the support of the people I overcame this shyness.

The first six months of my tenure were the best. I earned a lot of respect, as I was the President of my Panchayat. The officials would come home to inform me of meetings and would approach me for permission to do certain jobs. They were under the impression that I enjoyed the same powers as the President of the previous Panchayat. Later when they got to know exactly where I figured in the hierarchy, they started creating problems. I was no longer respected, they stopped cooperating with me, so much so that I would not even be aware of meetings they would have called.

In a workshop organized in SIRD for women elected to Panchayats, we had the opportunity to discuss our problems and try and find solutions. One lady from Kanyakumari shared her experience with us. She was a Block Panchayat President and on an occasion when she had

to travel along with the BDO in her jeep, she was made to sit behind. The fact that the BDO was given the seat in the front only demonstrates who is more powerful. When she protested that she would rather occupy the front seat she was chided. After listening to this account, we all decided that if there is another instance where we have to take a back seat to the BDO we will protest. Now we travel in the front seat. Most of us present at the meeting expressed the feeling of total powerlessness in front of the arrogance of the officials. We had to constantly bear the brunt of their impoliteness.

There were several instances of women Council members who do not attend meetings because they are represented by their husbands. The first few council meetings invariably have the attendance of the women councilors, their husbands, other male councilors and officials. Only after an orientation course imparted to women Councilors did they start attending meetings on their own.

Another issue we discussed was the lack of linkages between the 3 tiers of Panchayat. There are times when an elected representative has to give priority to people's immediate needs, instead of getting caught up with rules and procedures.

An SC hamlet close to Athoor had severe water shortage. The woman panchayat member was receiving several petitions from the people of that community. When she took up the problem in the panchayat, it was ignored. On the one hand, she was unable to bring upon her colleagues the acute need of the community and on the other hand she had to face lots of problems in the form of harassment from the disappointed villagers. Finally she managed to provide water connection from Athoor to the SC village. The people were very happy and just as they were expressing their gratitude to their representative she got a summons from the Municipal Corporation asking her what right she had to provide water without the permission of the Corporation.

The incident did not end there. In her attempt to bring an end to the problem of alcoholism in Athoor, the women panchayat member with her panchayat support brought a ban on the brewing of illicit liquor and provided those who were employed by this trade, with IRDP



loans for them to make a living otherwise. This attempt was politicized and mixed with the attempt to provide water to the SC hamlet, thereby causing unnecessary problems for all concerned. In a meeting held in the wake of all this commotion, I told those gathered that just because the river was running through their village they were claiming the water as theirs and therefore did not want it to be diverted to another village. In a state where we don't want to share water with our neighbors in our villages, how can we demand that we get water from our neighboring state through the Quaver?

I am convinced that the root cause of many problems is the corruption of the leaders who encourage this system of throwing money to get their work done. People are so corrupted by it that no work gets done without being bribed. What then is the fate of those who are sincere and conscientious or those who cannot afford to give money?

In the face of such evils it is the responsibility of elected women representatives to be fearless but assertive. Women headed Panchayats, known to be less corrupt have to be encouraged to break the strangle hold of corruption and various nexus put in place by their predecessors.

**Ashwathamma Narayan Reddy, Former President, Chandapura Gram Panchayat, Bangalore Rural Taluk.**

I belong to a farming community, but was also working with a women's group in our Taluk. Though I was a Congress party supporter, a BJP person approached me to stand for elections. I was reluctant initially, so were my family members. But later they convinced me to stand after being coerced by this BJP leader. I stood for elections and was unanimously selected to be the President of the Chandapura Gram Panchayat. It was after this that all my problems started. The BJP man who had supported me began pressurising me to join his party. I refused. Then he wanted me to sign a 'Katha' for his land despite him not paying tax. When I refused that also, he threatened to take the matter up with the Lokayukta. He could not bear the fact that I was denying to make unlawful concessions to him who was responsible for my becoming the President. I could not bring myself to go

against my conscience and by-pass laws just in return for his support. But when the matter went to the Lokayukta, I got a little worried. I spent 3 sleepless nights wondering what the outcome will be. But I had the support of the people in my village and the Assistant Commissioner Ms. Ramanjaneya gave me a lot of courage saying that things will be alright and that I need not worry because I was not guilty. The case came up, the man was told to pay up his betterment charges if he wanted his *katha* and the matter was settled.

I faced the threat of a no-confidence motion when I proposed the construction of a 10 bed hospital. This did not deter me and I managed to get it sanctioned by the Taluk Panchayat. Whenever I was opposed or my position threatened it only made me stronger and more determined in my beliefs.

During my tenure as a GP President, I have managed to construct:

- ❖ 6 overhead tanks
- ❖ 26 shops
- ❖ form 66 Mahila Mandals and DWACRA supported Self Help Groups
- ❖ a Granary
- ❖ 98 houses for the homeless
- ❖ compound walls for 6 anganwadis and provide these anganwadis with toilets.

My village does not have a market/shopping complex, so I wanted to construct one. The estimated earning from it would have been Rs.5 lakhs if an initial investment of Rs.4 lakhs was sanctioned. But the government sanctioned only Rs.25,000/- so the shopping complex has not yet come up. My other dream was to construct another 10 bed hospital which was fully equipped but I could not get the money sanctioned for it. I have managed to get 2 acres of land for the hospital though. I received an award for the best Gram Panchayat leader from ISST. I am also the proud recipient of a Common Wealth Award for my success as an elected woman representative.

**Some Points from the Discussion:-**

Dr. Revathi Narayanan reiterated that many elected women representatives saw Gram Panchayat work as community service. In such a situation it is just as well that women who

have spent 5 years (one term) in office feel that others should get a chance to do their bit. In that case we can appreciate the roster system for enabling a new set of leaders to do their bit for the community. If the Gram Panchayat is seen as a political space for community service and not an office of profit, then conceptually are we looking for more and more people to get into community service? Isn't the rotation system creating that space? If politically articulate and literate women are elected to those spaces and are in power, they just need 6 months to get a hang of the whole system. The fact that most of the Mahila Samakhya Sangha women have not been re-elected because of the rotation system is worrying, but ultimately, isn't political office a space for community service?

Suman Kolhar served the Zilla Parishad as a Vice President for 5 years. After that she had to devote more time to her family and managing both would have been stressful. Despite not being in active politics she is a very valuable resource for those newly in Panchayats. She has her experience to share with them. Isn't that what we want? In the words of L. C. Jain, "Don't look at one term, look after 5 terms – see how many have been touched".

Manikyamba: It is clear from this session that women are not after power but are service oriented. In that case do they require the support of women's groups? What kind of assistance do they need? Have they faced male domination in their GPs? What are the lessons they can pass on to the future EWRs?

Dr. Jos Chathukulam: The roster system offers only two options. That a woman willing to contest for the second time has to do so from another constituency which has reservation for her, or she should contest for the general seat. Another problem exclusive to women is the fact that they migrate to another village after marriage. It is very difficult then for an EWR to continue.

The women who have completed one term in Kerala invariably withdraw completely from GP work unlike here in Karnataka where they say they are willing to help the newly elected women and provide support from outside.

**Responses from the Elected Women Members in the Panel:**

Thresiamma, Kerala: "Women have to have the support of other women in their community, and will benefit greatly if they have the support of women's groups. Without this support women cannot stand for elections. All women have an uphill task in their struggle not only against patriarchy, but also party leaders and the bureaucracy. Only with the support of women's groups can women work in the system, and try to eliminate corruption".

Ashwathamma, Karnataka: "Women in my Panchayat meet regularly. I can assure the participation of at least 700 women if anything is planned in my constituency. The Congress is aware of my popularity and wants me to stand for the Taluk Panchayat elections. But where were they when I was being harassed by the BJP leader? Why didn't they come forward to help me when I was threatened and the window of my car was broken right in my neighbourhood which is full of Congress sympathizers? I was so disillusioned with the politics they play and with the way they were using me. So I decided not to get involved in these elections. I told them I will become an MLA, then again they threatened to hoist a black flag to condemn me".

Margaret Mary, Tamil Nadu: "Not only in Tamil Nadu but women all over India are faced with discrimination which begins from the time, they are born. In Tamil Nadu there are specific areas (Usilampatti, Salem) where the life of a girl child is snuffed out as soon as she is born. If women have the support of women's groups they can do much more for the benefits of their community".

**Session 5 - Experience Sharing by Sharanavva, EWR, Gulbarga;**  
**Suman Kolhar, Ex-Vice President, Zilla Panchayat, Bijapur;**  
**Jyothi Kulkarni, Coordinator, MSK, Gulbarga district;**  
**Prema Gopalan, Swayam Shikshan Prayog, Maharashtra**

**Chairperson: Dr. Revathi Narayanan**

**Sharanavva, Former member, Keribhosga Gram Panchayat, Gulbarga**

"I am here to share my experiences as an elected woman representative. The Mahila Samakhya (MSK) *sahayogini* (field functionary) helped us form our sangha in my village.

We would meet and discuss various issues and collect our savings for the week. When the elections were announced in 1994 it was the MSK people who met us and encouraged us to contest. Most of us were reluctant. Some of us had family constraints and others felt that they wouldn't be appropriate because they were uneducated. Finally, after much encouragement I thought there is no harm in trying. So I stood for elections and was elected unanimously.

Initially I did not know what to do. The notice would come home and I would go for meetings. I did not know who was the big shot in the Gram Panchayat. One day I asked the pump attendant who the 'Boss' was, whether the Bill collector or the Secretary. He told me I was the boss!

Once, I got to know that children had not received the books sanctioned to them by my Panchayat. When I enquired about it I was told that they had been distributed. On cross checking I found out that the money had been pocketed by some of the members in my Panchayat. I requested them to return the money where it belonged and that if such a practice were brought to the notice of the higher-ups they would get into trouble.

I did not get this courage just by being an elected woman representative. I had the support of the people in my community and was confident of the support of the women in my sangha. They all wanted me to stand again but I told them that I had learnt a lot in the past 5 years so now someone else had to take the benefit of being elected.

In a room like this where there are so many of you present, I can be heard because all of you are staying quiet. If you make a noise how will I be heard? The same way, I could do all I did because I had people's cooperation. But I think I could have achieved more if I was educated. I encouraged another woman from my sangha to stand and we all lent her Rs.800 to file her nomination and other expenses. This money we took out from our savings.

I think all of us have to be oriented into how the GP functions, our role, the role of the Secretary etc. It is very necessary because if we are not aware, we will not know who is in charge and where the money goes. Our Secretary wanted us to give him full control over

the funds that came to our GP. We told him that we would identify the needs of our community and we would take decisions on how the Rs.1 lakh is spent.

The one thing, which was left to do, which I think is very important is the high school building, which will greatly benefit the girls. This project has been ignored because we are so close to Gulbarga and people think children can easily go to school there. But I know that a school in the village will mean more girls will be able to study at least till Std. 10. Otherwise they have to either take a bus or cycle down to Gulbarga for higher education. I hope this school gets built in the near future”.

**Jyothi Kulkarni, District Programme Co-ordinator, Mahila Samakhya Gulbarga,**

“In our interactions with elected women representatives, whenever we asked them if they would stand again, 50% of the women said they cannot. Some said the seat won't be reserved and it would be difficult to contest from another constituency, others said they would try to stand for the General seat. Then again when they were asked what they would do if there were a seat reserved for them many women were reluctant to re-contest because the previous term was not as empowering an experience as they expected. Women from upper castes did not contribute to the working of the panchayat. In fact there were many instances where they just signed the attendance register at home. The sangha women on the other hand were largely SC/ST women who diligently attended meetings. They were quite often questioned by their community and held responsible for issues that did not get addressed.

Listening to the responses of the ex-members we decided to conduct training for women who were interested to stand for the forthcoming elections. Eighty women came for this training and many of them wanted to know how to canvass, file nominations, whom to go to for support etc.

Meanwhile, I had attended a workshop conducted by Aalochana in Pune. There, I learnt about the 14 All women GPs. This inspired me to come back home and encourage our women to form an all women GP. It would be good if we succeeded, but we did not have

much to lose. We decided to try this in a Taluk, which was close to us, which we could follow-up. Initially we went to Maadgol GP which constitutes 4 villages and 2 *taandis*. It also had 5 MSK sanghas. We showed them the 'Aadarsha Gram Panchayat' videotape, distributed pamphlets about the all women GPs in Maharashtra, put up banners and literally went from house to house telling people about the All Women GPs.

Despite all this we did not get any support. The matter went up to the local Minister who tried to get support, but finally only 6 women stood. There were 14 seats in all. All the 6 women won, the rest of the seats were won by the men. This experience did not prevent us from continuing our efforts. By now we had got the hang of village politics, so we decided to go to Athnur.

There we met the big men in charge and other local ZP members and TP officials and talked them into encouraging the people of Athnur to elect an All Women GP. We told them that the men did not do much in the past 5 years and that by electing only women to the panchayat things could not get worse. In fact the sanctity of the Panchayat will be restored as there will be no incidents of drinking or misbehavior and instances of 'chappal throwing' will be a thing of the past.

Athnur GP has 3 villages. We went to meet the women of the SC/ST colony and convinced them to stand. 14 out of 16 women won unopposed. Two men opposed the 2 women who stood in the general seat. They were made to believe that the General seat was not meant for women. Then after we convinced them that the General seats were open to women also, (with examples of Sushma Swaraj and Sonia Gandhi) and after we told them that we were not denying men of a chance, but just wanted to elect an All women GP, people promised not to vote for these 2 men. The police were informed and after we made our stand clear these men withdrew their nominations. The elections went off smoothly – there was no distribution of liquor during campaigning. People are now waiting to see the effect of the all women GP on their village progress.

The President of the Panchayat has a Pre-University education, 2 women have passed their SSLC and others also have some years in school. The Panchayat has women representing all the castes in the villages.

These women from Athnur GP attended the MSK National Mela in Delhi on March 8<sup>th</sup>. They also attended a one-day training as an introduction to GP functioning. They have formed women's sangha in all the three villages.

The President belongs to the family, which did not allow her out of her house for anything. Her husband had installed idols of virtually all the deities of the Hindu pantheon in his courtyard so that his wife need not go out of the house even to worship. This woman is now attending meetings, trainings, went to Delhi for the Mela and played an important role in organizing the MSK two-day Mela in her village for over 300 women from Mahila Samakhya Sanghas".

**Experience Sharing by Suman Kolhar, Former Vice-President Zilla Parishad,  
Bijapur District**

"In 1987, 25% of the seats were reserved for women to the ZP. This was a welcome sign in a state, which had 30 years of Congress stronghold in politics. There were three seats reserved for women. The previous Vice President got his relative, a woman to stand. I was also approached and another woman was elected unanimously. People wanted me to stand so I gave up my initial hesitation thinking that I had nothing to lose. I had no money, no experience, no Godfather and I was quite disappointed with the way officers functioned. So I thought if I won I would try and make a difference. I stood for elections and won by 3000 votes. I was elected Vice President of the Bijapur ZP. All the time I reminded myself that now that I have stepped out of my house and taken up public office, I had to uphold my family's respect. The Panchayat work was just for five years, whereas my family I needed for the rest of my life.



Initially, we (the other 2 women and I) just sat through the first few meetings. Later when I figured how the system worked, I started participating in the decisions taken. I felt also that our presence (elected women) made a big difference to the use of the funds – we did not collude with nor did we ignore any misuse of funds. We always wanted to do something new for our district. Bijapur is a historical place so in our tenure in the ZP, we tried our best to make it a tourist stop over. The officers in the various departments were very happy with our work as people's representatives.

Another incident to demonstrate how I learned the ropes little by little. Once a petitioner came to me and said the "Jai" was being very irresponsible and not cooperating with her. I did not know whom she was talking about and asked her who this "Jai" was? She said, "He is that Jai" – the guy who makes plans and all that! She meant the JE (Junior Engineer).

- The rotation system is very unjust. The seats that are to be reserved for the President and Vice President posts are not announced well in advance as they should be so that women know where they can stand from.
- The present Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act is so powerless, so people who stood in the 1987 elections are not prepared to stand in these elections. Those who have finished one term are also not willing to spend another 5 years in an Institution, which does not grant them any powers.
- Women also are faced with the criticism that they look 'ajeeb' (out of place) on the chair in the Panchayat. Just as we get used to seeing one sharing another's responsibilities we must get used to accepting women in positions of power.
- Another drawback in the present local governance set up is that members of these local bodies are expected to work for the community's development without being corrupt. They should have the facilities that MPs and MLAs have – in fact some of their unnecessary expenses can be cut and given to members of PRIs. It is unfair to expect a Gram Panchayat member to show results even if it means spending from her own pocket.

- If a person can afford to stand for elections it is not a problem but someone who wants to stand but does not have the means to, will probably take loans with the hope of recovering it once elected which only means resorting to corrupt practices.
- What we should capitalise on now is the experience of women who were members of previous panchayats. It is important therefore that a platform is created to facilitate interactions between ex-members and present members. They can form a federation, which will support them in their carrying out of their responsibilities.
- Maneka Gandhi had said that women should not be given reservation that they should come up on their own etc. I ask, if she did not have the reservation of being in the 'Gandhi family' how could she have got elected herself? Women should be encouraged to join politics, and reservation is a must to enable their contribution to the political process.
- Women should be made Presidents of political parties and not just presidents of the women's wing of parties. Only then will they be more accepted in politics.
- In a polity, that believes in distributing not milk but alcohol packets to people buy votes, elections are increasingly dependent on the spending power of candidates. One who can spend more on alcohol and other means is expected to fare better than another who cannot afford it. So it is now time to encourage more women to enter the political arena and make a difference to the current face of social governance".

**Prema Gopalan, Swayam Shikshan Prayog, Mumbai**

"I represent an organization called SSP – Swayam Shikshan Prayog which means learning from oneself. It is a network of rural organisations, which was formed a decade ago. After the Latur earthquake, SSP worked with GPs and women's groups for the reconstruction of Latur. The women's groups included self-help groups, which provided the economic base to later address practical issues. Savings and credit were also used as a tool to organise women into more groups. Our organization worked under the assumption that it was not only the responsibility of women elected to GPs but also all women's groups to play a key role in all the development decisions made for their panchayat. They had to gain experience in accounting and management of resources and had to enter government planning processes. No theoretical training could be imparted but a churning process had to be

facilitated where development agenda could become a part of politics, where elected women representatives don't just function but also take up development issues. So we started mobilizing people around issues that concerned them. The effect of the last 5 years where even Mahila Mandals involved in cultural activities were activated can be seen in a place which was devastated by the earthquake. Women activated Gram Panchayats in 300 villages. Those who had not stepped out of their houses were organized – the cause was rebuilding their homes.

Gram Sabha's were called for by women, as it is not only the GPs prerogative to call a Gram Sabha. Sarpanch were coerced to attend the Gram Sabhas by these groups, who thereby established themselves as active players in local governance. No training as such is imparted – every situation encountered is treated as a training situation. Women also go on a study tour to the Taluk office, where they go from table to table to observe where they can get what work done.

One group of women was not happy with just being one part of women's groups so with the support of the collector they activated the PDS Vigilance Committee. This did create some conflict with the Gram Panchayat, but it also forced the GP to get active. Then once these women were given identity cards as members of the ration shop monitoring committee, they started monitoring schools, health centres and other public service units. This strategy of women's groups taking on the monitoring role has evolved without any planning.

When these groups have a responsible role to play they can forge alliances with local bodies with excellent results. There is tension at times especially when it is the collective leadership of the group against the individual leaders in politics.

Another area of conflict is the fact that Mahila Mandals and self help groups have lots of money as opposed to the Rs.1 lakh that the GPs has. This way they can mobilise more resources than a GP can. For example, these groups collect community contribution for repairs of pipes, roads etc. They ensure that the GP takes up certain project saying they will collect taxes for the GP in return for what they did. This might not be the case in all the 300

villages that SSP is working in but it is a common sight to see women taking the lead in areas where only men were involved. Women groups not only monitored repairs of roads and pipes but also undertook contracts. There have been instances where the GP has been questioned about their budget allocations. The Gram Sabha is a regular occurrence now. The village development officer has been activated and women are seen working in tandem with Gram Panchayats to plan for health and education of the community.

Baseline surveys are facilitated and resource mapping done to expose, say, the unequal distribution of water. This exercise could encourage better visibility of what a woman sarpanch can do. These women's groups do not merely 'hand hold' the elected women – they know how the system works. They conduct several walking tours, study tours, to provide visibility to the state of affairs. Elected women and Chairpersons are supported to avail projects and are helped to follow up and achieve what they set out to do. Every small initiative accomplished is appreciated. A Water pipeline installed or a bus provided will be cause for celebration.

Despite all their achievements they have had their share of ups and downs; The programme has a very well established information network.

- The print media has been used extensively and has played a vital role in this network.
- 10-15,000 elected women get to meet officially through the study tours at the Taluk and cluster level.
- They have an informed ongoing strategy with government officials at Taluk and village levels.
- The women elected to GPs know who the officials are and what they can be contacted for.
- What women really need is contacts – with people in power from whom they can access resources.
- The PRI system does not facilitate a mechanism of participatory planning. The SSP strategy of study tours and '*Shibirs*' (camps) get women's groups and elected women to plan with each other.
- Even if 50 people have no access to schools it is taken up at the Taluk Panchayat level.

- Forums for grievance redressal activate women into planning so women elected to Gram Panchayats see their future in Taluk Panchayats.
- The members of GPs share a good rapport with government officials. In fact, trained men and women (22,000 in all) enjoy the support of district administration.
- Women's groups have an important role in the development of their Panchayats.
- Initially the attitude was one of why should women interfere in GP work? Let them save and bring/avail loans to their families, but now after 5 years of work the environment is now of good will.
- In a recent interaction with the women from these groups, all the women want to stand for the next elections because they know half the job. Women can't go back to being mere Mahila Mandal members they want to move ahead to get elected as leaders of the local bodies.

We hope that the alliance that Sharanavva was talking about will throw up more women who will be supported by women who were members of the previous Panchayats".

**Some Points from the Discussion:-**

Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay recalled Suman's suggestion to make a woman the president of party and not just preside over the women's wing of a political party. Can this be an issue to be taken up with women's groups?

Suman Kolhar: The fact is that no party approaches women, nor do women go to the parties. It has taken 3 terms for women to come forward and now that they are in it, they should make the best use of their position. It is always nice to know that there is someone like me above me who will give me a chance.

Prof. A. Vaidyanathan: Do you think caste equations affect the function of elected woman representatives? What is their attitude to local resource management through market economy and tax etc. What do they feel about making the community much more self-reliant?

Suman Kolhar: Caste reservations have thrown up problems. As it is, there is a "*hulla gulla*" by the mere presence of a woman. A dalit woman finds it even more difficult. For example, there have been instances where a dalit woman President was not allowed to hoist the flag on any occasion. Things are slowly changing now.

There was a Gram Panchayat member who worked as a cowherd in a '*sahukar*'s (landlord) house. The boss wanted license to start some business and asked the woman when she came for work to get him one. The woman asked him to give in his application in the GP for it to be considered. Clearly indicating that the man should not confuse her role in his house, which was purely to earn money, and with her role as GP member.

Prof. A. Vaidyanathan: Can women work easier than men across caste lines?

Sharanavva: Initially there was a problem. The upper caste(UC) women were not sent out to the meetings. We used to attend though. There was an instance where an UC elected woman's daughter who was the anganwadi teacher asked the dalit children to bring their own plates if they wanted to eat. I spoke to the girls's mother and asked her not to perpetrate this evil. Things are better now.

Madan Gopal, Director, DPEP: The All women GP is very interesting. I am very familiar with the taluks you mentioned – Chitapur and Afzalpur belong to that socio-economic block where political forces are so strong that as many as 30-40 villages don't / are not allowed to vote during elections. When you say Chitapur is a success and Afzalpur a failure are we only looking at symbolic processes? My association with MSK started in the early years when I was involved in the literacy campaign. It is disappointing that such a process oriented program like MSK has succumbed to illegitimate processes and are under the assumption that symbolic victories will lead us somewhere. Why only Afzalpur we can form dozens of all women GPs anywhere. I remember that during the 1995 elections, the BJP candidate from that block disappeared. We were told he was 'kidnapped', later we realised that he was just getting fatter, tucked away in Madras. The block has a history of extra constitutional authority stronghold. I agree all women GPs are required but do you have any strategy to counter such forces?

Jyothi Kulkarni: When we decided to go to Athnoor, we knew it had a lot of politics at the MLA and ZP level. That was why we first took up Maadbol village, which was not a complete success. We wanted to make a difference in a place where the situation for men is so bad and therefore for women worse. We were conscious of the fact that we were involving ourselves in a scenario where upper castes and lower castes don't mingle, where school teachers are terrified of the politicians. We are also concerned about the outcome of this exercise and need all of your support to make it a success.

Madan Gopal: I think the time has come for us to evolve new strategies/processes instead of carrying on with the old. Maharashtra and Rajasthan have evolved a system of 'consensus candidates' where the incentive is participation, not winning or losing. In the obsession with development PRIs have been made executives of the government. But this rush for empowerment should not sacrifice basic characteristics of the project. You are expected to expose the illegitimacy of these anti-people power structures and attempt to dismantle it and not collude with them.

C.P.Sujaya: Suman and Sharanavva described different perceptions to stand again. While Sharanavva felt why only me, let others get a chance to be represented in the GP, Suman said she would like to stand, but she didn't have the money and family responsibilities do not permit her. There are 2 sides of the roster system here: (1) The roster is evil, bad and (2) Roster makes space for more women.

How much of this is just unselfishness to give more women the space and how much is an unwillingness because I can't last? We should not jump to conclusions about whether the roster is good or bad.

Sharanavva: All the women wanted me to stand, whereas the men did not. Even my husband did not want me to stand for elections. When Bhagyavva was nominated to stand from our sangha, she said she could not afford it and that she did not even know anyone to try and influence. But I told her that we will lend her money from the sangha and now that

we have made our entry into the Panchayat we should not let go of that space. Someone from our sangha must be represented in the GP.

Dr. Poornima Vyasulu: Is Sharanavva's decision not to stand for the second term a clear altruistic '*tyaaga*' (sacrifice) or is it cool headed pragmatism or is she finding it difficult to burn the candle on both ends. Are women seeing the roster like a relay within the team or are they leaving because of the '*dikkat*' (problem). Do they realise that the GP is not as great as they thought it would be, that infact it is a disempowered institution and is that why they think it is not worth a second term.

Ashwathamma: Women are showing '*tyaaga*', but there are others who want to stand and cannot because there is no reservation in the same constituency.

Meera M: Many elected women also wonder as to why enter '*rajakiya*' (politics) where dirty power games are everyday affairs. Where one has to compromise on energy, time and values and be ready to stoop to levels which pricks one's conscience. And to battle it all they see very few empowering support options, structures and resources.

Ashwathamma: Very often women have to engage the support of rowdy elements to counter similar forces. During my tenure the contractor who was given the responsibility of building the hospital was angry with me for going over to the site everyday to see if he was doing work properly. When I objected once to his use of substandard material he brought 8-10 people the next day to threaten me. I had the support of my husband and so nothing untoward happened, but can a woman undertake such responsibility on a daily basis? There are instances where we are aware of money being misused like the Nirmal Karnataka Scheme that gives Rs.1400 per house to construct toilets. As for as I know, only 20 of the 100 toilets sanctioned got built. Similarly, in the *bhagya jyothi* scheme only 3 of the 10 projects were completed. At every stage there is corruption happening right under our noses and we are quite often unable to prevent it. How then are we supposed to feel up-beat about the system and stand for a second term?



There is another case of a BC women who has won elections this time but she is already so fed up with the discrimination that she wants to give up her post. She has been threatened that if she dares sit on the chair her son will be killed! In a situation where the men themselves are too scared to retaliate what can women do?

Thresiamma: Women all over have all sorts of barriers to participate and even in a state like Kerala they have to suffer patriarchal forces. But the past 5 years Kerala GPs has had a lot of money, therefore have the power to achieve something. But, even if a woman wants to continue and stand for the next term, she does not have a choice in the matter. The party decides the candidate. This is the case for the men as well.

Aliyamma: The party prefers women who are more domesticated and will tow the party line implicitly. In fact, women who are articulate and have some social standing are a definite 'no' as far as the party is concerned.

Dr. Lakshmi Krishnamurthy: Apart from Kerala, it seems that women don't want to stand again. Reasons could be 'tyaaga', corruption or that they can't manage. But, how many men give up their seats for other men? Should we analyse why we are giving up? By not giving up his seat the man is asserting his self-image. If the woman wants to stand again it is going against her self-image of nurturing, caring etc. Is that also one of the reasons?

Dr. Poornima Vyasulu: We have the example of Dr. Ramakrishna Hegde always saying that he is not after public office but was forced into it. But as far as GP elections are concerned there are very few men who have been re-elected.

Prema Gopalan: One of the reasons for people opting out of a second term has been that GPs are resource scarce. But our experiences show that GPs have made full use of Common Property Resources and funds from the community. Many of them are big villages, so women use the infrastructure, markets and their connections to mobilise money. Tax is collected from individual houses, when pipelines and direct water connections are given etc. While providing infrastructures and houses a lot of resources in the form of building

material, equipment and technical skills available in the community are used. Government information and resources have also been made good use of.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan in her concluding remarks as the chairperson reiterated some of the highlights of the session:

- There are many reasons for women not standing for the second term. It is important we understood the environment women face in GP politics while coming to conclusions.
- It is critical that women are equipped with the skills to mobilise resources to ensure development of their constituency

### **Session 6 - Wrap up of the two days proceedings.**

**Chairpersons : Dr. Poornima Vyasulu and Dr. C.P. Sujaya**

C. P. Sujaya: I am not sure we can sum up the proceedings the past two days very easily because many complex issues have been touched upon. We will try and flag the important issues that have arisen.

Dr. Poornima Vyasulu: Some of the issues that kept coming up were

- The Roster system or rotation to the post of President, Vice President and seats reserved for women. It is interesting to note that rotation is seen positively as well as negatively. On the one hand rotation has negative implications because by the time women have figured how the system functions, it is time to step down; and on the other hand the feeling that someone else can develop as leaders. It will be interesting to find out what was on the mind of the PR officials who introduced rotation. Then again, why did they decide to reserve 30%? Why not 50% reservation for women and no rotation?

For those who are pro-rotation they feel that many women will benefit and there is a sense of dispersed leadership skills. It is a good on-the-job-training, an excellent 'learn-by-doing' device. It is a chance for many to enter PRIs but those who learnt conscientiously don't have a chance to apply their learning in any depth. This is a poor permanent solution to gender equality. It kills gender equality in PRIs.

The Roster is in fact a manipulative practice to keep good, articulate women out of leadership positions. Our future strategy must be that if roster is given, how do we minimise its manipulative nature. The experienced can do hand holding and ex elected women can be used as resource persons for future trainings.

- Women have entered PRIs – Have they influenced the agenda of the PRI? Is it different today because women are in it? If we have not engendered PRIs we must do some soul searching.
- We also have to make a critical assessment of sectoral allocations in the financial budget and see how much has been assigned for industries, irrigation, health, education etc.

C.P.Sujaya:

- We have to identify who is representing what. Can men represent women's issues and women? Reservation means women fighting each other for the reserved seats. Those who won last time thought they solely represented women and women's issues, but now they feel they represent the whole constituency i.e men, women and children. There was an incidence where the women had to change her ward to stand for the second term. She was in a dilemma because she was not sure whom she represented the constituency she belonged to, or the constituency from which she won.
- All of us are busy admiring Kerala – but here those interested in women know that however superior they may be in comparison to other states they are definitely not bettering the cause of women's empowerment. The 10% of budget allocated for women is not the end in itself because no one really knows what to do with it. Devolution is necessary, but it is not enough for women's empowerment. Sitting in Delhi and making plans – a woman's component plan, 30% reservation for women etc., and just earmarking funds does not mean women's equality.
- The experiences of the All women GPs in Andhra have a different viewpoint – which men are making us of these GPs.
- Proxies have been criticized by many. But Dr. Abdul Aziz did an excellent job in deconstructing and disentangling the word.
- Mr. L. C. Jain expressed his disappointment at the betrayal of the majesty of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment. He felt we were not looking at the heart of the matter. So instead of just

making incremental changes we must look at the heart of the matter. On the other hand, Mr. Srinivas Murthy felt that everything must be cleaned up before women came into power. There are two parallel ideas.

- (i) The Status of women in PRIs, their struggles etc
- (ii) How women are influencing change.

We need to respect the line between the two and see how we can improve the system and evolve strategies to survive the heart of the matter.

Dr. Poornima Vyasulu: The Devadasi Rehabilitation program is an interesting example of 30% component of every project for women. To prove, that money has gone to the women they just have to show that 30% of the beneficiaries are women.

Prof. A. Vaidyanathan, Chairman of ISST gave the Valedictory address.

Listening to the women articulate their experience with such clarity was very inspiring. We should not be pessimistic about democracy and underestimate the ground level stirrings. They are important manifestations of the development paradigm.

There is also a tendency to confound 2 different aspects of change. The first is that of empowering the local bodies and the second that of engendering governance and empowering women. We should not mix these two. The interface is that reservations are a fact, they won't get 'unmade'. This is the big step at the local level and we have to build on its potential. Empowerment on the other hand is the effective participation of women, which will bring about a change in the nature of PRIs. But thinking seriously about it intellectuals are not the best chaps to bring about this change.

Have women really been empowered? Agreed that PRIs have not empowered themselves except in Kerala where the law has made it possible. In most other states a maximum of Rs. 5 lakhs is tied under different schemes to be carried out by the GPs. So they are nowhere near effective power. The struggle then has to be that as well as what happens to women. If participation of women is a constraint and if she is forced to take up local politics as a career it is worse than the roster system. So what is it we want at the GP level?

- No arbitrariness – pick 3 lots so it is completely transparent and shows up results beyond individual discretion.
- Encourage women to move up the scale to TP or ZP levels, which will not violate the spirit of the plan.
- Where such issues are debated, we are overwhelmed by immediacy. Changes and consequences should not be viewed as a snapshot but as a larger part of the unravelling process.

During the first elections to the PRIs all district Congress chiefs were summoned to the State headquarters. Later the party had to go to the districts. Now they have to go to the villages. In the past 50 years, there have been tremendous transformations in the vitality of lower caste/class participation in politics. We have to keep its processorial perspective in mind. It is also important to constantly check if the direction of the process is as desired and then go on. To put ideas of equal empowerment or complete equality is setting up ideals, which might never be. The nature of the tension will change but there will be a perpetual struggle. So we must focus on desirable directions and on the journey instead of the goal.

Thank you all for spending 2 days. Interacting with people in the field and researchers is always exciting. A very vibrant process has been set in motion. We must see what we can understand and from the diversity of experiences, statements and experiences of women, both successful and not so successful are worth wide circulation. Their accounts will help to decide the way to push the process of activism. Our training is in the doing. What lessons can we learn for wider publicity of the issue?

C.P.Sujaya: There is a plan to federate all women elected to GPs. No milestones have yet been passed but the process has been initiated.

Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay: Is it a federation of only elected women representatives? Like the MSK and SSP process where there is networking between women in the community and elected women representatives, the federation should also look at how to get various groups involved with all their vast experiences.

Dr. Poomima Vyasulu: Ex-Members should also be part of the federation

C.P.Sujaya: Even male representatives could be included.

Suman Kolhar: One good thing about the roster system is that it has ensured that every community has its representatives in the GP. That way sangha women also got an entry into GPs.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan: The federation that the Singamma Srinivasan Foundation (SSF) is talking about is a federation of current and past elected women representatives who can meet and discuss strategies. MSK and SSP encourages elected women representatives to draw community support. A practical federation of elected women representatives is useful.

Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay: Yesterday people raised their concern about the involvement of SHGs in the decentralisation process, especially when so much money and support from outside the country are instrumental in their experiences. There were concerns that these groups would reverse the entire empowerment process. But after listening to the SSP experiences of how they used the SHGs as tools and how pure SHGs have been activated to involve themselves in PRIs, I believe it is the responsibility of women's groups to use SHGs as empowerment tools.

Dr. Poornima Vyasulu: The 9<sup>th</sup> National Plan lays out a target for SHG formation. Karnataka must form 1 lakh SHGs. SHG formation is a process oriented mechanism for empowerment, but now if hijacked by outside funding agencies they will be seen only as quick-fix delivery mechanisms for government schemes. There is a lot of danger in taking the SHG path to organise women to activate GPs.

Prof. Palanithurai: There are 2 different perspectives here. The SHGs are institutional mechanisms where every program is targeted at them. They can encroach upon GP terrain. But they can also be seen as a vibrant area where women's groups can assert their entry into the PRIs.

One signal is that SHGs that are operating credits, are putting up a show that they are more vibrant than GPs. But the GP can draw representatives from SHGs so in the next elections leaders of SHGs can be elected women representatives. The federation of NGOs and elected women representatives should involve SHG organisations because the government is unable to find any other organisation to spend money for Swarna Jayanti. Another

important aspect is that representatives from SHGs have developed managerial skills, which will benefit them greatly if they get elected into PRIs.

C.P. Sujaya: Here we should not forget the experience of Andhra Pradesh that has upto 27 committees set up under various departments, but the control is ultimately with the line departments. So water committees, health committees, hand pump committees etc. represent the institutional mechanism for delivery of projects from Delhi and the State. These are removing from the power of the GPs. So many vertical programs with no linkage to the GPs only result in loss of autonomy for the GPs.

Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay: Can Gram Panchayats function properly if the line department committees are channeled through the GP like it is for the last 15 years in West Bengal. The District Planning Committees are all vertical programs where people are answerable to the Zilla Parishad. If this structure exists and if West Bengal can do it others also can.

Dr. Jayalakshmi: There are 1,50,000 SHGs in Andhra Pradesh. So far no women from SHGs are in GPs. Women in SHGs are easy targets of all the UNDP, IFAD, IMY and DWCRA programmes who know that repayment levels are high in these SHGs. If a scheme sanctions gas stoves it has become difficult to decide which group to give it to because there are so many. The quality of the SHG also differs – one organised by an NGO differs from an SHG organised by the CDPO which differs from an IFAD group.

C.P.Sujaya: Andhra Pradesh differs from West Bengal and Kerala in that there is multiplicity of organisations in Andhra Pradesh.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan: SHGs create major problems. The Swarna Jayanti for example has flexible guidelines. It is meant for people below the poverty line, but if no such people can be identified it can benefit anyone. One thought the 'Trickle down' process was killed. It will again be the dominant people and women with more visibility who will benefit. There is a danger of MSK sangha's breaking up because there are so many SHGs. They (Swarna Jayanti & SHGs) should be flexible yes – but with positive discrimination towards backward groups.

C.P.Sujaya: It is impossible to bring any clarity when the States position is so controversial.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan: Officials at the Block level identify the Swarna Jayanti and SHG activities by what they think can be taken up.

C.P.Sujaya: This way the potential is chipped away even before it begins.

Dr. Revathi Narayanan: Money is very seductive so groups which have registered after years of growth and participation are disillusioned that SHGs which are just 6 months old have so much support from outside agencies.

C.P.Sujaya: SSP has demonstrated how it managed to turn the SHGs as important actors in decentralised planning.

Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay: For this, GPs have to be strengthened.

Dr. Jos Chathukulam: The Balwant Rai Committee points out that there are a number of institutions in place, which have been by-passed. There is no convergence of groups in Kerala. The Ashok Mehta Committee report suggests that the roster system can be addressed by proportional representation. We should ask for proportional representation in PRIs. The decision whether women should contest or not is taken by the party in Kerala because they know that the GP can deliver. The language of politics and the ethics and value system of politics is not women friendly. This language has to be demystified and deconstructed.

Prof. Palanithurai: The PRIs have to be strengthened yes, but why are there so many central schemes which find mechanisms to deliver them? This is because the belief in the bureaucracy persists. Once while talking to the Director, RDPR in Tamil Nadu about decentralisation he said he was so busy just looking after accounts so where was the time to talk about powers. He has to first show expenditure statements only then can he, if he has the time, think about anything else.

The Swarna Jayanti meeting was convened in Delhi. It was attended by ministers but there were no elected representatives. If PRIs plan we can talk about structural reforms in tax and



finances but they have to be sensitised to project their demands. Also all efforts should be made to change the mindsets of officials, leaders and bureaucrats.

Jyothi Kulkarni: The ZP also has the budget to train members of the GP. Merely budgets won't help, good training, should be given. Since the ZP does not have any *adhikaar* on the GP, it is not really interested in imparting good training for members of GPs. So far there has been no training undertaken in our districts. It is the NGOs, which have been entrusted with the jobs. Those interested only will do a good job.

Training contents should be well thought out. They should include:

- Information about their roles and responsibilities as members (as requested by All Women Gram Panchayat)
- Details on resources GPs can tap eg: common property resources and taxes etc.
- Where the finance comes from and how much.
- How much honorarium the President, Vice President, and members are entitled to.
- Knowledge of previous projects so that they can learn from them or even follow-up on them.

Suman Kolhar: The All women GP has to be trained, yes, but the GP also has to be strengthened. If the GP is reverted to its roles in 1987-92 then we can see better progress. It should not be the case of "*Khaana banao, magar ration nahi*". (Prepare meals but without ration!).

C.P.Sujaya: The Tamil Nadu experience shows that new elects were respected only for 6 months till the actual powers or lack of it were exposed. The Karnataka experience shows that the term from 1987-92 was better in that it had more powers. These indicate that the existing environment is not conducive to decentralisation. We have to think of what will make it possible to demand a better system of true decentralized planning.

Suman Kolhar: A political might is necessary. A Women's forum, which breaks all party barriers, is essential.

Dr. Poornima Vyasulu: In the Trivandrum Seminar, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments talk about devolution of powers but there is no talk about devolution of finance to the PRIs. It is

because of the state's discretion that 10% or 40% of the funds are going down. If the State decides otherwise there is no clause in the Constitution, which can question their decision.

Dr. Jos Chathukulam: It is very obvious in the Constitution that the State Finance Committee will be set up to place its demands in the assembly.

Prof. Palanithurai: I would like to end with good news. District political parties and caste/class parties, which joined National parties failed. But now they are in local bodies and are demanding more powers. District political parties are coming up with better representatives than National Parties. Representatives who had no share in State-Central structures get a lions share in District Political Parties (DPP). The DPP can organise a meeting with the Chief Minister or even the Prime Minister. So there is no doubt that local bodies will be strengthened. But any major difference can be brought about only through a movement not by a single party or a group or a federation of groups.

Several movements have succeeded so the time had come for us to go in for a Gram Panchayat movement in the country.

C.P.Sujaya: It is difficult to take the 'processorial' view of things like expressed by Prof. Vaidyanathan. It is better to talk about the future. During the freedom movement when women were demanding their rights men said we would talk about rights after getting independence. So Palanithurai's future note sounds better.

Taking on from the positive notes that emerged after a heated debate on SHGs, its positioning vis-a-vis women's empowerment, decentralised governance, role of centre-state and development itself, Ms. Meera M, thanked one and all once again, for sharing their valuable experiences and insights. She closed with reinforced hope and conviction that we have lots to learn from the women at the frontlines of democracy and that all our efforts to strengthen them will help widen and redefine democratic spaces for women.

**Seminar**

**on**

**Women in Local Governance:  
Experiences and Effective interventions in Andhra Pradesh,  
Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu**

**1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>, June 2000**

**ANNEXURES**

**Papers presented at the Seminar**

**Institute of Social Studies Trust  
N-601, North Block  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Manipal Centre  
47, Dickenson Road  
Bangalore- 560 042**

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## REGIONAL SEMINAR

*Women in Local Governance: Experiences and Effective Interventions  
in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu*

1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2000

### PROGRAMME

1<sup>st</sup> June 2000

10.00 to 11.00

**INAUGURAL SESSION**

**Welcome & Introduction**

Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay,  
Director,  
Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)

**Inaugural Lighting of Lamp**

**Keynote Address**

Mr. M.R.Sreenivasa Murthy  
Secretary, Dept. of Rural Development  
& Panchayat Raj, Govt. of Karnataka

Ms. Sharanavva, EWR,  
Kheribhosga GP, Gulbarga

**Honouring Elected Women Representatives**

By Her Excellency V.S.Rama Devi  
Honourable Governor of Karnataka

**Inaugural Address**

Honourable Governor of Karnataka  
Her Excellency V.S.Rama Devi

**Vote of thanks**

Ms. Meera M  
Associate Director  
Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)  
Bangalore

11:00 to 11.30

**Tea Break**

**Session I**

**EXPERIENCES AND EFFECTIVE**

11.15 to 01.30

**INTERVENTIONS FOR WOMEN IN  
LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

**Chairperson:** Mr. L.C.Jain,  
Chairman,  
National Council of Rural Institutes,  
Ministry of Education

**Presentations By**

- ❖ Ms. Aleyamma Vijayan  
SAKHI, Trivandrum  
Kerala
- ❖ Dr. P. Manikyamba  
Dept. of Political Science,  
University of Hyderabad  
Andhra Pradesh
- ❖ Prof. G. Palanithurai  
Gandhigram Rural Institute, Dindigul  
Tamil Nadu

1.30 to 2.30

**Lunch**

**Session II**  
2.30 to 4.00

**EXPERIENCES AND EFFECTIVE  
INTERVENTIONS FOR WOMEN IN  
LOCAL GOVERNANCE:  
KARNATAKA & MAHARASHTRA**

**Chairperson:** Ms. Meera Saxena, IAS, Secretary  
Dept. of Women & Child Dev.  
Government of Karnataka

**Presentations By**

- ❖ Ms. Medha Kotwal Lele  
Aalochana, Pune  
Maharashtra
- ❖ Dr. Revathi Narayanan,  
State Program Director  
Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka

**Session III**

**EXPERIENCES AND EFFECTIVE**

4.15 to 5.45

**INTERVENTIONS FOR WOMEN IN  
LOCAL GOVERNANCE - KARNATAKA**

**Chairperson:** Ms. C.P.Sujaya, IAS  
Additional Chief Secretary  
Himachal Pradesh (on leave)

- ❖ Dr. Abdul Aziz, Professor & Head  
Decentralised Governance & Planning,  
ISEC, Bangalore
- ❖ Dr. Shanta Mohan, Fellow,  
Gender Studies Unit,  
NIAS, Bangalore

**2<sup>nd</sup> June 2000**

**Session IV  
9.30 to 11.15**

**SHARING OF EXPERIENCES BY WOMEN  
IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

**Chairperson:** Dr. Abdul Aziz, Professor & Head  
Decentralised Governance & Planning  
ISEC, Bangalore

**Elected Women Representatives:**

- ❖ Ms. Thresiamma Antony, President  
Amboori Gram Panchayat,  
Ernakulam District, Kerala
- ❖ Mrs. Margaret Mary, Union Chairperson  
Attur Block, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu
- ❖ Mrs. Ashwathamma Narayan Reddy, Former  
President, Chandapura Gram Panchayat, Anekal  
Taluk, Bangalore Urban Dt. Karnataka

**11.15 to 11.30**

**Tea Break**

**Session V**  
**11.30 to 01.30**

**SHARING OF EXPERIENCES BY WOMEN  
IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

**Chairperson:** Dr. Revathi Narayanan,  
State Programme Director,  
Mahila Samakhya Karnataka,  
Bangalore

- ❖ Ms. Sharanavva, Former Member  
Keribhosga Gram Panchayat,  
Gulbarga, Karnataka
- ❖ Ms. Jyothi Kulkarni  
District Programme Coordinator  
Mahila Samakhya, Gulbarga, Karnataka
- ❖ Ms. Suman Kolhar  
Former Vice President  
Zilla Parishad, Bijapur District, Karnataka
- ❖ Ms. Prema Gopalan  
Swayam Shikshan Prayog, Mumbai  
Maharashtra

**01.30 to 02.30**

**Lunch**

**Session VI**  
**02.30 to 03.30**

**EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS – DISCUSSION**

**03.15 to 03.30**

**Functional Tea**

**Session VII**  
**03.30 to 04.30**

**EVOLVING STRATEGIES FOR FUTURE**

**Chairperson:** Dr. Poornima Vyasulu,  
Advisor, DANIDA,  
Bangalore  
AND  
Ms. C.P. Sujaya, IAS  
Additional Chief Secretary  
Himachal Pradesh (on leave)

**Open House Discussion**

**04.30 to 05.00**

**Valedictory** Prof. A. Vaidyanathan, Chairman  
Institute of Social Studies Trust



# Women in Local Governance: *Experiences and Effective intervention strategies in Kerala.*

(Organized by Institute of Social studies trust at National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Date: 1-2 June-2000)

## 1. Background

In recent years, with the globalisation of economies and increasing control of the International financial institutions, issue of good governance is receiving special attention. It arises from the growing realisation that conventional development efforts have failed to achieve desired results- to eliminate poverty and inequality and to promote human rights. The various debates and approaches in this regard brings to focus the need to make public administrative institutions accountable to people whom they are supposed to serve. The expectation regarding a corruption free, transparent government is voiced again and again. The right to information campaign is turning to be a mass movement in the country.

Decentralization of power is a basic step in the right direction. This coupled with effective measures to enhance people's participation will go along way to make the political institutions responsive to the needs of the people, in resource allocation, in policy and administrative reforms. " Local self governance is a genuine effort towards political restructuring to achieve social transformation that is necessary for equitable, environmentally sustainable and gender-just development" (DAWN-signposts to the summit: Towards WSSD+5. Oct.99)

Kerala is pursuing this line--going through yet another path-breaking and revolutionary experiment- of power sharing, a truly decentralized and participatory development process. The Left Democratic Government has shown the political will to hand over 35- 40% of the budget directly to be spend by the local bodies. Necessary rules, deployment of staff, and other administrative procedures and formalities have almost been completed This experiment of giving power to people-Gram Swaraj- as envisioned by Gandhi and many others after him is slowly becoming a reality in Kerala.

This paper is an attempt to give a brief summary of this process and place the experience of women in that background.

## 2. Context

Kerala stands apart from other Indian states in having achieved high human development index (HDI) in spite of low per capita income and economic well being. It is the sixth smallest Indian State with a population of 30 million and with a highest density of population (790/ sq./km)

An average gram panchayat in Kerala has a population of 25199 and average population of a Municipality is 48785.

The social development in Kerala shows positive indicators like high literacy levels, low birth rates, high life expectancy and low infant mortality. The status of women in Kerala measured in terms of the above indicators is also better than their counterparts elsewhere.

These positive human development achievements are attributed to the various historical, cultural factors, a participatory political culture, and conscious development and redistribution strategies.

What is projected as the Kerala model of Development in the national and international development circles and debates come under sharp critique in the 90's with the realisation that of the poor economic performance in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors which makes the model unsustainable. The discussion of the paradoxes of the model brings to light the multi-dimensional crisis, which has become obvious in many ways. Economic stagnation, unemployment three times the national average, budget and trade deficit, increasing suicide rates, increasing violence against women etc clearly indicates that the present development strategies need to be revised. There are also inter-district inequalities-pockets of deprivation co-existing with overall progress.

It became clear that problems of development at the micro-level could be solved only through a change in the approach and strategy, from centralised to decentralised, from macro to micro.

The attempts of decentralisation in Kerala dates back to late 50's when the administrative reform committee recommended various measures towards devolution of powers (Isaac and Tharakani 1995). Unfortunately the recommendations were not implemented as the Govt. was dismissed. A significant step in this direction was taken in 1987-91 when district councils were created. This was also dismantled when a change of Government took place.

The 72 and 73 constitutional amendments paved the way for decentralisation of power to local panchayats. With the Panchayat Raj elections in '95, the three-tier panchayat system came in to effect (2-10-'95). There are 990-gram panchayats, 152 block panchayats, 14 district panchayats, 55 municipalities and 3 corporations. The constitutional amendment made it possible to have about 5000 women elected to 1/3 posts in the local bodies.

Any innovative, pilot programme is bound to making mistakes and the path to success is in acknowledging mistakes, criticisms and strive towards bettering the scheme and that is what the planning board is claiming to do.

### 3. Women in Governance: Experiences and interventions.

A notable paradox of the Kerala Model was the poor representation of women in politics, in spite of high literacy levels and social development. Out of the 144 seats in the state assembly, number of women has been never more than 13 (10%). Even in the highest decision making bodies of various political parties, trade unions and service organisations, women's representation is either nil or absolutely low.

As mentioned earlier, large number of women could come in to the public realm through reservation of seats in the local bodies. 3954 women are members of gram panchayats out of which around 375 are presidents of panchayats, 564 are in block level and 105 at the district panchayats

Many more women are active in the decentralised planning process as convenors of various taskforces and as Key resource persons. For the first time in the history of the state, there is recognition, acceptance and visibility to women in politics. There is conscious effort to develop the capabilities of women leaders.

Many women are coming into governance for the first time and they also have to spend time to learn a number of new things like rules, administrative procedures, project preparation, skills of public speaking, implementation, evaluation and monitoring.

With this entire process of people's plan campaign, a very dynamic process is set in motion at the local level. Each year, projects have to be prepared, previous projects implemented. There are meetings at various levels and training programmes. All this makes the day of an elected representative packed with activities. This is specially the case of women, as they have to couple this with their household activities and professional work if they are employed outside.

The people's planning process has now entered the 4<sup>th</sup> year and it is interesting to assess the experiences of women in local governance in this challenging context

### 4. General approach

- ❖ The Planning Board has been responsible for this pilot and innovative project but in the board there are no women!
- ❖ In the initial phase of the planning process itself, conscious attention was given to give visibility to women in the process of development and it was included as a topic of training and handbooks. Although initially women's welfare was the title given, it was changed to women's development subsequently. In order to do this, women had to be brought forward to participate in large numbers from the planning process to execution of projects. From the beginning, planning board took steps and give directions to this effect

As mentioned earlier, the LDF Govt. in Kerala which came to power in 1996, decided to give actual power to the local bodies to act as institutions of self-government and agents of local development. The Kerala Panchayati Raj and Municipalities Act 1994 was passed and a special cell was constituted in the state Planning board to oversee the decentralised planning process. To make this a popular programme and to ensure maximum participation of people, a campaign strategy was used.

According to the new act, the grama sabhas (all members of a ward- the constitutional sub of a local body) are vested with powers to identify local need and prepare plans in a scientific participatory and time-limited manner. It was made mandatory that they meet at least twice a year and discuss the development problems in their area, the options before them to solve them, estimate the resources that can be mobilised and arrive at plan proposals. In order to make these proposals into projects, the panchayats needed data and statistics. Each local body prepares a development report with all the necessary background information, data and resource potential of each area. Then development seminars were organised at each local body level in which task forces were formed and they then undertook to develop the proposals into projects. At the end of the first phase, each panchayat had a number of projects ready. In the 1st year, the common demand was for construction of roads, schemes for employment generation, housing and other non-productive areas. But the planning board directives were clear about the larger allocation needed for productive sectors like agriculture, minor irrigation, dairy projects, and manufacturing sectors. Health and sanitation were other areas, which received a boost from the planning board. In the next phase depending on the priorities, funds allocated by the government etc, projects that can be executed are selected.

A voluntary technical core team (VTC) was formed at each local body to study the technical feasibility and viability of these projects.

Expert committees were formed at each level (BLEC, MLEC, DLEC) They recommend the projects to the district planning committee (DPC) who will have to finally approve the projects. Funds were directly handed over to local bodies.

In the next stage, the projects of different tiers of local bodies were integrated and block level and district level projects were also formulated

There are implementation and monitoring officers to help the local bodies to implement the projects in a time bound manner

The achievements and drawbacks of the Decentralised planning process are not within the scope of this paper. Yet it can be said with confidence that the local bodies have become local governments constantly interacting with people and responding to their needs. The contractor-bureaucratic nexus at the grassroots level is broken. It is not easy to change the mindset of people who had seen that local development is about roads and bridges. The Planning Board has been very consciously shifting the focus to productive sectors like agriculture and industry.

It has not been smooth all the way. There was resistance from legislators, opposition parties, and employees' organisations who felt that their power is threatened and their authority is getting eroded. There is also criticism that the CPI (M) who spearheaded the programme is jealously keeping full control over it and not making conscious effort to get the collaboration of the coalition partners.

- ❖ The handbook on women speaks of gender, development, and status of women, model projects and exhorts the local bodies to earmark 10% of funds for projects exclusively for women. But in the 1<sup>st</sup> year, only 4.6% were spend for projects on women. Hence the planning boards made it mandatory that 10% is spend on women and only then DPC will give sanctions to the entire projects of local bodies. Due to conscious intervention, the share of women's component rose to 11.5%
- ❖ Another aspect was the stipulation that gender impact assessment was mandatory in the cost -benefit analysis of all projects
- ❖ Before each phase of the programme, training programmes were conducted on a wide variety of topics related to all areas of decentralised planing and concerns of women were integral to these. Although it was intended to have at least 30% of participation of women in the state, district and local levels, nowhere this could be achieved. In the Key Resource training (KRP) of the 1<sup>st</sup> year, women's participation was only 17% and many dropped out subsequently. In adequate number of women resource persons affected training programmes at the lower levels. The planning board also felt that active leadership of women to organise and implement programmes at the local level also was lacking in many places
- ❖ A special attempt to increase women's participation was to get the anganawadi teachers active in mobilising poor women who are the beneficiaries of the anganawadis. Kerala has about 14000 anganawadis and about 30000 related workers. A special handbook was prepared for the child care sector and conventions were conducted to involve the teachers in the plan campaign. The local bodies were given permission to give additional honorarium of Rs.100/- as an incentive for this work
- ❖ Special effort was made to get women to participate in the grama sabha. Although women could go to any subject group discussion, most went to women's development group and some went to the groups which discussed issues like drinking water, education etc. Discussions were based around a questionnaire on women's situation in the panchayat. The overall participation of women in grama sabhas also was around 20%. It was mainly women from the economically backward sessions who participated with the hope of getting benefits. It is to be discussed whether the concerns of the rest of the society is more to do with macro policies that affect their economy like the import policies regarding cash crops like rubber, coconut or is there a general apathy to what is happening around them?
- ❖ The chapter on women in the development report of the panchayats gives an overall situation of women in Kerala. Yet, one must admit that in the secondary data collection to prepare the report, women's participation was not there as expected. It was on the basis of actual data that reports of other sectors were written but the chapter on women was written on the basis of common knowledge and understanding. Subsequently, special attention is paid to conduct a status of women study through all the women's groups of the local bodies. Guidelines are discussed in the Training handbook for women taskforce members
- ❖ The taskforce that formed out of the group-discussing women's development were to prepare the projects for the women's component. Yet, because of the inadequacy

of training on development issues of women, lack of experts on gender and limited number of women volunteers have affected the project preparation. Many are aware of the issues of women but not of the potentials of gender based planning and development.

❖ Projects for women

Not only that sufficient money was not earmarked for women in the 1<sup>st</sup> phase but also most of the projects could not be considered as women's projects. Out of the total 4412 projects under the women's component in the 1<sup>st</sup> year, 59.15% (2523) were in productive sectors. 38.42% (1773) were in service sectors. 2.42% of the funds were spend for the infrastructure development. It is very relevant to ask how many of these were fit to be included as the women's development project. Projects for roads and bridges (1.22%-25 projects), sanitation (0.74%-22 projects), drinking water (0.28%- 14 projects), minor irrigation(0.85%-35 projects) electricity (0.31%-17 projects) could in no way be considered under the Women's component plan. Projects to improve facilities in schools , housing etc also were found to included as part of this

Of the projects in productive sectors, majority (1147) was in animal husbandry. All this was related to distribution of goats and chickens to individual beneficiaries. Although, these assets were transferred to women, there was no provision to see that women had its ownership or control of the income from them. There was no organisational support to see that the birds or animals were protected from diseases or marketing is undertaken collectively. So it is imperative to see that women are in control over the assets created and that they will directly receive and control the income and that they are assisted to develop the management capabilities. The same can be said of the kitchen garden projects (300Projects).

Most of the projects proposed as part of the industry (807) were related to the distribution of tailoring machines. There were industrial cooperatives oriented to give employment to women but these were prepared without giving sufficient attention to the forward and backward linkages.

A close examination of the women's projects reveals many shortcomings. Many of the projects were oriented to enhance the income of women but they never questioned the sexual division of labor or the gender discrimination in society. Most of the occupations promoted were those which women can do combining their household responsibilities.

There were 700 projects related to anganawadis but again without any innovation or new approach

In spite of all this, it has to be acknowledged that, in designing projects and programmes in local bodies, the need to include women was acknowledged and this was visible throughout the state.

A beginning has been made:

Very conscious strategies were used subsequently; using lessons learned from this 1<sup>st</sup> phase. Since it was difficult to get Key resource persons on a sustained basis to assist with the projects and programmes, it was decided to focus on training the

elected women representatives themselves, women members of the taskforces, anganawadi teacher's etc

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase 62.93% of funds were for the productive sectors, 36.14 in the service sector and infrastructure received 0.93%

There were many changes and improvements. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year projects in the manufacturing sector showed about 40% increase at all levels. Tailoring machines were given only related to garment making units. Projects for individual beneficiaries were minimum.

One remarkable feature in the second phase was the emergence and active functioning of neighbourhood groups and self-help groups. A new wave of enthusiasm to get together and act collectively is emerging in many areas. In some places, women were able to mobilise 2-3 lakhs of rupees in 4-5 months. This will definitely help to improve projects in the next phase.

Even in this phase, in spite of strict monitoring, 10% of women's component plan goes for anaganawadis, to construct buildings terming them as women's centers. But it is to be noted that women cannot have access to the place when children are there and when the building will be free, women are not free, as they have to take the kids home.

Funds for housing also has gone up, in spite of directions that only houses for female headed households can be included!

Although there is remarkable progress, a lot more have to be achieved. At the end of the financial year, (1999) only 65% of funds were spent and quick survey revealed that what was mostly unspent was money earmarked under the women's scheme. So implementation and monitoring is still areas where a lot of attention and pressure has to be there.

If such projects have to be properly implemented a special implementing officer have to be put in place. In the words of a panchayat member " Majority of the panchayats spend the 10% without scientifically studying the problems, needs, potentials and limitations of women locally. Hence you hear of women's cowshed, women's milch animal project etc (Shailaja Surendran, member, Bisonwally Panchayat)

##### 5. Experiences of elected women representatives.

The context of the decentralised planning process is such that requires a lot of time, energy and commitment from the part of the elected representatives. " People's plan Campaign( PPC) gave tremendous opportunities for those who want to do something. Earlier it was just meetings and office work. But after the PPC started, the development activities evolved through ward conventions and grama sabhas had to be executed and elected representatives had to work jointly with the bureaucracy. There was no place in our appointment diary for anything else." ( P.Dhanalakshmi, President, Panthalany block Panchayat)

85% of the EWR's are inexperienced in politics and is contesting in elections for the first time. 40% of them have entered politics through elections and 26% through working with women's organisations.

26% of them are below 30 years, 40% are between 30 and 40 years. Only 33.4% are above 40

Regarding education, women are ahead of men, 18% of women are graduates or post graduates. Only 13% men are in this category. What is significant is to note that 64.55% of women are educated up to either high school level or below it

According to a survey conducted by KSSP, 33% EWR's have no employment. For men this is only below 10%

The planning board in '98 conducted a survey among 1656 elected women representatives about the changes that have occurred after they became people's representatives. Majority of the women agreed that in 3 years time, their awareness about local government, the rules and regulations, skills of planning, writing and public speaking, ability to control meeting proceedings, deal with bureaucracy etc have substantially increased. This survey however did not examine their awareness of the planning from a gender perspective, their understanding of development (welfare, anti-poverty, equity, empowerment) nor gathered opinions on male perspective of the participation of women and the gender dynamics in the local bodies.

Most women had to face a lot of mental tensions, having to combine family and work responsibilities and handle prejudices against women According to their own assessment 43.7% of women had to face slandering, mainly from opposition parties, contractors and the public

Having entered the public realm created tensions within the family too. On an average, an elected women had to spend minimum 4 hours every day on programmes related to the local body and decentralised planning and another 2 hours for other public functions and activities. If they are working outside the home, then another 6 hours goes for that. All this, along with the household responsibilities leaves very little time for personal needs related to leisure and rest. The amount of time spend outside the home is creating some type of tension or other in families of 60% women. In 5% families, this tension is very high. These tensions are in the households of women who are between 30-40 years, where childcare and education are crucial.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the educational background, double work burden, expectations from the public in the context of the decentralised planning process, the lack of experience of the elected women and problems created by a male dominated political system have all made the life of an elected women very difficult and demanding. Hence, many women opined that they would not want to stand for another election. To make women in political process effective and responsive, lot of support from concerned women's organisations is a must.



## 6. Gendered governance

The experiences of Kerala shows that attempts to bring about effective and good governance does not automatically address the question of gender inequality. Like all other social relations, gender relations are also about hierarchies of power and privileges between men and women, giving rise to differing needs and interests. This also means differing and unequal capacities to meet these needs and realise these interests.

Governance is about interventions to address needs of people, matching social and economic resources with these needs. In this power is the decisive factor. If good governance is about equity and equality, gender and gender equity has to be major concerns in development. For example it is important to analyse how needs are perceived, voiced and understood? How resources are generated and allocated? How the differences of power and privileges between men and women influence upon this process?

The last 4 years of experience makes it very clear that women as a group lack the social and economic and political power. Yet not all women experience this lack of power in the same way. Their caste, class, age, educational background, political belonging, husbands party position etc affects a woman's position and clout. Women's perceived needs were those that addressed their practical needs and improved their positions. Even to these practical needs, the response was not enthusiastic as seen from the first year's allocation of 4% of funds. Even after insisting that over and above the allocations from general funds, 10% should be earmarked exclusively for projects on women, there was a tendency to put drinking water or buildings for anganwadis etc under this.

There were also incidences of sanctioned projects not implemented in time and funds lapsed due to negligence or silently defeating the women's programmes by mere absence or lack of interest. The power was shown in a subtle way, which makes it difficult to fight.

The challenge is to bring strategic concerns of women into projects. There are very few such projects that helped to change the position of women but beginnings are made to bring women from the domestic sphere into the public realm, empower them with economic independence. Self-help groups and neighborhood groups are very popular. Some panchayats allocated funds for certain innovative and non-stereotyped programmes because of the insistence of Key resource persons or a dynamic women panchayat member, an often sited example is of Balusseri, in Kannur where 106 girls and housewives were enrolled to study self-defense techniques (as a way of addressing increasing violence against women). Many housewives were forced to give up the training after one or two stages as the husbands were saying that they don't need a 'belt' at home! The panchayat who funded the instructors also felt that self-defense techniques are enough and not a black belt, which they would have got if they had completed the 4<sup>th</sup> stage.

The final control over resources and the decision-making capacity is still with men. Many times in discussions comparison is made between the scarce resources and

whether it should be spend for drinking water or cycling for women! The point of the 10% fund utilisation as a pro-active step towards overcoming effects of a long and systemic oppression is met with stiff resistance.

#### Some Suggestions for the future

- If gender equity is a serious concern, there should be a woman as a member of the Planning board
- Very conscious efforts to create awareness on gender based planning and implementation to all heads of panchayats initially and then to all elected representatives
- In the selection of beneficiaries, strict criteria to be followed and it should be above party and other considerations.
- It is not enough to have 10% funds allocated to projects for women: It is equally important to see that the projects are implemented in time, efficiently and effectively.
- Gender impact assessment committee set up at the state level should be made functional. Similar bodies should be set up at the district and local levels.
- Violence intervention projects, like the proposed 'jagruthi samithis' at the panchayat level should get urgent consideration
- The women's organisations and NGO's must take serious interest in decentralised planning process and work to ensure effective people's participation at the gram sabhas. Women's groups also should show the willingness to go beyond resistance and struggles and intervene in gendered planning and development.
- More important is the change of mindset needed in political parties regarding the gender concerns in planning.

The experience in Kerala makes it very clear that just by decentralising power or allocating funds or putting certain mechanisms in place, gender equity cannot be addressed. Kerala has taken a step in the right direction but it needs conscious, strategic and planned intervention to progress further.

Patriarchy as a system has deep roots in all institutions of society and sustained and long struggles, systematic intervention of all concerned persons, especially of women's organizations and movements only can bring lasting changes. And the right place to start are the local bodies of governance.

*Paper presented by Aleyamma Vijayan, Sakhi resource center for women, Trivandrum, Kerala-695001*



## Referances

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## WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE EXPERIENCE IN ANDHRA PRADESH

A paper presented at the seminar organised by the Institute of Social Studies Trust Bangalore on Women in Local Governance: Experiences and Effective Strategies in Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra  
1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2000

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The revitalization stage of Panchayati Raj, which had set in the late 70s, brought about several structural and functional changes in the system. One significant change is the passing of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment in 1993 which provided for reservation of not less than one third of seats and chair-positions to women in the Panchayati Raj bodies. The amendment, which could be regarded as one of the important achievements of the Indian Women's Movement, created high hopes among all those concerned about the increased and active involvement of women in grass roots politics, especially in decision-making. The expectation is that reservations to women could facilitate 'bigger and better share' to them in the whole process, 'infuse democratic way of functioning' in local government, help for decline in corruption and provide a space for women in the male dominated political sphere. Reservations are also considered to be responsible for offsetting and unsetting the status quo and for beginning the process of bringing out 'simple women' in the task of governance.

This paper would focus on the pattern of recruitment and performance of women members and chair-persons in Panchayati Raj institutions in Andhra Pradesh; experience of the writer in awareness generation, information dissemination and training of women in general and elected women members in particular; identification of future trends and the strategies for the political empowerment of rural women.

**EXPERIENCE :** Andhra Pradesh is one of the few states to introduce the system of Panchayati Raj as early as 1959. The component of the present three tier system are Zilla Parishads, Mandal Parishads and Gram Panchayats. The Mandal Parishads are smaller units than the former Panchayat Samithis and the Mandal Parishads are organised with the objective of 'going nearer to the door steps of the rural public'. Andhra Pradesh is the first state to provide early in 1986 reservation of chair-positions to women in Panchayati Raj bodies. The Andhra Pradesh Mandala Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Pranalika Abrivruddhi Sameeksha Mandals Act, 1986 provided reservation of 9% of the total number of offices of chairman of Zilla Praja Parishads and Presidents of Mandala Praja Parishads to women. This Act is important in that it ensured representation to women in key positions. The state is implementing the provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and one generation of women members and chair persons have completed their term.

Seven years have passed since the passing of the Constitutional Amendment and it is appropriate to take stock of the experiences to plan for the future. The male dominated social setting, including the political has been strongly against the sharing of power by men and women. In a large number of cases, caste, familial or social nearness to the presidents of panchayat bodies have been given greatest importance in the recruitment process.<sup>4</sup> Hence the quality of membership got heavily compromised in the first two decades of the implementation of the system of Panchayati Raj in general. Significant variations between the attendance in records and actual attendance were present. While the above had been the general trend, some women, though very few in number, had made real contributions. They moved resolutions and participated in deliberations and decisions. Women in key positions with interest and talent could play considerably important roles in decision-making. Sitamahalakshmi, who served as Sarpanch of Mukkamala Gram Panchayat in early sixties was a very active and promising woman and her Sarpanchship provided a source of inspiration to other women. She had several achievements to her credit, but was later forced to surrender her office. Threats, deadlocks, challenges, non-cooperation by officials and traditional objections- all have had their impact on the forced surrender of the office by this woman.<sup>5</sup> During the period when 9% reservation of chair-positions was in operation, two women became Zilla Parishad presidents and 101 women served as presidents of Mandal Parishads. Of the 101 women Presidents of Mandal Parishads, 3 got elected to positions unreserved for women. These figures indicate a quantitative increase in respect of women's position in leadership roles and this was because of reservations. Selection of capable women must have led to qualitative improvement. It is needless to say that all sorts of manipulations have had their play in the choice of women candidates. But micro level studies made very clear that a new and young women's leadership had emerged. This is a sign of revitalization in the context of women's participation in the Panchayati Raj bodies. In a study conducted by the writer in 1989, it was found that not a negligible percentage of women (12%) contested for and assumed leadership roles. It is personal interest and initiative that had contributed to their decision to contest. Familial connections continued to have influence on recruitment but the impact was less than what it was in the 60s and 70s. Thirty two percent of the women elected as presidents, though nominally inducted, performed effective roles with the help of family members and in some cases with the very active cooperation of husbands. Twenty eight percent of the women presidents were endowed with the ability to perform independent roles.<sup>6</sup>

Ganta Deenamma, former president of Yelamanchili Mandal Parishad West Godavari District, Subbalakshmi, former president of Undi Mandal Parishad in West Godavari District, Nagamani, former president of Bashirabad Mandal in Ranga Reddi District, Mallela Gouri, former president of Bikkavolu Mandal Parishad in East Godavari District, Parvati, former president of Anaparty Mandal Parishad in East Godavari District, Nalini Ram, former president of Kuppam Mandal Parishad in Chittore District, Amudavalli, former president of Pichatur Mandal Parishad in Chittore District, Gandu Savitramma, former president, Kesamudram Mandal Parishad in Warangal District and presently, member, State Commission for Women, Andhra Pradesh, Subhadramma, former president of Jammalamadugu Mandal Parishad in Cuddapa District are among the efficient women who served as chairpersons at the middle level institutions. Mrinalini, former president, Srikakulam Zilla Parishad, Rajeswari, former president of West Godavari Zilla Parishad, Geeta, former president of East Godavari Zilla Parishad have been successful women presidents at

the district level institutions. Very recently, Geeta has been elected to Rajya Sabha. The role of nominal performers was over shadowed by the officials or husbands thereby, defeating the purpose of reservation.

**POST AMENDMENT SCENARIO:** The post amendment phase proved beyond doubt that the women in Panchayati Raj moved from peripheral to leadership roles. In fact young and new women's leadership has increased which is made clear by field investigations in Andhra Pradesh. Several success stories have also come to lime light. A few examples could be given here. Karuna who had completed her term very recently contested and won a general seat in Chimvenla Mandal of Nalgonda District and later got elected as Mandal President, which position was reserved to Scheduled Caste women. This young woman's experience has been one of struggle and confrontation with officials, party leadership and the government at higher level. Cutting across several barriers, she could get benefits to her Mandal, concentrating on problems of drinking water, irrigation and education. She successfully fought against misappropriation, erring officials and a manipulated no-confidence motion. She carried the struggle with remarkable confidence and succeeded both in protecting her dignity and promoting democratic values.

Srinivasa kumari, Sarpanch, Tadepalli village in Guntur District worked in a totally different atmosphere. This committed young woman has been a very efficient persuader, problem solver, and administrator. With a planned and phased programme, she repaid the loan left by her predecessor and mobilized funds for development works. Her focus has been on education, irrigation and other amenities to the villagers. She strongly feels that women are honest and could provide good politics. She said that women concentrate more on meeting the needs than on power, but for men power occupies top priority.<sup>8</sup>

In her recent field trip on 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2000, the writer interviewed women presidents of 14 Mandals in the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. A high proportion of these women are young, educated and are new entrants in respect of political involvement. Six of them have a very clear perception of their role and six have a reasonably good view. This is really an encouraging trend. An improvement in the quality of membership and an increase in the number of interested women are clearly visible. Of the remaining two women, one is ignorant and the other has a very limited perception of her role. Male domination in the case of three women and male interference in the performance of seven women were noticed. The remaining four women presidents have been independently performing their roles. As regards educational levels, two are graduates, two had education up to intermediate level, eight have secondary level education and those with elementary educational qualifications are two.

Kamidi Sitamahalakshmi of Karapa, Alamanda Vijayalakshmi of Tuni, Pechetti Vijayalakshmi of Ainavilli, Busi Jayalakshmi of Kothapeta and Sridevi of Mummidivaram are important among the Mandal presidents who have successfully completed their term very recently. Extensive interviews with these women revealed that commitment, honesty, service orientation and dedication are their cardinal virtues. Twenty eight year old Sita Mahalakshmi said "I have accepted the position not for the sake of status and power but to serve people. I strongly feel that development does not come all of a sudden, but takes place in stages".<sup>9</sup> "Am I not competent to contest?"

is the question that every woman is now posing to herself", said Vijayalakshmi of Tuni Mandal.<sup>10</sup> Within a short period of assuming office, this woman picked up courage and feels that there is a lot to be done for women by women. Thirty five years old Pechetti Vijayalakshmi, emphasizing on the need for women's participation in the political process and for purposeful implementation of reservation told the writer that with increasing awareness, women are definitely going to be active in the political process. "I have the satisfaction that I performed my duties to the best of my capacity and my work is recognized in each of the villages in my Mandal", she concluded. Sridevi of Mummidiavaram faced tough opposition from the local party leadership for being honest and committed. But her courage and the support of colleagues as well as public enabled her to successfully fight against four no-confidence motions.<sup>12</sup> Busi Jayalakshmi, the wife of a staunch TDP party worker in Kothapeta has shown concern for the development of her Mandal and a special concern for promoting the interests of Scheduled Castes. She regularly conducted Gram Sabhas and earned reputation as a powerful mobilizer of public support. Pointing out that women's presence makes a difference, she said that the kind of politics men and women play would be markedly different. "For women, respect and reputation are important, but men prefer conflicts and money making", she added. She is interested in contesting a second time and emphatically said "I had established positive influence on the people, and am confident that they would support me. I was always and am available to the people. Whenever they called, I went to help them and cooperated with them. I worked for equitable and fair distribution of favours and resources whether it be pensions for old aged or other benefits. The identification of needy people is done in Gram Sabhas. The women members of the Mandal and other women also have worked without party considerations and are making the best use of the available opportunities" she said.

Fatimabee, former Sarpanch of Kalva village, Orvakal Mandal, Kurnool District received the best Sarpanch award of the state government for her exemplary work in improving the conditions of her village. She also received the Fight Against Poverty Award sponsored by the United Nations organizations. This 39 years old 'tough as steel and soft as silk' lady was initially hesitant and even terrified to take up the role of Sarpanch. When interviewed after becoming Sarpanch, she said "I had never seen a city before, never sat in a room full of men, much less spoken in the presence of others."<sup>14</sup> But participation in orientation programmes brought about marked changes in her attitude and approach. She gained enormous confidence and has worked for the development of her village. Behind the success of Fatimabee are the concerted and continuous efforts of a voluntary organization called Proddu, meaning Sun Rise, headed by Sankaramma.

The above would suggest that the Constitutional Amendment has facilitated the entry of a large number of women in Panchayati Raj bodies and some of the women have been effective power partners. In places where young and energetic women assumed chair-positions, special attention is paid to promote income generating activities to rural women. Sitamahalakshmi of Karapa Mandal motivated a begging community called Budagajangalu to take up self-employment and engage in small business. This Mandal president could get the cooperation of the Women Welfare Department, Nodal Officer and the officials in the collectorate.



The success stories should not lead one to conclude that the outcome of the amendment has always been positive. Attempts to prevent capable women to enter the Panchayati Raj institutions have increased. New preventive dimensions emerged. These include kidnaps, forced withdrawals, illegal unseating, negative networking, harassment, subjugation and oppression. In a Mandal close to the capital of Andhra Pradesh, a woman was nominally placed in the role of president of a Mandal and functionally, it is the husband who is the president. He went to the extent of arranging for himself a chair next to that of his wife in her office. He goes through all the records and puts his initials on the official papers which he desires to be approved. The woman president, who was taught only to sign, fulfilled the formality of signing after seeing her husband's initial. This practice uninterruptedly continued. The members of the Mandal, other than the woman Sarpanch, officials and villagers never questioned the illegality. The Mandal Development Officer, who should function as the implementer of law allowed the practice to be continued. The point is, the officials, who should function as change agents, with exceptions, have become the perpetuators of male dominated political culture. The protectors of law have become supporters of illegal practices.

One of the unhealthy practices in the state of Andhra Pradesh is the constitution of All Women Panchayats to suit the needs of men. All Women Panchayats emerged in states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Tripura, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. According available sources, there are thirty All Women Panchayats in India. Maharashtra has the largest number of such panchayats followed by Andhra Pradesh

It is well known that <sup>the</sup> Committee on the Status of Women felt that one purposeful way encouraging rural women to enter politics is the constitution of All Women Panchayats and recommended accordingly. The committee clearly stated that the proposed statutory women's panchayats are not meant to be parallel organizations to Gram Panchayats and that they are recommended as transitional measures to break through the traditional attitudes in rural society. The committee hoped that the All Women Panchayats would reduce inhibitions and encourage women to actively participate in local bodies. It should be pointed out that long before the committee's recommendations, some All Women Panchayats were experimented with in the state. In the 70s, Mattupalli village in Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh had an All Women Panchayat. In Gandhinagaram, a village in Warangal District, an All Women Panchayat was set up in 1981. The intention behind the formation of this panchayat was definitely not encouraging women's participation in decision making. The major factors contributing to the formation of this panchayat had been caste conflict, gender conflict and a spirit of compromise in the final analysis. It had merely a superficial stamp of 'all women' and the decisions remained those of the village leaders. In the period following the implementation of the amendment, Andhra Pradesh had eight All Women Panchayats. The formation of these bodies was not preceded by real commitment.

**INTERVENTIONS:** The writer is closely associated with a few organizations, in the state, working for awareness generation, information dissemination and training of women in general and elected women in particular. These associations include Ankuram, Young Women's Christian Association and Mahila Rajakiyadhikara Vedika. She is the Joint Secretary of Mahila Rajakiyadhikara Vedika. The vedika

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manipulations and preventive measures. Women heads of Gram Panchayats are often told that their only duty is that of signing on papers and nothing else. Some of are asked to offices to fulfill the formality of signing. The local political leadership or the dominant male members of the panchayats exercise real power. In essence, it is the numbers game that the patriarchal society would be interested to play. Women, as rightly pointed out by Kumud Sharma, need to go beyond the numbers game to expand their share in political power.<sup>15</sup> Women's movement should seriously question this practice and lodge a big protest. Extensive use of media and protest marches would be useful in this regard.

Experience in Andhra Pradesh and in several other states made clear that the device of no-confidence motion is frequently used to unseat women, especially young and assertive women. There are a good number of instances of dalit women being illegally unseated from their positions. Janaki Bai, a dalit woman who became the Sarpanch of Harpura village in Karnataka was allowed to continue in office for one year by the higher caste leadership because, according to the rules, no-confidence resolution could not be moved in first twelve months of the election. She was kidnapped on the day of illegal no-confidence vote against her. Her supporters hoping that there could not be no-confidence vote in the absence of quorum, went on a pilgrimage. But the pro male and anti dalit officials managed the show without quorum. She and her husband were beaten up and were freed only after the 'so called' no-confidence vote was passed. A combination of caste and gender politics and gross violation of rules is very much evident here. As noted, Karuna, former president of Chimvenla Mandal and Sridevi, former president of Mummidivaram Mandal faced similar situations. It is necessary that women's groups should extend support to such women in challenging illegal acts.

The future of women in Panchayati Raj is going to be one of conflict between assertion and suppression, the conflict getting intensified especially when young and capable women enter these bodies. The conflict gets intensified both within and outside the family. Women's groups should and are going to give tough fight against manipulations outside the family. Parties play a prominent role in the selection of candidates, whether male or female. Conflict between party leadership and women's wings are bound to increase. This should be looked at as a positive sign in the process of accommodation and adjustment. This results in an increase in women's component in the decision-making structures of political parties.

Closely related to political power is economic power. Women heads of panchayats are paying increasing attention for facilitating and promoting rural women's economic empowerment. Sitamahalakshmi, president of Karapa Mandal Parishad said that "women have picked up confidence and courage through DWCR schemes. There is change in their life style. Though the income generating schemes have not been useful for getting adequate earnings, women are learning the importance of living on their own, gaining courage and are developing a feeling that they can stand and work on equal terms with men." For making men effective partners in the development process reforms, guaranteeing economic security to women are essential. Economic empowerment of women is going to be one of the top priority items on the agenda of women in Panchayati Raj.

Skill development is one of the prerequisites for effective role performance. It is all the more significant in the present context because of the considerable increase in the number of women representatives in rural local bodies. National and state institutes like the National Institute of Rural Development, Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development, Rajiv Gandhi Institute, Tamil Nadu and Institute of Social Studies Trust, Karnataka and a large number of women's groups as well as other groups are engaged in awareness generation, information dissemination and training. But there seems to be a pressing need to rethink and to have a fresh look at the training modules and the items chosen for awareness generation and information dissemination. The modules identified and efforts put forth so far are varied and diversified. It is necessary to identify a broad training pattern for the country as a whole. Necessary modifications could be made depending on local requirements. Thus it is possible to strike a balance between uniformity and local needs. Awareness generation could focus on topics like social system, sub-systems, participatory democracy, government, rights, duties and local governance. Knowledge about women specific aspects such as women's status in general and rural women's status in particular, women's empowerment, urban-rural variations could form part of the awareness generation programme. It is very important to take elected women as resource persons as no other knowledge could be a real substitute to that gained out of experience. Training programme could focus on building confidence, promoting leadership qualities and preparing women for successful role performance. Networking based on large scale is another pressing need of the time. Women's political empowerment should occupy the position of top priority on the agenda of voluntary organizations committed for the promotion of women's cause. In addition to networking of voluntary organizations coordinated efforts of academics, activists, elected women representatives and women officials could bring about fruitful results.

Successful implementation of beneficiary programmes, depends among other factors, on the interest evinced by officials. Committed and service oriented women officials could be of added strength to women in Panchayati Raj bodies. Shashi Rekha, the Development Officer of Moinabad Mandal in the Ranga Reddy District of Andhra Pradesh received the best Mandal Development Officer award for her commendable work. She says that if the officers are correct, everything gets done well. She has been instrumental for the successful implementation of governmental schemes meant for women.

Women's groups and all those concerned about the empowerment of women should launch a strong protest against the unjust media - print and audio-visual. Positive roles of women are either relegated to the background or wrongly magnified roles are projected. Both are unhealthy symptoms for society in general and women in particular. Therefore careful watch on the media by women's associations is very much essential.

Identification of success stories and spread of information relating to these is necessary to counter the argument that women have not been successful representatives. Current research should give priority to this aspect and try to expose the manipulations that are taking place.

To make Women's Movement effective, its urban colour has to change and should spread to grass roots. To strengthen the role of women in Panchayati Raj should be the immediate task of all those concerned about grass roots development.

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**PANCHAYTI RAJ IN ANDRA PRADESH :  
EMERGING TRENDS**

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## PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ANDHRA PRADESH: EMERGING TRENDS

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The system of Local self-government existed in the villages during the days of Saravahanas and Kakatiya kings. Although dynasties changed yet the villages remained intact with a lot of autonomy. The present system of Local self-government draws its inspiration more from the panchayat, which existed in the ancient and medieval period. Until the advent of British, village was a unit endowed with sufficient administrative powers and sound economically. Initially the British gradually reduced the autonomy of these institutions but at a later stage they made attempts to revive them. One such measure was the Lord Ripon's Resolution of 1882, the Decentralization Commission of 1909, which subsequently paved way for the present Local government system, or the Panchayati Raj. Till Independence, no Sincere attempts were made to constitute Local self-government across the country. Post-Independence Developments for Local-self Government:

During 1950s T.Prakasam introduced Firka Development Scheme and simultaneously the Community Development Programme was tried out in the State. Both these schemes had all the components of the present PRIs. With the formation of the state of Andhra in 1953, the coastal and southwestern districts. The present Telengana districts continued with the former Hyderabad State till 1 November 1956. In 1953, attempts were made to introduce the local-self-government in the state on the basis of the system operating in the then Madras State. The Local Institutions drew its regulations largely from the Madras District Municipalities Act, 1920, the Madras Districts Boards Act, 1920, and the Madras Village



Panchayat Act, 1950. In 1956 the state was re-organized and the present Andhra Pradesh was carved out and during that period the Hyderabad District Board Act, 1951, and the Hyderabad Village panchayat Act, 1951 were also included in the state Act and was applicable in the state. As all these Acts were applicable in the state, due to which three types of institutions emerged in the state they were district boards, taluk boards, and village panchayats. A three-tier system was operating at all the three levels. In Andhra Pradesh the District Boards were elected bodies with the President having executive authority. Their activities were confined to non-panchayat areas with an exception only in the area of education, public health and medical relief. The District Boards had to heavily rely upon land cess, education cess and surcharge or stamp duty, as it was their major source of income. The Taluk boards had similar functions like the District Board. Both the District Boards and the Taluk Boards had similar functions and were also constituted in an identical pattern. Whereas the village panchayats were different in nature and was classified into Class I panchayats with a population of five thousand and above and revenue of ten thousand rupees annually. The remaining village panchayats could not collect any revenue or less than the Class I panchayats. The Class I panchayats was divided into five wards and the Class II into two wards. Elections were held by secret ballot based on adult franchise. Seats were also reserved for Scheduled Caste members.

The functions of the Village panchayats included both obligatory and discretionary ones. Construction and maintenance of village infrastructure, Provision of basic facilities and remedial public health measures and improvement of agricultural activities and animal husbandry programmes formed part of the

obligatory functions. Discretionary functions included environmental upkeep, commercial and other services, educational infrastructure, public welfare measures, and improvement of agriculture and animal husbandry activities. The main sources of revenue were cess on land, transfer of property and taxes of different kinds. Special government grants were also given to the panchayat for teaching, purchase of school equipment and for running maternity and child welfare centers. All the three institutions had in-built limitations in terms of its constitution and functioning. Their jurisdiction was so large, which obstructed their functioning. Each of the three levels operated in a compartmentalized manner with no support from the villages. Both the government departments and the District Boards carried out similar functions like supervision of schools and dispensaries. Paucity of resources, inadequate staff and infrastructure, lack of technical guidance are often reasons for poor functioning of the district, taluk boards and village panchayats.

In 1952, the Community Development projects and the National Extension Service accelerated the activities in the rural areas. This resulted in establishing large administrative machinery and advisory wings at the block and district levels. The elected representatives from the Assembly constituency and Parliamentary (M.L.As and M.Ps) were nominated to these advisory bodies. Panchayati Raj System in Andhra Pradesh can be chronologically divided into four phases. The Institution had its set of ups and down. An analysis for its non-functioning may enable us to understand the pulse of the ' Political will ' with related to PRIs in the state.

The First Phase: 1959- 65

Andhra Pradesh was one of the first states to accept the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta study team (1957) report with few exceptions and constituted a Panchayati samiti in each district on an experimental measure in 1958. An assessment of its working was made, and legislation was passed to create a three-tier system in the state. By 1959, the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads Act was passed and statutory elected bodies had been established in the districts. 235 Panchayat Samithis were constituted and subsequently others were established. By December 1959 the existing District Boards were statutorily abolished and Zilla Parishads were constituted in twenty districts of the state. At that point of time the government issued an adoption order to transfer functions, powers, staff, assets and liabilities of the erstwhile district Boards to the Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads. During 1959, the village panchayats in the Andhra region were constituted under the Madras Village panchayat Act, 1950 and similarly in the Telengana region the Hyderabad Village panchayat Act was in vogue. Practically the three-tier structure was established and was corporate, statutory and representative in nature. All the three institutions at various levels were able to acquire, hold and dispose off property and enter into contracts with other agencies/ bodies.

The state had decided to statutorily abolish district boards and constituted Zilla Parishads in December 1959 in all the twenty-two districts. At this juncture, they had issued an order giving in the details that assets, powers, functions, liabilities, institutions and staff of the district boards were transferred to the Zilla

Parishads and panchayat samithis. Some amendments were made in the 1959 act that in 1963 stating that the Andhra area would be redefined, also restricted the membership of the legislators with voting rights to one samithi only, and prohibited a person from simultaneously being a legislator and a presiding member of any of these bodies. The amendment had prohibited the M.L.As from becoming the members of the Zilla Parishads or samithi if their constituencies were not part of any rural area, besides prescribing the term of the presiding members and prohibiting village officers from becoming members of these bodies.

In 1963, the government had thought of reducing the number of 448 samithi blocks staff in order to ensure economy in the expenditure on establishment. There was a move to carve out bigger blocks but without affecting the tempo of the developmental activities. In order to operationalise this aspects, a high powered committee was constituted with M.Purushottam Pai as the chairperson. This committee recommended larger blocks as it felt that the panchayat samithi blocks were essentially units of planning and development. It felt that while panchayats were envisaged as instruments of economic progress and social change, with the widest scope for the expression of democratic opinion at the village level, larger blocks would be financially stronger with increased scope for independent planning and execution of development programmes, including those under area planning. The committee also suggested categorization of blocks as, ordinary, backward and tribal and the e abolition of the distinction between stage-I, stage -II, post-stage, and so on. The basis of categorization depended on the certain indicators like- per capita revenue; percentage of irrigated to the total area, literacy rate, and

percentage of children attending schools and road mileage, amongst others. It recommended allotment of community development funds on a varying per capita basis so that less developed blocks could get finances more than the others. In order to operationalise some of the recommendations put forth by the Pai committee an amendment was made to the 1959 act in 1964 to empower the government to alter the boundaries of the blocks and reconstitute the samithis. By July 1964, the number of blocks had been reduced from 448 to 321. At the same time some of the municipalities in the Telengana region were reduced to gram panchayats.

By 1964 the Andhra Pradesh Gram panchayat Raj Act, was introduced and it superseded the earlier acts of Andhra and Telengana. According to the present Act, every village had to have a gram sabha consisting of all the adult voters. The gram sabha was entrusted the responsibility to consider the annual statement of accounts and audit, the report of the administration of the previous year, the programme of works for the following year, and the proposals for fresh taxation or for enhancement of the existing taxes. These gram sabhas were presided either by the Sarpanch or the Upa-Sarpanch in case the former is absent.

The gram panchayat was constituted in a village with a population of ten thousand or above. In case it was less than that a group of villages were formed into a gram panchayat. Gram Panchayat was the lowest unit with proximity. All the eligible village voters elected the members and hence the membership depended on the total population and varied between five to seventeen in each panchayat. Prior to the existing reservation policy, one seat was always reserved for women in case of seven and two in nine seats in a gram panchayat. One seat was reserved for either

for Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. The village was divided into as per the number of voters into as many wards as there were seats. Both the Sarpanch and the Upa—the members of the panchayat indirectly elected Sarpanch. Their term of office lasted for a period of five years only.

**Powers of the Sarpanch:** He was the executive head of the gram panchayat. Monthly meetings were convened and exercised administrative control over the executive officer, who at times was in charge of more than one gram panchayat. Apart from executive officer, the Sarpanch also had administrative personnel of the village—the gram sevak in charge of four to six villages and a primary school teacher. There was provision in the 1964 Act to constitute functional committees for agriculture, public health, sanitation and communication, and also two more committees in case there is a felt need from the members. The gram panchayat implemented all the developmental programmes with no exceptions. Due to lack of financial resources most of these programmes were not implemented in the desired manner. Apart from these panchayats, Nyaya Panchayats too was constituted for a group of three to five villages to tackle criminal and civil justice in the rural areas. Nyaya panchayat term of office was for three years.

**Panchayat Samithi:** This was the intermediate tier and all the M.Ps, M.L.As within the block and sarpanches of the gram panchayats were members of this body till 1965. An amendment was made to the 1959 Act stating that the M.Ps and M.L.As were banned not to hold any office of the President and Vice-Presidentship in the intermediate tier. In case the honorable members wished to hold office, they automatically ceased to be members in the Legislature. The term of office of the

President and the Vice-President could be extended by six months by the government or may be removed in case of complaints lodged against them by villagers or any other person. Ex-officio members were holding office as long as they were sarpanches or members of the legislature. The President of the Samithi convened, presided and conducted the meetings once in three months. The Block Development Officer was the chief executive officer of the Samithi and was responsible for implementing its resolutions of the standing committees. Although he was an under the administrative control of the President yet was not entitled to vote or to move any resolution. The Panchayat Samithi implemented all the developmental programmes and also works related to the local economy and infrastructure.

#### Role of Women in PRIs:

Literature on Women's political participation often concludes by stating those women's participation in freedom struggle slowly dwindled successively in post-Independent era. There may be a host of reasons for the decline. Some may be structural, social and cultural too. Situation was no different at the PRIs. Although the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) recommended that besides the 20 members of the Panchayati Samithi, there should be 2 women " who are interested in work among women and children" as co-opted members, A similar provision was suggested with regard to the village panchayat. Accordingly, few states made some provisions in their act. The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) had recommended that statutory All-Women panchayat at village level, with autonomy and resources of their own for the management and administration of welfare, and

development programmes for women and children, as a transitional measure". This recommendation has never been adopted statutorily anywhere, though such all-women panchayats have emerged in some places for a short while. According to a study there were 13 all-women panchayats in Andhra Pradesh after the 1964 elections.

In Andhra Pradesh, the 1986 PRI Act provided 9 percent reservation for women for the offices of Chairman of Zilla Praja Parishads and Mandal Praja Parishads. The act had also made provision of reservation at the gram panchayat level. In A.P. since 1986, reservation of 2-4 (22-25 percent) seats was provided for the gram panchayat, with two women to be co-opted in Panchayat Samithis. For the first time, the National Perspective Plan for Women (1998) recommended that thirty percent of the executive-head positions from the village to the district level should be reserved for women. Similarly, other states too have such all-woman panchayats -viz. Andhra Pradesh six, Haryana one, Karnataka one, Maharashtra nine, Madhya Pradesh four, Tamil Nadu one, Tripura one, and West Bengal one. This data is collected from the respective rural development department and district level officials and elected representatives. There may be some more all-woman panchayats which have not been brought to our notice.

Andhra Pradesh has two lakh ward members, 21,948 sarpanches, 14,647 Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency members, 1098 mandal presidents and 1098 Zilla Parishad Territorial constituency members and 22 Zilla Parishad Presidents. Out of these members one third are women. Most of the problems expressed by women in A.P too are similar to women elected representatives.



In A.P there has not been any sincere efforts to strengthen PRIs at all the levels. In fact two of the Zilla Parishad women Chairpersons were removed under corruption charges. Both of them were highly qualified and trained professionals with good practice in their respective field of excellence. One of them was made Rajya Sabha member very recently and continues to be Politburo member of the Party.

The PRIs decision-makers in A.P are in a very precarious position. Sincere efforts are made to constitute several parallel organizations be it in a small way. Efforts are geared towards Community based organizations who are at times promoted by NGOs or by departmental officials. Some of them are self-help Groups (thrift), Vana suraksha samithis, Village education committees (District Primary education Programme), Watershed committees, Water users association (elected body) with sufficient financial powers, School education committees (Primary and upper primary schools) and Mothers committee. These committees are expected to help the village community and also the PRIs in lending their assistance in the respective areas by resolving the problems and adopting strategies to mitigate them. On the other hand they seem to function independently without any interaction with the PRIs. This has further aggravated the problems for the PRIs functioning.

Women in A.P are formed into thrift groups. Mobilization process has commenced but sustaining these women groups is the larger issue and utilizing their services at the local institutional level is the key problem. Elections are due for the upper two tiers and for Gram panchayts by October 2000. Our efforts need to be to see to it the mobilized, articulate women from these committees become part of the PRIs at various levels and be better decision makers.

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH LOCAL BODIES

EXPERIENCE FROM TAMIL NADU

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# EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH LOCAL BODIES

## EXPERIENCE FROM TAMIL NADU

### Introduction

As a student of Political Science I could not mention a worthy literature on the area of Women and Politics or an area linking the role of women in the political process of the nation. Till the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, Academics in Political Science were not sure and specific about the role to be played by the women in the process of the development of the society in general and the development of the women in particular. Political Scientists hardly find any role for the women in the political process of the society. Indian Council of Social Science Research had undertaken a major review of studies conducted in India on different areas of polity. I am unable to find a chapter on Women and Politics as I could see on Caste and Politics, Students and Politics and SC/ST and Politics. So this is the status of the women in politics in India. 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India prompted the academics to use the concept "Empowerment of Women".

Empowering Women is a loaded concept which connotes different meanings to different individuals. To me empowerment of women refers to the process by which women are acquiring due recognition as men to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity. The barriers which had been very active in the process of the development of women on their own, have to be removed and for which interventions are imperatives at different levels. Reservation of seats in the Local Bodies is one of the steps in this direction and this is not the be all and end all. It has to go a long way in the process of development in the society. The reservation of seats for women has been looked at from many perspectives. One basic question normally addressed in this context is the objectives kept in the minds of the framers of the 73rd amendment to the Constitution of India, while providing 33.3% of reservation of seats to women. Secondly the women leaders who are in local bodies should have a clear cut perception about the objectives of the reservation of seats for women in local bodies. There are other notions on the same issue perceived by the people and the functionaries who are working with the leaders. One could see the incongruity and ambiguity in perceiving the role properly. There is a second aspect, the general perception about the role to be performed by the women leaders as the perceptions are being guided by the historical notion of women folk

and their responsibilities and capabilities. This provision of seats in the Local P makes the women as well as the society to move out from the traditional percep track. This process has been initiated already. But in reality, despite several weaknes the elected women leaders are in position and discharging the earmarked responsibili with varying degree of success. This study makes an attempt to locate the proble encountered by the women leaders and to find out the ways and means to facilitate women leaders to discharge their role and function effectively in their domain.

### **Caveats**

Women leaders cannot be treated as one entity. There are varieties women leaders and the problems associated with women empowerment vary from o segment to another segment of women leaders. Intensity of intervention varies from o group to another. What we find in this small write up is the problems and perspectiv of the women leaders who have been in the continuous struggle in establishing the position as leaders in the local body institutions. It cannot be generalized but th observations would indicate the trend of women leadership position in the local bod institutions.

### **Classification of the Women Leaders**

Never in the Political history of Tamil Nadu that the institutions of Governanc had such massive number of women in positions as what we have been seeing i Local Bodies at present. All the women leaders who are in position have no volunteered themselves to contest in the election. It is a well known fact that they ar driven to these position by an array of organisations, individuals and institutions. Bu after assuming office women leaders have exhibited their distinctions in terms o their perception behaviour and performance. Their distinct functions are the result o a number of factors. Before going into the details of the substantive issue of their perception, behaviour and performance we have to classify the category of leaders.

1. There are women leaders propelled by the male member of their family.
2. There are women leaders oriented by the NGO's for this specific task.
3. There are women leaders oriented by the party.
4. There are women leaders recruited by the community.
5. There are women leaders sponsored by their husbands with the support of the political party.

Of the five categories, a large number of leaders belong to the last category. Third and fourth category forms the next largest group. The other two are having the minimum numbers. The second and the third group are not having more number of leaders yet their activities are drawing the attention of the people as they have support base for their activities. All the other groups are having a wide variety of problems to be tackled to discharge their role and responsibilities. This classification is not exhaustive but it is done on the basis of the experience gained in the training conducted to the women leaders at various levels in Gandhigram Rural Institute sponsored by various funding agencies. The details are given below.

S.No.	Trainee Category	Sponsoring Agency	Total No.of. Leaders Trained
1.	Gram Panchayati Presidents Block Panchayati Presidents District Panchayati Presidents and ward members of Dharmapuri & Dindigul Districts	Population Foundation of India	0750
2..	Gram Panchayati Presidents and Vice Presidents Villupuram & Cuddalore Districts	DANIDA	0245
3.	Village Panchayati Presidents of Dindigul, Sivaganga, Madurai, Ramnad districts	CAPART	0425
4.	Village Panchayati Presidents of Theni, Thiruvarur, Salem Nammakkal, Virudhunagar Dharmapuri	Social Welfare Board	0825
5.	Chairperson of Town Panchayats Municipalities of Sixteen Districts	Government of Tamil Nadu	2150
		Total	4395

## **Entry in to Positions**

By and large the performance of the leaders are conditioned by a variety of factors and of which mode of recruitment is a key factor. As per their perception and understanding they are elevated to position through election on the basis of the caste, party affiliation, family, organisational affiliation, community, peer group, money, own reputation and past services rendered to the community. No single factor worked in an isolation. A combination of factors worked in the process of their elevation to the position. The same factors are responsible for their performance also. The leaders have been oriented by the peer group leaders, family members, community leaders and their husbands and they have to go by the advise of the people who had been responsible for their elevation to position through election. NGO's and political parties who have sponsored the candidates have given proper orientation to the women leaders. Certain groups of women leaders who have undergone training have got confusion over their role and responsibility as they are under the control of some extraneous forces. Because of the continuous orientation and capacity building exercise the women leaders have started moving out from the clutches of others to their own domain without much noise, through a variety of devices.

## **Problems faced by the Women Leaders**

Normally to overcome the problems in discharging the role and functions of the leaders in the Local Bodies, the leaders capacity has to be enhanced. By enhancing the capacity, institutions can be managed effectively.

Government has not taken any serious step in the first three years to enhance the capacity of the leaders through the training programme. To impress upon the government about the importance of the training we took near about three years. Now the government has taken effort to conduct the capacity building exercise with the financial support of UNICEF, but the leaders have come to the final phase of their tenure. The women leaders have entered into the offices without any orientation. The moment the leaders peeped into the offices the officials have given orientation to the leaders on 'dos' and 'don't dos' by reading out some of the provision of the Tamil Nadu Panchayati Act. This kind of orientation has crippled the initiative of the leaders.

Generally it is a complaint made by all the women leaders that the officials are not cooperating with elected leaders by providing necessary information in time to enable them to perform their functions effectively. Further the leaders who are weak in terms of their capacity are being illtreated. The Dalit leaders are not even provided with a chair to sit in front of a clerk in the offices. Very rarely one would find officials treating the Dalit leaders with dignity. When fear psychosis is created in the minds of dalit women leaders in the beginning itself the leaders never think of meeting the higher officials at the district level during the whole period of their tenure. Officials who had performed the role in the same office without any interference in the absence of panchayat leaders now feel somebody has come and they have taken up the mantle and for them the officials are made accountable. This new system has pushed them from the stage of a decision maker and to an executive officer. Hence their reactions towards the leaders are always negative. The officials tried their level best to establish their control over the leaders by making use of the ignorance of the leaders.

The segments which had supported the women candidates in the election, have not extended their support to the same leaders for their functioning. The leaders who have not indicated a signal that they are working for the people who have costed their votes in the election in favour of them can not get the support of the same segments of the people. Even her party leaders at the grass root level are not extending their helping hand towards her activities in the panchayats. In the same way the caste leaders and family members exert pressure on the leaders to yield to their pressures. The caste leaders feel that the panchayat leaders are relying on the support base of the caste. Hence they also exert pressure on them. Husbands are the yet another problem to the elected women leaders. A large number of women leaders have been recruited to these position by the influence of their husbands in the party. When a seat is reserved for women, the male aspirant candidate seeks permission from the party to field his wife for the post. Such is the way most of the women leaders have been recruited. The male members have fielded the women for leadership position with the thinking that the administration could be controlled by them. Even after the election the husbands have tried their level best to control over the administration but in vain as the government have instructed the officers to check this kind of practice. Moreover wherever the husbands are establishing the administrative control over the panchayats, people have started questioning the capacity of the women presidents in managing the affairs of the panchayats. Over a period of time the women leaders have oriented themselves by way

of participating in the training programme conducted by various organisation, to manage their affairs of their own but they are not in a position to communicate this message to their husbands. Even after three years the male members of the women leaders family have not changed their perception about the competency and capacity of the women leaders. Still they feel that the women leaders are not having the needed capacity to manage their affairs. Hence they make themselves ready for accompanying the women leaders.

Managerial skill is an imperative for the leaders to manage the personnel and the resources well within the established frameworks of administration. Here the women leaders lack that capacity. In all fora they have indicated the problem yet decisions are not on the sight. Yet another problem they face in local bodies is the lack of communication skill. Tamil Nadu is known for inflammatory speeches. Political parties are having a separate wing of public speakers. The local body leaders have to share the dais with MLAs and MPs and officials in public functions. Of them, the women leaders used to cut a sorry figure as they are not able to communicate their ideas in an effective way as done by the MLAs and MPs. Further they need a communication skill to mobilise the people and to manage them in Gram Sabha and other public meetings. Nobody gives such orientation to them in the art of effective communication.

By providing this opportunity to women to work in the local bodies as leaders, work load of them has been increased enormously both in their houses and offices. Women leaders hailing from upper middle class family have been to some extent relieved of their duties at home as necessary arrangements have been made in the home to look after the affair which had been looked after by the women leaders before they were elected to positions in local bodies. But women hailing from poor families are facing number of problems. Their work load has been increased, panchayats are not paying anything to the leaders as salary even after handing over a variety of responsibilities to be handled by the leaders on par with a full time officer. In some of the places we find poor men and women assumed responsibilities and discharging their role and function. Poor coolie cannot afford to loose this wage by attending the panchayat works. It is natural on the part of the women leader who is a wage earner to handover responsibility to some one and performing her duties to the family.



Panchayat leaders at the Gram Panchayati level they have to maintain thirty one records. <sup>9/5</sup> It is possible for an uneducated women to maintain all the records properly as per the rules and procedures. Even the clerks are finding in very difficult to maintain the same. Most of the women leaders are the victims of the accounting procedure in Tamil Nadu. This is a major area one has to concentrate as to how the women leaders could be saved from this ordeal. It is a general problem for all the leaders but it is more specific for women leaders about the non communication of the government orders to the leaders. Not only the government orders but also the schemes and programmes of the government. In the age of information, information flow is struck below the district level. Every office is instructed to have peoples charter and they have to be circulated among the people and their leaders. But now all those documents are kept in the respective offices. Officials are not willing to share this information with elected leaders.

Normally women would be sensitive towards women issues and that was the expectation of the leaders who have talked about the one third reservation of seats for women. But in reality, women leaders are brought and oriented in such fashion not to be sensitive towards women issues. Women leaders who have been trained properly are sensitive towards the women issues. They are periodically sensitised by the NGOs.

It is true that the administrative procedures which have been introduced in our system to administer development are so complicated not understandable to the commonman. But it helps the vested interest to develop a corrupt coterie in the administrative system. The newly elected women leaders have moved into the office with a sense of hope, but they have seen a different picture in the scenario of administration. The women who are novis in administration have to either yield to the corrupt system or to struggle with the system. If she has chosen the later, who will help the women leaders is a major question.

The interference of politicians at the level of MLAs and MPs in the local body administration is an yet another disturbance faced by the women leaders. The MLAs and MPs with their area development fund have interfered in the administration of panchayats. The women leaders pleas and beseeches are not respected by the MLAs and MPs as they felt that women leaders cannot mobilise vote for them when they contest in the next general election.

## What They Need?

Problems can be projected to any level and they can be visualised in a perspective manner but what is the solution? and what is the way out? It is not our analysis and suggestion but it is their suggestion which I explain in the following pages.

They need continuous training on the role and responsibilities to be discharged by them within the framework of the established political system at the Grass root<sup>3</sup> level. How to administer development and social justice should be known to every one to perform their role effectively. Through orientation workshop and training, their capacity could be enhanced. This exercise should not be an one time affair. It is a continuous process where the women leaders can have an opportunity to meet and interact with other leaders. By doing so they could easily get the models for emulation. Hence training could be given to the leaders periodically but not by the officials. Officials use to threaten the leaders in their training programmes. Hence this could be avoided.

Further, leaders cannot perform their roles and duties without adequate information. Now it is a major handicap that leaders are not supplied with needed information for their functioning. Everywhere it is a cry of the leaders that the government orders are not being sent to the leaders. They are being sent to the offices and officers but they have not been given to the leaders. Unless the leaders have a centre for getting information, they felt that it is very difficult to carry out their activities to the level of the expectations of the people. They require the details of the Act, rules, regulations, procedures, government orders, programmes and schemes of the governments to be carried out in the rural and urban areas.

Next to training and information, the women leaders need a supportive organisation which is able to support the women leaders when they are in trouble. Women leaders are working in a given environment which is not so conducive for effective functioning of the women leaders. All the women leaders who are upright and committed have to face troubles and tribulations in the society and they have to swim against the current, and hence they felt that a supportive organisation is needed to provide moral support. This support can be done by the NGO's very effectively. The Panchayati supportive Non Governmental Organisation have to sensitise the women leaders periodically otherwise they will be non sensitive towards the women issues. There is yet another expectation from the women leaders that the mentally depressed women leaders in a complicated social structure require proper and timely

counselling. There are cases admitted in hospitals and took treatment for mental depression. This was explained by the women leaders at the state head quarter meeting in front of the Secretary of Rural Development, organised by Human Rights Foundation, Chennai. This can also be done by some committed NGO's.

Honorarium is yet another demand which could be seen rationally in the backdrop of the workload assigned to the local body leaders. It is our experience that the women leaders who are the bread winner of the family not taking responsibility without honorarium. Hence whenever programmes are organised for poor women by the NGO's, the women leaders are provided with their wage as they earn in their work spot. Hence corresponding to their workload, honorarium could be fixed and paid properly to them in time for the work done by the women leaders. Otherwise poor will not participate in the political and development process of the grassroots level institutions.

### Leaders are on the Making

Though they have problems and inadequacies, women leaders have emerged and are able to perform the role and function as effectively and efficiently as men. The women leaders in the process of making themselves as leaders exhibited a variety. They are six kinds namely aggressive leaders, capacitated sober leaders, leaders with status quo aspiration, leaders with the aspiration of upward mobility, leaders with a mood of withdrawal and leaders with no idea.

A few cadre parties and a few committed NGO's have been continuously orienting the leaders and extending all their supports to the women leaders who have established their links with the party as party members and NGOs' as beneficiary. They always exhibit aggressive character and by which they are able to discharge their duties more effectively than the other leaders.

There is yet another category of leaders, who have been oriented and trained but not committed to any ideology or organisation. But they are committed in their work. They have participated in the programmes organised by the NGO but they donot have continuous linkage with NGO. They are capacitated leaders concentrating much on their responsibilities and they have performed very well as they have enhanced their capacity. They have aspiration to continue in public service but no specific position.

There is another category which is slightly different from the first one. The capacitated leaders have concentrated much on enhancing their capacity continuously

and performing their duties. While performing their duties, they see the response of the people based on the response, they have a desire to continue in office. But this category has fixed an ambition to continue in the same position and for which this category leaders have developed an art of managing the people in the local bodies. All their deficiencies are compensated by their public relations. Their linkage with the people are stronger as they are always with the people.

The fourth category leaders have a different aspiration. Though they have a number of deficiencies, by keeping themselves very active in discharging their duties they want to demonstrate to their party leaders that they are the opt candidates for Membership in Legislative Assembly. They are always busy in meeting the people and keeping their life busy by familiarizing themselves with the people. They consider the Panchayati institutions as launching pad for their political entry. But this number is very less but they are the models for emulation.

Another category leaders who are unable to meet the challenges of the role and unable to bear the pressure of the society and the family have expressed their desire to withdraw from public life. These leaders were brought to the public life by force by their husbands. The relationship between the husband and wife has undergone a change in the whole process of administering development through Panchayati Raj Institutions in most of the cases. Many of the husbands realized the fact that their wives have acquired needed capacity and hence they have to withdraw from the support space. But there is another segment of men who have determined not to allow their wives to attend to their duties on their own. Most of the women leaders have expressed that they have been facing problem in the local body institutions because of the interference of their husbands. This factor cannot be explained to their husbands by the women leaders of panchayats on their own.

There is yet another category which has no idea. They are in the hands of the male members of the family despite the pronouncement of the Government. The women leaders have not moved out from their houses for public works. They are not meeting the people. Virtually their husbands are operating the machinery. They are not bothered about it. It is a money spinning device which is ably tackled by their husbands by their muscle and money power. Officials are also cooperating with such leaders. They have no idea about the panchayats and they have no aspiration to contest in the next election. If their husbands ask them to contest they will contest otherwise they need not bother about it.

## Rajiv Gandhi Chair Intervention

It is primarily a centre for research and policy advocacy. But it does a number of functions. Along with the elected leaders of the Local Bodies, the centre is involved in awareness creation work. It has been recognised as a model training centre and it has been organising training programmes for the leaders of gram panchayats, presidents of district panchayats. It provides vital information to local body leaders. It conducts a number of projects on vital issues affecting the normal functioning of local bodies. Based on the research findings, proposals being prepared and sent the same to the government. Since the Chairman of the Rajiv Gandhi Chair is closely working with the higher level functionaries, policy advocacy done by this centre is easily perceived and taken for policy decision. Apart from this activity, the chair has a network of NGO's for panchayati activities in the name of "Tamil Nadu Campaign for Panchayati Raj". Through this network the women leaders are sensitised periodically on the issues affecting their work. The centre helps the women leaders to form their own organisation to address the issues of women local body leaders.

## Observation and Conclusion

Women have come to positions in the Local Bodies as provision has been made in the constitution. Outlook of the society towards the women has started changing. But the hurdles are continuing in the process of empowering women. Steps are being taken by the women on their own to overcome the hurdles. It is a long drawn process.

A structure which had been created over centuries to work against the interest of women cannot be altered within a day or two. It could be changed only by creating a movement by the mass and for which this provision of one third reservation of seats to women would help. On the ground to fight against the designs of the structure, an organised movement of the mass is an imperative. To make the women to achieve results in their positions an array of interventions are necessary.

They need orientation, sensitization, capacity building, information, counselling, continuously through an organisation. The ongoing experiments and experiences suggest that periodical training, orientation, sensitization make the women leaders to perform the assigned role in a better way than the navis. When the women leaders are responding to the socio political challenges in this society they are to be supported by the organisations and institutions which are working for empowerment of women. Wherever such interventions are obvious, achievements of the women leaders are substantial and impressive. Government will respond to the needs of these women leaders only when they are supported by organisations well known for their credentials.

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# DEVELOPING GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN GOVERNANCE

*Prema Gopalan, SSP Mumbai, India*

*April, 2000*

## INTRODUCTION

Swayam Shikshan Prayog – SSP means self learning initiative. SSP is a voluntary organisation based in Bombay, India. SSP partners with community women's groups and networks on multiple issues - credit, livelihoods, housing and infrastructure, basic services. Women's groups are usually organised around savings and credit. Through information and capacity building, SSP facilitates scaling up of innovations by women's groups and communities. Within districts, a community alliance of elected members and women's groups supports the participation of grassroots women in local governance and planning.

SSP's work with Panchayati Raj institutions began five years ago with the women voters campaign. We are at a threshold where elections to the Gram Panchayats, local self-governments in Maharashtra. This presents an opportunity for women's groups to participate in the "agenda setting" process. Women's collectives have an opportunity to articulate gender concerns such as credit, violence, health, education etc. Similarly, it is expected that women's groups will directly participate in the electoral process. SSP sees itself using this opportunity for looking back, building women's skills for agenda setting and creating a supportive environment through information and training on a large scale:

## SSP'S PERSPECTIVE AND WORK ON ENGENDERING GOVERNANCE

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution of India provided the impetus for women to enter formal political spaces. This has presented a tremendous opportunity for grassroots women's participation in planning and development. Despite the large numbers of women in local governing bodies, however, gender issues are not addressed and women continue to be marginalised in local decision-making processes.

SSP's work on Panchayati Raj began with a campaign for women's vote in 1995. This was followed by training for 22,000 gram panchayat members in 1997. This goal was to create new institutional arrangements that would respond to the needs of women through partnerships with mainstream institutions.

SSP's intervention on engendering governance focuses on getting all the actors – government officials, women's collectives and elected members – to participate in learning and dialogue forums. These learning and convergence efforts are grounded in local reality, using local resources persons, local resources and skills. An essential ingredient of the process is that other key actors recognize capacities of women's collectives to play key roles in development.

Today, the Sakhi Panchayat (an alliance of women's collectives and elected women members promoted by SSP) represents a new kind of leadership. SSP

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together with the alliance works towards transforming gram panchayats to become accountable and transparent, training elected members on legal issues, advocacy on devolution of power and resources, and finally building an informed and active constituency.

We would like to share some important insights on how women's participation and leadership by an alliance of elected members with the support of women's collectives is changing the face of local governance.

Fostering grassroots democracy through mass participation of women, strengthening women's political leadership, building skills and capacities to participate in planning and local governance are some of the ingredients of the strategy. Women's collectives have emerged as the gate keepers of good governance.

- Mobilising communities to participate in local development
- Improving access to PDS/ration shops, anti poverty schemes
- Eliminated middle men/corruption in government schemes
- Made health care services and education accountable to women
- Ensuring that communities are informed through regular gram sabhas/village assemblies

#### Re-configuring women's role in communities

- Women's collectives are playing a key role in accessing and disseminating information on governments schemes.
- Women are participating in gram sabhas in large numbers in order to voice their demands for local resources and services. In other words they are demanding greater accountability from elected members. Women' groups are also participating regularly at dialogue forums to get information from officials and provide feedback on government scheme
- Women leaders are also participating actively in panchayat level committees – PDS, school, health, water – in 300 villages.
- Women's collectives are actively monitoring the functioning of basic services and infrastructure; education health and social support programs
- Women are also playing a pivotal role in mobilising communities around village development issues. As a result of the sense of community ownership created, community contributions and tax collections have increased.

#### SSP's ongoing efforts include:

- Panchayati Raj training of 5,000 elected members and Block level officials (start January 20, 2000)
- Developing and field testing learning tools that assist women to collectively analyse and understand infrastructural facilities, basic services and social services. E.g. mapping of settlements assessing sewage and sanitation, roads, water supply
- Organising study tours and exposure visits to "best practice" villages
- Organising study tours to taluka/district offices in order to find out about government schemes and procedures to access these.
- Creating Sakhi Panchayat forums to dialogue with officials with a view to facilitating women's participation in decision making and local planning
- Micro-planning for infrastructure in select village with Mahila Sarpanchas/chairpersons

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# WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: FIELD EXPERIENCE FROM KARNATAKA

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## **Introduction :**

Reservation of seats and authority positions for women have brought a large number of women to panchayats as members and presidents. The enhanced quota for women (compared to the previous regime) and the categorywise reservation also brought into panchayats a large proportion of first generation elected representatives. Though this should be construed as a welcome development, in some quarters doubts are being expressed about the ability of women members to actually deliver the goods in the political space which is considered alien to them. A good deal of literature has emerged decrying "the larger than the life-size role" assigned to women in local governance. Indeed, bashing women members and presidents on this point has become fashionable in many circles even to the point of creating some myths about women's participation in the local governance system. The purpose of this note is to objectively evaluate the real and imaginary positions taken on the issue of women's representation in local governance.

## **The Problem of Proxy :**

There is a view that since the number of positions in panchayats for women far exceeds the number of women who are competent and willing, the

panchayats get packed with inexperienced, illiterate and incompetent women members. And since the seats for women are reserved and rotated there is no chance for the sitting member to contest election next time; hence, every election brings in a new woman member who may not have previous experience. To top it all, it is also stated that since many of them are sponsored candidates they actually tend to be proxies for relatives and local leaders. By and large, this is true. Generally speaking, women members, when compared with their male counterparts, are less literate and less experienced. In such cases, relatives, especially husbands, and local leaders, especially the big land holders and contractors, serve as proxies to women members and women presidents. A recent study (SEARCH, April-June 1999) shows that the women members serve as a proxy to husbands, other relatives and local leaders, and that the proxy rate among them rises as one moves from membership of the panchayats to presidentship - for the presidentship the rate of proxy being much higher.

While admitting that the problem of proxy rule by relatives and local leaders is a fact of life, it may be desirable to note the following points:

Our experience is that the proxy phenomenon is not confined to women alone; male members are also subject to this charge especially those coming from the reserved category. A majority of the males in this category are illiterate, inexperienced and incompetent. In their case also, sponsorship has been a common practice in so far as the number of reserved positions are in excess of

those who are competent and willing to contest. Under the circumstance, it is strange that so much noise is made about the proxy problem only in respect of women when it exists extensively among males also. This strange phenomenon needs to be understood.

In our formal as well as informal discussions when we confronted the male members on the above issue, a point that emerged was that they were not against women becoming members of the panchayats; their objection was to women being offered the authority position of presidentship. The objection was based on their perception that women, especially when brought through the reservation channel, would not deliver the goods. The point that this possibility is highly probable even in respect of the male members coming through the same channel is glossed over. In order to get some insights into this contradiction in the position taken, it may be worth referring to some incidents observed by the present writer: Under the previous panchayat regime (the 1983 PR Act), out of over two thousand Mandal Panchayats only two panchayats were headed by women. In one such Mandal Panchayat (Honganur of Channapattana Taluk) a hindu minority caste woman was elected as pradhan by a quirk of circumstances. But within a couple of months, a no-confidence motion was contemplated by the male members. What is surprising is that her own party members joined hands with the opposition to dislodge her. The lady, whom this writer interviewed, in so many words gave the reason that the male members were not willing to work "under" a woman. Though one has to

be cautions before generalising from this single instance, the fact that a mind-set of this nature among male members was visible on many occasions cannot be ignored. Thus, an evaluation study of the SIRD training program for the Grama Panchayats (B. Vijay Kumar *et.al.*, June 1997) refers to an incident where the organisers make the women members sit on the floor while the male members were accommodated on chairs. When this writer organised a training program for the Zilla Panchayat members at ISEC, Bangalore he was amused at seeing the male members always choosing to sit closer to the resource person leaving no choice to women but to sit in the back rows, and blaming the non-performance of panchayats on the large presence of women in the panchayat bodies!

These incidents, minor as they appear, reflect the inbuilt prejudice about the status of women in our society. This mind-set of the whole set applies equally to the sub set of the panchayats and creates an exaggerated version of the so-called incompetence of women members. It may be of interest here to digress a bit and examine why at all the proxy phenomenon obtains in the panchayats. Since women tend to be proxies largely for their family members and relatives, we interviewed some husbands and relatives to get a feel of why they shadowed the women members and presidents. The main point that emerged was the following: since the women are illiterate, elected for the first time and by reason of which are inexperienced they needed help and support from the close confidants. Husbands and close relatives come in handy to fill

the bill. Husbands and relatives also feel compelled to be always on the side of the women members especially with the woman president because if the latter made a mistake or conspired to make a mistake it will be a reflection on the family honour. Hence the relatives of the woman president in particular keep company just in case she needs any help. In the opinion of this writer this is quite legitimate and there should not be any objection to the women members and presidents taking the advice of close relatives or even be guided by them. In fact, when women members came to our training program, they came with their husbands/ relatives who even sat behind them in the session taking down notes on their behalf and even prompting them to answer a question and seek a clarification. If this is the role they play even back at home in the panchayat one should not have any objection to it.

#### **Awareness, Perception and Participation :**

One of the factors undoubtedly that is at the base of better performance of the panchayats is the higher level of awareness, and perceptions of, and participation in decision-making by, the members. A study of this aspect carried out in Chitradurga district (N. Sivanna, 1998) brings out some interesting results pertaining to male and female members. According to this study, women consistently obtained lower scores in regard to all the three parameters. However, the difference between males and females was slightly larger in regard to awareness (about 14 percentage points). But in respect of perceptions and participation this difference was lower - being 7 and 8.5

percentage points respectively. The slightly wider gap in awareness between male and female members is understandable considering that the former have a better chance of exposure to the goings on in the polity than the latter. However, lack of equal amount of exposure of female members has not deterred them from forming more or less equal perception levels and participating equally well in the decision-making process. Therefore, if the levels of awareness, perception and participation are an index of performance, then the performance levels of males does not appear to be too high to warrant creation of a myth that men can do better than women.

The above statement of facts is a quantified version of the performance potential of males and females. Let us now examine its qualitative aspect. In his informal and unstructured discussions with some Grama Panchayat members, this writer asked them to state in order of priority three development projects they would choose if funds were made available. The male members preferred a link road to the nearest town, a bus shelter and a community hall in that order. The women members' preference on a priority basis was drinking water, toilets and street lights. A harijan woman added "Rudrabhoomi" - a burial ground as her caste people were not allowed to bury their dead in the village burial ground! This gives a clue to the nature of felt needs of the people at the grass roots level. May be the intensity of the needs felt by the male and the female members is the same and may be the needs of males and females differ. But the point that cannot be over looked is that

women members are much closer to home - to the immediate needs of the family. In so far as local governments are expected to meet the immediate needs of the family, the quality of women's perceptions appears to be a shade better.

Consider another incident in support of this point. A panchayat in Kolar district was debating a question as to how it can utilise a grant received from an organisation. The male members of the panchayat proposed that an additional dairy building may be constructed using those funds as the present one was congested. Two women members who were present stood up and made an alternative proposal. They argued that the building where the anganawadi children are housed presently was dilapidated and as such it may collapse any time causing death of the young children. Hence, there was an urgent need to put up an anganawadi building. That the final decision went in favour of the dairy building is a different story. But the fact is that the concern of the women members to the safety of children cannot escape the attention of the readers.

Another case may be quite revealing. A Grama Panchayat did not have a panchayat building. So, the panchayat took a decision to put up a building for the purpose on a two gunta private plot belonging to a panchayat member who offered it for a price of Rs.20,000. A woman member intervened to make a suggestion. She said that it was atrocious to squander the precious panchayat

funds on purchase of land. She suggested that an announcement may be made to the effect that whichever village comes forward to donate two guntas of land, the panchayat will decide to locate the panchayat building in that village. If land is thus obtained free of cost, the amount that would have gone by way of price to be paid for land could be used for construction of the building or providing amenities to the villagers. Though the decision taken obviously went against her suggestion, the logic involved in her argument cannot be missed.

#### **Training Needs :**

From the above discussion, it appears that though the awareness levels of women are lower, the levels of their perceptions and participation are not far below those of male members. Moreover, qualitatively women capture the felt needs that are nearer home and the needs identified by them are of immediate nature. However, women members seem to be constrained from having their say in the decision-making process. As a result, they tend to lose out to the male members. This result may be due to their inability to lobby with other members and officials, their low levels of articulation skills, and perhaps to lack of information. Therefore, it appears that asymmetry of information, inability to lobby and to be articulate act as constraints on them to get the decisions in their favour. If these constraints are released by providing them with full information about the panchayat system, and training them in the art of articulation and lobbying, they possibly will effectively influence decision-



making. This makes out a case for organising special training programs for women to provide them with relevant information and to impart skills of articulation and lobbying.

Realising the need as also the importance of training, the Government of Karnataka sponsored several training programs for the benefit of members, presidents and vice-presidents of all levels of panchayats. The SIRD, DTI's, academic institutions and NGO's organised such programs in the State. In some cases, training programs were targeted exclusively to women members perceiving that they needed special attention. In many cases, the programs were targeted both for male and female members. The inputs given to the trainees were (a) basic information about the PR system with special emphasis on the legal, administrative and developmental aspects, and (b) skills of speaking in the panchayat meetings, seeking information, raising issues and debating on the proposals brought before the meetings and (c) leadership skills of handling people - citizens, officials and other elected members. Some institutions also placed emphasis on changing the attitudes of members on the question of reservation, equal opportunity for weaker sections especially women and depressed classes, on corruption, class and caste harmony and such other sensitive social problems.

It is difficult to capture the exact impact of training programs on the trainees. However, field experience seems to suggest that members benefited

from such programs though a need was felt that the training duration could have been extended, and repeat and follow up programs organised to update knowledge and to keep members' interest alive. On women members particularly, the training programs appear to have left a good impact. This point may be illustrated by sharing our own experience in respect of a program organised in ISEC for the members, vice presidents and presidents of Zilla Panchayats.

The fact that out of 700 persons who attended the program about 36% were women suggests that response from them was encouraging especially when viewed from their general reluctance to come out of their homes. On the first day we found them to be overwhelmed by the new environment and strange people. But our lady colleagues did their best to put the women trainees at ease. The women members did not speak much on the first day but gradually as they went through the sessions, they picked up courage and participated in the discussions. By the end of the program we hardly found any difference between the participatory levels of male and female members. A remark made by Dr.P.V Sheno, the then Director of ISEC, in regard to the participation of women members on the valedictory function of one of the programs in the presence of the Minister of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development may be of interest to note here. He said, "on the first day they would not speak at all in the sessions. But, on the second day they would open up, they would speak on the third day and roar on the fourth day". This is a dramatised assessment of

the participation of women members in the discussion. As a matter of fact, this writer who was the course coordinator, had the pleasant experience of getting congratulatory calls from the relatives of the women trainees after they went back from the course. A typical example is a call from the husband of a member who after conveying his congrats exclaimed: "My wife had never spoken in the panchayat meeting until recently. After she returned from ISEC, she made a speech". We also on and off received reports that our women members had become assertive, even quoted from the panchayat Act and referred to various Union and State Government programs and schemes funded by external agencies whenever occasions demanded. What a tribute to the role of training programs in empowering women members! All of this underlines the importance as also the usefulness of training for panchayat functionaries.

#### **Concluding Remarks :**

It is admitted that the women panchayat members and presidents do have limitations arising on account of their low literacy level and lack of experience and exposure to the world outside home. This is compounded by a spurt in demand for women to assume charge of local governance due mainly to reservation of seats and authority positions. Under the circumstance, in many cases they work as proxies to relatives and local leaders. But the phenomenon of proxy rule in panchayats is not the exclusive preserve of the female members alone; male members are also subjected to the same charge.

The levels of awareness, perception and participation among women members are, no doubt, lower compared with men but the resultant gap between the two does not appear to be wide enough to warrant such a severe criticism of women for their non-performance or low performance. Besides, the qualitative aspect of their levels of those parameters suggest that women members are nearer home and focus on the immediate needs of the family when compared with the male members.

Though women members do put across their views and appear to be logical in their arguments, they tend to lose the battle mainly because they are not articulative enough, not assertive and not equipped with adequate information. It is in this context, a need is felt to equipping them with knowledge, and skills of articulation and lobbying by organising training programs. Whenever training programs have been organised, women have responded better, shown immense interest and demonstrated their ability for quick learning. Therefore, it is suggested that training for women is a must and that repeat programs should be organised to update and keep their interest alive.

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T1

PRESENTATION ON "GENDER AND GOVERNANCE: EXPERIENCES AND INTERVENTIONS OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA, KARNATAKA"

- Dr.Revathi Narayanan, State Programme Director  
Mahila Samakhya Karnataka

AT

ISST SEMINAR ON "WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: EXPERIENCES AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES IN KARNATAKA, KERALA, ANDHRA PRADESH, TAMIL NADU AND MAHARASHTRA

T2

Mahila Samakhya - GOI project under Dept. of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development for the empowerment of poor rural women in Karnataka (1989), UP, Gujarat (1989), AP (1993), under Bihar Education Project in Bihar (1991), under DPEP in MP, Assam and Kerala (post 1996).

Vision : ▲Equality through education, ▲formation of empowered grassroot federations of poor women.

Strategy : Formation of Village level collectives as a starting point - collective reflection, analysis and action.

T3

SAMAKHYA : GIVING EQUAL STATUS TO ...

STATUS OF WOMEN REVISITED:

THREE KEY INDICATORS

- ✧ CHANGING STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS
- ✧ ENHANCING ACCESS TO RESOURCES
- ✧ CHANGING IDEOLOGY

GENDER AND GOVERNANCE THEREFORE SEEN AS A CORE ISSUE FOR MAHILA SAMAKHYA

### CALL IT SERENDIPITY OR WHAT YOU WILL

- 1987 : Local body elections in Karnataka with 25% reservation for women
- 1989 : MS Karnataka launched in Bidar, Bijapur and Mysore, 1991 - 92 in Raichur and Gulbarga
- 1993 : GP elections with 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % reservation for women  
Sangha women contest and several win, especially on SC reserved seats.
- 1994 : MS Gender and Governance training woven into the Gramsat programme of Department of Women and Child Development , G.O.K.

### MS SANGHA WOMEN ELECTED TO THE GRAM PANCHAYATS (DECEMBER 1993 ELECTIONS)

Districts	No. Women elected	No. of women elected President	No. of women elected Vice - President
BIJAPUR	59	6	7
GULBARGA	33	2	2
RAICHUR	10	-	-
BIDAR	28	2	2
MYSORE	53	1	2
KOPPAL	26	-	-
TOTAL	209	11	13

The findings of a study on the experiences of *sangha* ewr's by the MS team confirm that an ongoing empowerment programme can create an enabling environment for poor women elected to the *panchayat*.

- ✧ The *sanghas* have provided continued support to the *sangha* ewr's through the political processes and thus created an enabling environment.
- ✧ The *sangha* experience, based as it is on women's agency, has enabled *sangha* ewr's to approach their role and tasks with gender and community interests at the centre.
- ✧ Several of the *sangha* ewr's have stayed accountable to the interests of poor women, establishing accountability mechanisms for themselves and for the processes of governance in general. They have been able to challenge patriarchy, class and caste barriers in their new roles.
- ✧ The *sangha* ewr's have challenged corruption, broken negative stereotypes of women and within the sphere of the *gram panchayats*, redefined political roles.
- ✧ The support structures of the *Sanghas* has the potential to function as the countervailing force to the co-optation of women *Panchayat* members into mainstream politics.

*Sangha* ewr's have been placed in categories 1-4 in order of decreasing 'effectiveness' as *panchayat* members. The four categories are

- Category 1: Women are articulate and effective in accessing resources for the *sangha* and community, challenging corruption, creating positive images of women in the community.
- Category 2: They are active in terms of accessing resources but much less so than those in category 1 in terms of challenging existing 'norms' and 'ideologies'
- Category 3: They are able to access only those resources that are normally available to any member. Their skills of articulation and confidence levels need to be built up.
- Category 4: Women are not effective, male relatives are de facto members of the *panchayat*.

T8

## EFFECTIVENESS OF SANGHA EWR'S (1993 - 1998 GRAM PANCHAYATS)

Sl. No.	District	Category-1	Category-2	Category-3	Category-4	Total
1.	Gulbarga	8	5	18	2	33
2.	Bijapur	17	25	14	3	59
3.	Bidar	13	4	6	5	28
4.	Koppal	14	7	2	3	26
5.	Raichur	8	2	-	-	10
6.	Mysore	27	8	3	-	38
	Total	87	51	43	13	194*

\* Data for 15 EWR's from Mysore not available. The actual total of sangha women elected to the gram panchayats from the MS districts is 209.

T9

HOWEVER

Clear by this time that much more needed to be done FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE.

VITAL TO BREAK THROUGH THE ISOLATION OF THE ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVE

VITAL TO ESTABLISH A SOLIDARITY NETWORK, A SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM FOR THE EWR

THESE ARE SEEN BY MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA AS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICS.

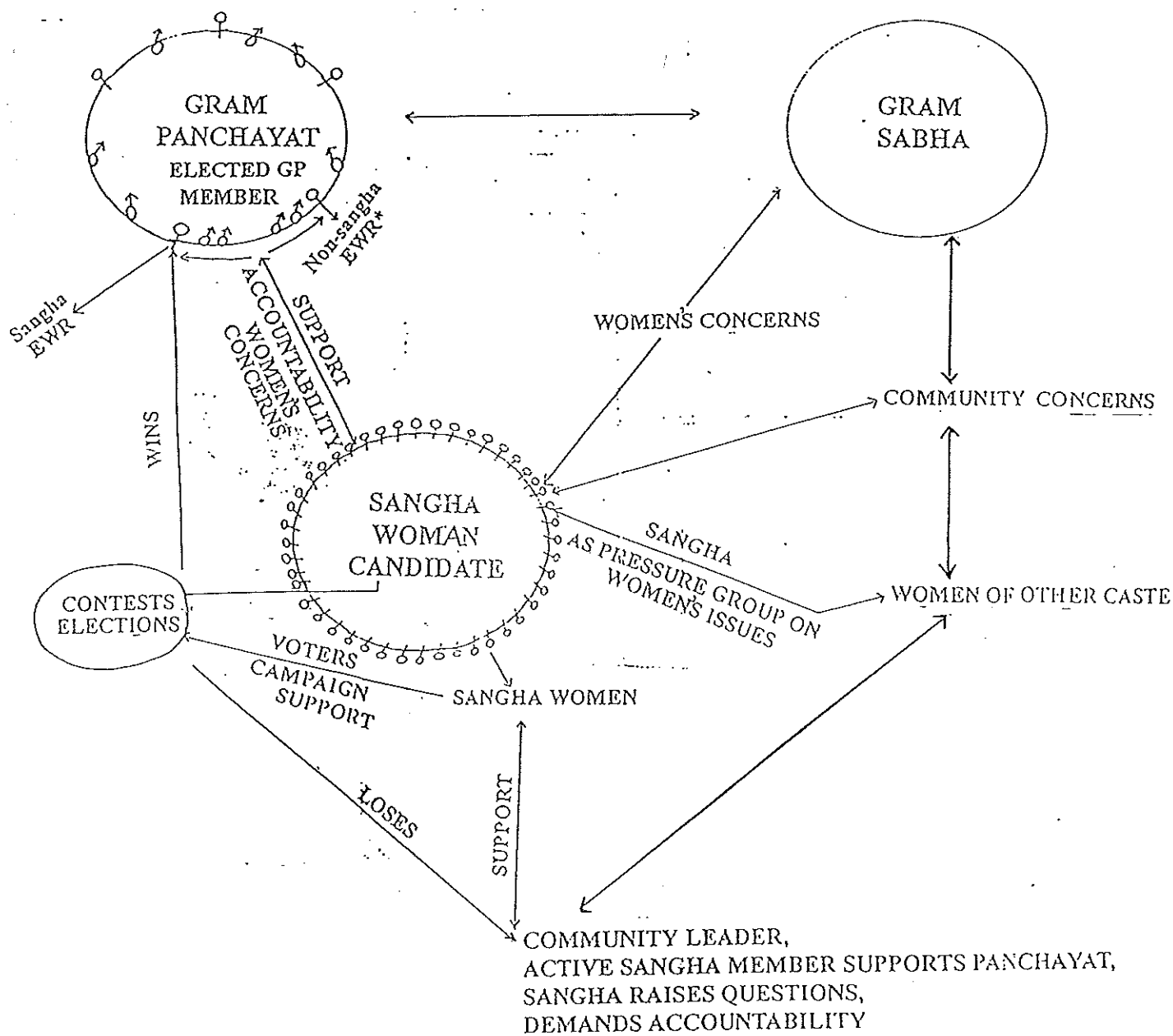
T10

MS STRATEGIES TO SET UP THE SOLIDARITY NETWORK FOR EWR ...

- ✧ EWR supported by the much wider process of politicisation of poor sangha women.
- ✧ That the election process and the candidates are only one part of this process given the current situation for reservation of seats.



# POLITICAL ROLES OF SANGHA WOMEN



\* EWR - PANCHAYAT WOMEN REPRESENTATIVE

SANGHA WOMEN IN THE GRAM PANCHAYATS (FEBRUARY 2000 ELECTIONS)

DISTRICT	CONTESTED	WON	ADHYAKSHA	UPADHYAKSHA
Koppal	56	30	1	-
Raichur	30	16	1	-
Bellary	21	-	-	-
Bijapur	100	73	-	-
Bidar	60	44	-	-
Gulbarga	95	40	2	2
Mysore	42	22	-	-
Total	384	225	4	2

CHANGING AND BROADENING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION SANGHA WOMEN

- ✧ Although number of winning candidates has not increased dramatically, the quality of participation has been very different and more meaningful.
- ✧ Sangha women as candidates, voters, supports.
- ✧ Sangha women have discussed and negotiated with candidates in general and panchayat election.
- ✧ Sangha women have entered the fray in order to force men to contest.

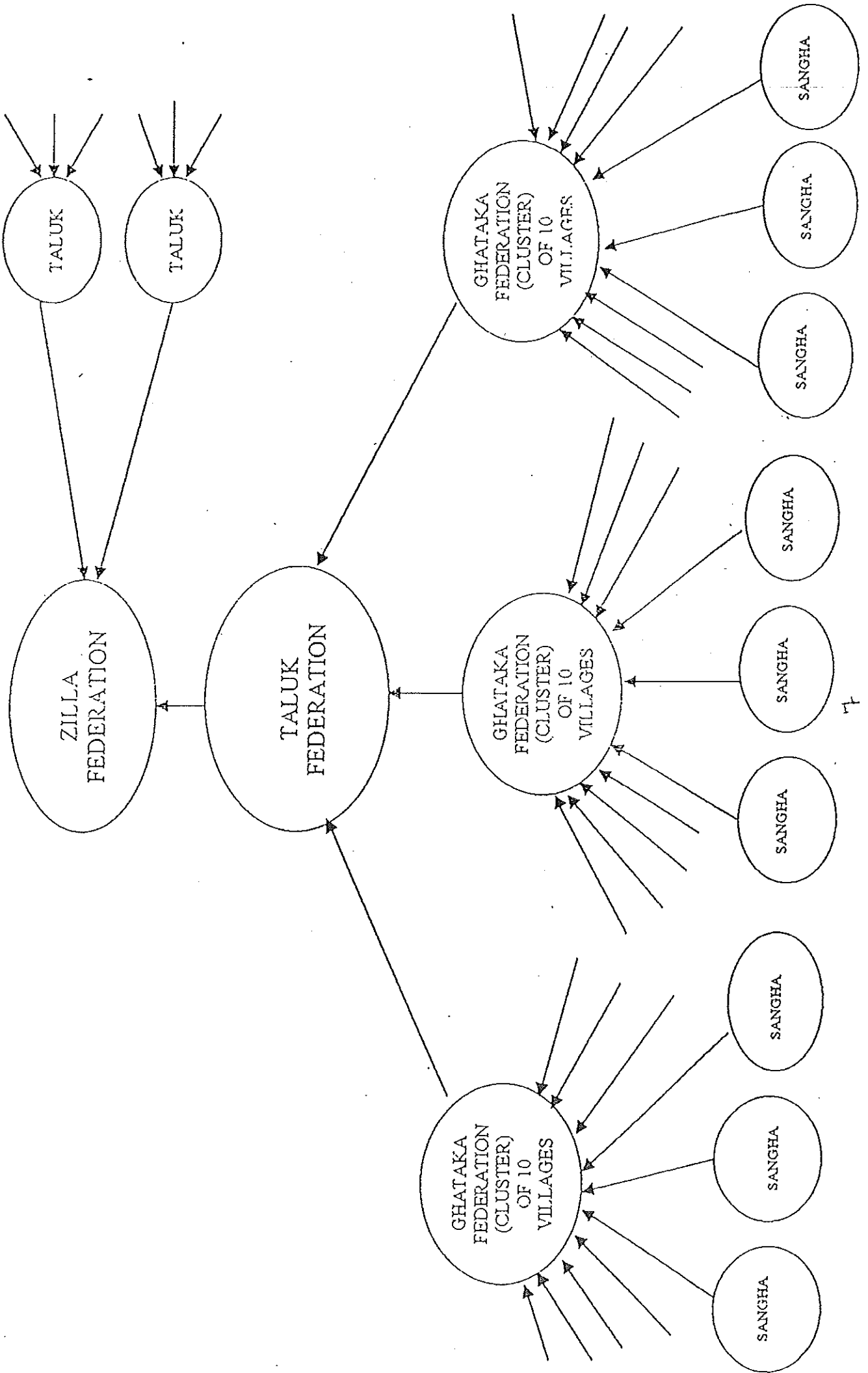
THE PITFALLS

- ✧ SOME WOMEN HAVE HAD TO SPEND LARGE SUMS OF MONEY FOR ELECTION CAMPAIGNS IN MARCH 2000
- ✧ VERY FEW WOMEN HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONTEST THE TALUK PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS.

BUILDING THE SOLIDARITY NETWORK

- ✧ Formation of sangha level committees for Governance and Panchayat Raj.
- ✧ Grassroot federations at ghataka, taluk and eventually zilla level.
- ✧ Issue based federation which are linked to each other. One such will be the federation of PR committee members.

# GRASSROOTS FEDERATION IN MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA



T17

ISSUE BASED FEDERATION - THE SOLIDARITY NETWORK FOR EWR's

- ✧ SUPPORT
- ✧ ACCOUNTABILITY
- ✧ BRINGING WOMEN'S CONCERNS ONTO THE PANCHAYAT AGENDA
- ✧ ACTING AS A "NURSERY" FOR WOMEN CONTESTING ELECTIONS.

T18

DREAM ON . . . AND WHY NOT ?  
FOR WE MUST AIM FOR THE STARS TO REACH THE TREETOPS !!

T19

ALL WOMEN PANCHAYAT

16 member all - women gram panchayat elected in ATHANOOR, AFZALPUR TALUK, GULBARGA.

PROCESS FACILITATED BY MAHILA SAMAKHYA, GULBARGA TEAM.

MELA FOR SANGHA EWR's AND SANGHA PANCHAYAT COMMITTEE MEMBERS AT ATHNOOR 18, 19, 20 APRIL 2000.

EXTRACT FROM MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA TRAINING  
PROGRAMME ON GENDER AND GOVERNANCE  
CASE STUDIES USED TO LINK CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

MS SANGHA WOMEN IN THE PANCHAYATS

DREAMING THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM . . .

All this time, we have talked of what we can do in the future, as one *sangha* woman, as a *sangha*. (Resource team may do as many case studies as time permits, add other case studies if needed. What is important is to link concepts with our positive experiences).

Let us now listen to the stories of brave women, brave *sangha* women like you...

In this part of the session, we narrate the success stories of MS *sangha* women elected to the *panchayats*... how they are showing that politics can be changed, how they are bringing social justice and gender justice issues "on the *panchayat* agenda" / "into the working of the *panchayat*."

(Method of communication : From different parts of the tent, members of the resource team stand up and tell the story of one MS *sangha* EWR and how she has changed things around her. The changes can be told in Question and Answer form so that the group can participate.)

IMPORTANT: If a *sangha* ewr is part of the group, use her as a resource person, to tell her own story.

\*\*\*\*\*

DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY FROM PANCHAYAT MEMBERS AND FROM THE COMMUNITY

*Lakshmibai L.Maddar (Member of the Beeraldinni panchayat, Bagewadi taluk, Bijapur district) is a sahayaki (sangha leader) and is unusual in that she has been educated upto class VII. The other unusual fact about this Dalit woman is that she has won the elections from a general seat. There are seven women and five men in her panchayat. Two of the women are wives of wealthy Gowdas. All they did was come in cars every third meeting to sign the attendance register. It was their husbands who attended meetings in their stead. Until Lakshmibai pointed out that they were not supposed to. Not only was she able to allot IRDP loans to eight women from the sangha, she ensured that all these loans were repaid within 11 months- something unheard of in the history of the village. The bank manager was so pleased that he felicitated her at a public function. Values nurtured in the sangha have helped Lakshmibai become a respected member of the community.*

- \* As a *panchayat* member, Lakshuibai herself was accountable to the public (getting loans sanctioned to the poor)
- \* Ensured that the public was accountable... making them repay loans in time.
- \* Made other *panchayat* members accountable to the public... insisting that these women and not their husbands come to the meeting.
- \* Changing the image of women politicians as weak and ineffective.
- \* Changing the image of the politician as corrupt, inefficient, not responsible to community interests.

All the elements of empowerment are present

- ◇ Was poor women's access to and control of resources changed.

Yes, Lakshuibai not only won the elections (political space as a resource) but she did so on a general woman's seat in competition with wives of the village power elite.

Resources in the *panchayat* (IRDP loans, Ashraya houses) were made available to poor women.

- ◇ Changing structures and institutions

The *panchayat* as the domain of rich, powerful upper caste men was changed (refer back to Gowda in the 'Khali Hale' role play)

- ◇ Changing ideologies

- \* Beliefs that women are ignorant, weak and inefficient were changed by Lakshuibai's actions.
- \* Gaining the respect of community when her work was appreciated by the bank manager.

This case study shows how women's participation in politics can lead to empowerment and the transformation of politics.

\*\*\*\*\*

## "HOW HANUMAVVA FOUGHT GENDER AND CASTE BIAS BY BECOMING A PANCHAYAT MEMBER"

*Hanumavva of Dhotihal village, Kushtagi taluk, Raichur district is a poor Dalit sangha member who eked out a living selling firewood on the outskirts of her village. Being a Dalit, she was not allowed to enter the main village. The turning point came when she contested and won the gram panchayat elections.*

After the elections, the MS team put in considerable effort into training victorious sangha women (see section on training). Hanumavva benefited a great deal from these sessions. After one training she suggested to the MS team that non-sangha EWR's be included in the training. It would then be easier, she said, to influence panchayat decisions in favour of women. Hanumavva realised the importance of networking all ewr's in her panchayat. These seven women (sangha and non sangha EWR's) have become an effective lobby group on women's issues. The community soon became conscious of Hanumavva's clout in the panchayat. Village families with each other to invite her to their houses - the same woman who sold firewood outside the main village. Hanumavva is a role model in Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka and is an inspiration to sangha women who want to contest the elections. She made a great impact on members of the new sanghas in Bellary district.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### "HOW SHARANAVVA CHALLENGED CASTE DISCRIMINATION"

Sharanavva, a sangha panchayat member from Gulbarga district found out that children from Dalit families were being discriminated against in the anganwadi. She persuaded the president of the panchayat, an "upper-caste" women, to sanction a second anganwadi for the Dalit children. When village powerbrokers tried to interfere with the selection of the teacher, Sharanava brought this to the notice of the local MLA and ensured that the selected candidate was appointed.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### TAKING A STAND AGAINST CORRUPTION AND THE VILLAGE POWER ELITE.

Durgamma, a sangha member from Muddebihala taluk of Bijapur district was elected Vice President of her Panchayat. The President was a lady who belonged to the dominant Reddy community. All Panchayat decisions were made by her husband. Under the Ashraya scheme, Durgamma put in the applications of three extremely poor people. However, the allotment was made to some people known to be close to the President's husband. Durgamma also found out that these so called beneficiaries had given Rs.2000 as a bribe to him. She brought this up in the Panchayat and succeeded in changing the allotment in favour of the genuinely poor beneficiaries. Not only had Durgamma taken a stand against corruption, she had also confronted the village power elite.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jhalabai (Bidar) fought to have proper seating for women members.

Nagamma(Bidar) arranged for proper roads and toilets for women.

Dhyamma (Koppal) helped her village get a water tank.

## THE *SANGHA* AS A PRESSURE GROUP

"How the *sangha* can bring women's concerns on the *panchayat* agenda".

- ☉ *Sanghas* select they candidate, help her campaign for elections.
- ☉ *Sangha* insist that the ewr's inform them about *panchayat* work, discuss with her on what issues she can take up in the *panchayat*.
- ☉ *Sangha* get land, money and materials for the *sangha* mane(kutir) from the *panchayat*.
- ☉ *Sangha* women raise women's issues in gram sabha meetings.

\*\*\*\*\*





## Part I.- Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act and its Implementation

The much awaited but unexpected announcement of the elections was received with an overwhelming response in the state. But there have been drawbacks. Following is an outline of some of the drawbacks observed. Invariably, these drawbacks have affected the less informed and less political individuals.

1. The period between the announcement of the election and the last date of nomination was very short. Consequently, women and men, especially those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, were unable to garner support for their candidature.
2. The Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act decrees that an aspiring panchayat member needs to comply with the 'toilet rule' which states that an individual who does not have a latrine facility for his/her family members will automatically be disqualified. This was contested and the court allowed for a conditional relaxation of this rule on the February 9, 2000. However, this date coincided with the last date for filing nominations. In some cases, the court verdict and the emergency message to the Deputy Commissioners did not even reach the panchayats in time. As a result many aspirants were prevented from filing nominations.
3. Rotation of reserved seats has been detrimental to potential candidates from the reserved categories, especially women. In other words, though the spirit behind the principle of rotation is to give representative opportunities to those constituencies with a lower population of reserved categories, the manner in which the rotation of seats has been undertaken defeats this purpose. In actuality, it has in some places resulted in a misrepresentation of the population in the constituencies. In practice, this has meant that the candidates selected do not belong to the 'reserved ward'. Not only did the local party leaders and community see a 'unreserved' seat as a general male or reserved male seat the officials too use this terminology to legitimise this false conception. Seats termed 'General', 'OBC', 'SC' and 'ST', when not reserved for women were interpreted as a seat for which only a male candidate can contest. This was glaringly evident in that, in all the panchayats, the official letter listing the reservation of seats per ward stated the reservation for the General Seat as '*Samanya Purusha*' (a general male).
4. It was interesting to note that while few sitting male members could ensure nominations for this term too, none of the female sitting members was re-nominated. Repeatedly, it was pointed out that the rotation of reserved

seats was the single most important reason behind this. The male members have managed to retain their nominations by shifting their 'constituencies' or contesting as general candidates. For women, the situation is very different. First, women did not contest on general seats. Second, even in cases wherein their efficiency as a member has been established in the previous term, they have been denied a nomination on the grounds of providing opportunity to other persons.

5. On an average, most of the wards had three seats to which members are elected. Also, in a majority of the panchayats, these seats were listed as follows: a general seat, a reserved OBC seat and in some cases, a scheduled caste / tribe / woman seat. In the panchayats where the community was unaware of the ways to circumvent the Act with respect to who should be contesting for the general male seat, there was an election for all the seats and even the general male had to contest, as we evidenced in Koppal district (the cases of Boodhur and Heerur panchayats).
6. The lack of clarity in categorising caste and community groups has resulted in the overlapping of categories under which one could contest elections. There were some communities who were fortunate to be listed under two categories. For instance, in Koppal district, the Gaanigaru community, a sub-sect of the Lingayats, was listed as both OBC 2A / OBC 2B. This ambivalence eventually lead to the over-representation of these communities in the panchayats. Further, there were implementation problems due to the lack of clarity among the Tehsildars, with respect to the positioning of caste groups. For instance, in Dotihal Panchayat Parana Gowda, a person belonging to the Lingayat community with the help of an income certificate could contest under the category of OBC (B). However, normally Lingayats should contest under the general category.

#### Part II - Issues Emerging from the Local Dynamics of Panchayats

- ◆ It was observed that in all the panchayats the percentage of seats reserved for women was more than the mandatory 33 %.
- ◆ A large number of the members were unanimously elected across our sample panchayats.
- ◆ Also interesting is the fact that in all the sample panchayats, with the exception of one, a much higher proportion of women members were elected unanimously. Two questions emerging from this were:
  - 1) Is it a healthy trend for communities to elect members in this manner?

2) Should we be concerned about the higher percentage and see its link to the uncontested elections for the women seats?

These questions were of deep concern specially when we juxtapose them against our findings in the first phase of the study, wherein we found that uncontested candidates tended to be less accountable and less committed to their constituencies. Further, they failed to develop a constituency of their own even after the completion of the term.

- ◆ In spite of this being the third term, most of the women candidates are political novices. It is noteworthy that irrespective of the developmental status of the districts, this is one area where there is no inter-district variation.
- ◆ Most male candidates too can be classified as politically inexperienced. However, male candidates have had informal political training. Many of them have had some kind of experience campaigning for Parliamentary and State elections. Others have actively participated in the organisation of local level social and religious functions.
- ◆ The Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act 1993 clearly states that the Grama Panchayats are apolitical units of local governance. Further, it decrees that the elections to these bodies have to be conducted on a non-party basis. However, our field level experience proved the contrary. The influence of national level political parties on the Grama Panchayat elections was visible at many levels.
  - The contestants showed no hesitation to reveal their party affiliations. Many of the independent contestants had earlier attempted to gain party support.
  - In all panchayats, political parties convened meetings at the local level, soon after the announcement of elections.
  - Invariably meetings were attended by local party leaders and supporters, who finalised the candidates to be fielded. In fact, many of the candidates the parties eventually decided to support did not attend these meetings. This is especially applicable to the women members and in a few cases to the Scheduled Caste and Tribe male candidates too.
  - In many panchayats, Taluk and Zilla level party leaders and in some cases even the MLAs also played an active role in finalising the list of candidates. In this process various strategies were used to force a substantial number of potential candidates to withdraw their candidature in favour of party supported persons.

→ Though party symbols were not used, panels of candidates were formed on party lines. The party sponsored the printing of pamphlets wherein the names of the party supported candidates were mentioned ward-wise.

- ◆ Most of the women got their nominations to contest either due to their family's influence or affiliation with political parties. Not only were all the women contestants put up in reserved seats, often, their nominations were seen as a reward for the 'good' party work that their male family members rendered over the years. In contrast, the men were nominated for the following reasons:
  1. having a close relationship with a local leader
  2. being leaders in their individual capacity
  3. being an articulate member of a particular caste group
  4. a popular organiser at the village level for social and religious functions
  5. a benevolent landlord
- ◆ While a comparatively higher number of sitting male members could ensure nominations for this third term too, there were only two women sitting members from Udupi district being re-nominated to contest elections. In fact, we found instances, where women members with proven efficiency levels were denied the opportunity to a ticket this time, even upon requesting one from their parties.
- ◆ There is a general lack of interest among the women members, especially those belonging to the reserved categories. This is mainly due to the fact that they perceive themselves as not having lived up to the expectations of the community/constituency they represent.
- ◆ We also observed that several sitting women presidents were not inclined to recontest. For them, recontesting meant either a choice of losing or being elected as an ordinary member, which, for them, was a demotion and a situation that they opted out of.
- ◆ Another reason for opting out that is often quoted by women members is the fear of failure and the almost total absence in them of being a political entity. Many women were unable to develop their own constituencies, therefore could not bargain for their candidature on the basis of it. This is more so in the case of women members who were unanimously elected for the earlier tenure.

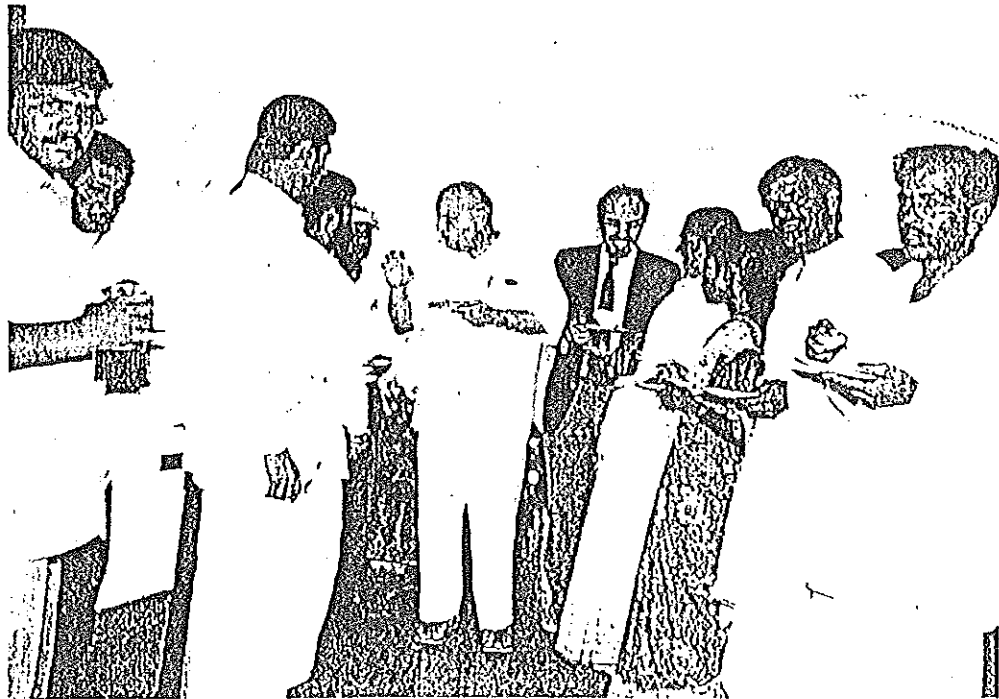
- ◆ Most of the uncontested women candidates of the earlier tenure, though they were efficient as members, were apprehensive of facing an election.
- ◆ Though education is often portrayed as the primary hurdle against women candidates being selected, our field experience does not substantiate this. There are many cases where women have been selected because they belong to families that can afford the expenditure of elections and that allow mobility and can provide escort.
- ◆ Women's involvement in the whole pre-election process was very minimal, almost insignificant.
- ◆ However, we would like to emphasize that even when the involvement was very partial and limited, we observed a remarkable change in the levels of confidence of the women contestants. Many women candidates, who shied away from being interviewed in the first round of fieldwork i.e. immediately after the last day of nominations, came forward to share their experiences in the second round i.e. the day before the election and on the day of the election.
- ◆ Generally speaking, the interplay of caste, class and party alliances play a very important role in both the selection of candidates for particular wards or villages as well as in the calculations for winnability. There are three types of arithmetic at work:
  1. caste/community: population of the particular caste/community in a given ward.
  2. village population : in a given ward, there can be two/ three villages. So when candidates are being selected from particular villages, it is the population of the village that determines the winnability.
  3. affiliation to a political party determines winnability.

Based on these calculations, we can understand the factors that determine the local dynamics of winnability. Caste, village, party and family politics and combinations of these play a crucial role in the selection of candidates.

- ◆ Amongst the number of issues that have emerged from the field, we would like to highlight certain pointers.
  1. We are in a paradoxical situation. In spite of being a non-political governing body, we see large scale party interference at all stages.
  2. Even in a non-political body, the calculations seem to favour political personalities.

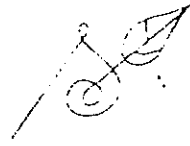
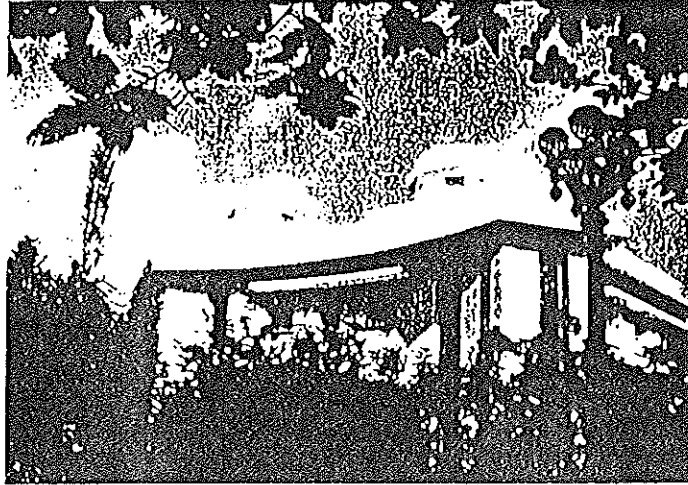


*Sharing their concerns with the Minister*



*Members in dialogue with the Minister and Director*

3. The simultaneous phenomena of very few sitting members being re-elected and the large-scale unanimous election of candidates to the panchayats needs to be juxtaposed against the larger political culture prevalent in the society, which in fact favours a repeated re-election of political persons.
4. Grama panchayats provides the space for formalisation of the informal system of patronage that has so far been in existence.
5. We need to re-examine the viability of the prevailing intervention strategies – in terms of training and the like given that there is a trend in the above mentioned system of patronage which favours a new set of clients in each subsequent election.
6. In spite of all our apprehensions, we need to re-emphasize the monumental contribution of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in that it has allowed the disadvantaged sections, especially women, access to both an institutional and socio-political space.



Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation  
Bangalore



## *Shared Spaces: The Beginning...*

*Associating Elected Women Representatives in Panchayat Raj Institutions  
An Ongoing Process of Consultation with South India-based NGOs*

### *Setting the Tone...*

We want to create a network of the women in the panchayats. In Karnataka there are a number of organizations working with women in the panchayats. We want all of them to participate and would like to know what each can contribute to this effort. The idea is to associate the EWRs so that they can prioritize the issues among themselves or to the government.<sup>i</sup>

Karnataka is now entering the third term in the Panchayati Raj Institutions wherein quotas for women have been instituted. Karnataka pioneered the entire electoral quota system for women in the nation with a 25% quota for women in 1987. In 1993-94, after the passage of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments, other states followed with a 33% quota by which time in Karnataka women were already governing for one term. In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference for Women, Beijing, a recommendation made by the Indian women's movement in this regard was to network elected women representatives (EWRs) to give them a stronger political voice and to provide support mechanisms for each other. Today again Karnataka will lead in yet another pioneering effort by initiating the process of federating EWRs as well as facilitate such a federation in 3 more southern states, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

### *Towards an Engendered Governance*

Reservation is only the first point, it is what scientists would call a necessary but not a sufficient condition for participation. What do we want from reservation? It is to bring in engendered governance. One elected woman representative would have a group or sangha of 30 women to whom she is accountable. The EWRs keep their links with the group and call upon their collective energies and talents to help her discharge her duties.<sup>ii</sup> To rectify such a situation where EWRs face tremendous barriers organizations recommended:

- ◆ Transparency, training and exposure were the most vital interventions to build up women's self-confidence and self-image.
- ◆ Building up of self-confidence in the EWRs.
- ◆ Creating and maintaining a critical size for the support network by building up a federation of sanghas, instilling a gender perspective in all activities and process, encouraging women to participate in all aspects of the political process-voting, campaigning, standing for elections, and supporting EWRs.
- ◆ Need to develop a set of alternative yardsticks in governance to what men consider success.
- ◆ Last but not the least is building a federation of EWRs.

## *Why Federate Women at all?*

### *Dialogue Among EWRs on the need for a Federation, Tumkur May 2nd:*

Confirming the need for this federation, Champakamala said had this occurred during the 1st term, women members could have benefited strongly. Such seminars should be held at all levels, so women representatives can attend and benefit.

Reservation has made it possible for women to enter politics. To openly express individual views and ideas a *common platform* is needed. While EWRs have the knowledge, there is no forum or opportunity to express themselves. Forming an organisation to strengthen the participation of women in decentralized governance will increase women's self-confidence and solidarity.

EWRs expressed concern about what to do next after the term ended. Suman Kolhar responded citing her own prior experience as an elected ZP member and said that since then she has worked in various capacities with women both within and outside elected bodies. This experience need not only be used as an elected representative. The association would provide a space where *former EWRs can train new comers*.

One male representative showing support for a common platform for all women representatives said that co-operation from all sections of society (including men) is needed with self acquired knowledge. *With a network the women can speak freely and come up with solutions and fight for their rights. The women getting together have helped them exceed the 33% quota of the panchayats.* He also quoted how their organization was able to develop these qualities in women by extending the services under Indira Mahila Yojane, both at Gram Panchayat Level, and Block level by forming self help groups. These groups have brought many changes among women. Literacy, education, unity will help women fight for their rights.

In the view of one member, 50% women reservations are necessary in all the departments and women have to be *educated and trained*. This association can be a forum for such training. Projects cannot be simply planned, but should also be followed through where the process, progress and success of the planning and projects need to be traced. Just giving money is not enough.

When a man raises his voice to get things done it is easily accepted but when a woman raises her voice she is stereotyped as dominating or aggressive which makes it hard for her to lead. The association could provide a space where *women's collective voice* can be heard.

EWRs tend to focus more on the needs of women. There is lack of knowledge and awareness, specially girls need to be educated at all levels. Caste plays an important role in the panchayats. In the PRIs women should first see themselves and work together as women and not let caste determine one's alliances. The association will foster relationships among the EWRs to allow *building alliances*.

*The rationale for a federation:<sup>iii</sup>*

At a gathering of EWRs, the women asked for a network, which is now 2 years old with 60 members from 13 districts. Though some women have lost the elections this time they want to stand at higher levels. Through the network exchanges have begun across districts and states (Karnataka-Kerala). This has helped build the self-confidence of EWRs. There is a feeling of inadequacy due to illiteracy but even illiterate EWR have proven to have successfully performed through training. *Thus training and networking can facilitate women's political participation.*

*Thus, creating a new space where EWRs can seek solutions to their problems is the driving force behind the federation.*

*Terminology<sup>iv</sup>*

A clear meaning needs to be provided to the term "Federation." during the May 2<sup>nd</sup> field visit, in Tumkur, words used were several: Vedike (forum), Okkuta (union), Jalabhandu (network). The term "Federation" does not relate to any one of these words. So one should exercise caution when using this term.

*What would such a federation of EWRs look like?*

It is in essence, a space where women can dialogue, reflect and articulate their own problems related to governance, and furthermore seek solutions collectively in an environment of support and solidarity. The Federation would be primarily a women's organization where women of all political persuasions or affiliations can come together on a common gender action plank. Though politics will make its presence felt, let us work as one from the beginning.

- The federation needs to be a membership organization. It should have a floating membership with ex-members, current members and politicians. It should have a clear profile, have visibility, should be a coalition of women working in partnership.
- The federation should have a strong element or stress on information, publication and dissemination.
- The Federation would engage on all women's issues, not only local governance
- Only Gram Panchayats would be included initially and later on, the higher tiers can be included.
- The federation should be a facilitator group, with a set of working strategies such as:
  - Action points emerging from one meeting to be passed on to other meetings.
  - Views expressed in those meetings to be strengthened by communication to women's groups for their validation.

*What would such a federation of EWRs do?*

The most important functions of this federation would be:

- ♦ To act as a problem solving and support forum.

- ◆ To institutionalize a gender perspective.
- ◆ To exchange experience and for peer learning.

The federation must be located in a much larger framework where the network becomes central to decision making. It is very important that poor women get heard in the panchayat and even more important that their inputs are more fully utilized in larger fora thereby institutionalizing their [gender] perspective.

*How does one negotiate the political identity of such a federation?*

The issue that repeatedly arose was the relationship between this new federation of EWRs and political parties. Regardless of what elections are supposed to look like on paper at the Gram Panchayat level, the reality remains that EWRs are connected to political parties. Therefore the consequent federation will similarly have some political affiliations. Parties too will begin to look at such a federation as a possible bank of both voters and candidates. The fact that political party affiliations are legitimate at the higher tiers of the PRIs further complicates the situation.

*Issues Relating to A Federation and A Network:*<sup>y</sup>

In federating and networking, roles and relationships of partners and networks, the meaning and significance of federation, basis of collaboration, functionality, equality of partners, apportionment of credit for work done amongst partners, access to materials and research and action plan are all significant.

*Challenges and views articulated were:*

- How one would form a Federation, which has endurance and permanence, in a constantly changing scenario created by new women being elected with each term?
- How to prevent the federation being hi-jacked by political parties?
- How does one assume convergence of interests between women's development and NGO?
- The Federation is an Association of Elected Women in Panchayats is an organization formed into a political group.
- Clarification is needed of the common goal and the time frame i.e. long or short term. A long-term strategy would yield a strong Federation.
- The economic position and lack of financial support EWRs have.
- There is a need to understand the whole issue of opposed and unopposed candidatures.
- The issue of residency and reservation: At the MP or MLA level they have to be residents of the constituency before they can stand for elections. At the GP level there is no such rule.
- Towing the party line and the consequences for EWRs who do not, especially in Kerala.
- Money should be available for meeting the needs of the elected members
- Flagging the what and how of collaboration, which should be sorted out
- Important differences about structure, sustainability, finances should be sorted out

### *The NGO Partners and their Commitments*

The partners in the network already bring to this initiative tremendous experience in federating and working with EWRs. The reach and scale of their work is wide.

- Singamma Srinivasan Foundation (SSF) has taken the lead in the creation of Shared Spaces, a new political expanse towards federating EWR's. It has done so by calling together and forming a loose partnership-network of NGO and other partners working in the arena of gender and local governance.
- Ms. Ann Good, First Secretary, Canadian High Commission, New Delhi, said that more funds would be diverted to build up infrastructure and that she would carry this information and message to the South Asia meeting.
- SEARCH works in 12 districts in Karnataka training GP women. In the previous term, they mobilized 60 EWRs into a federation called Jaal bandha whose members are now trainers. In the shared spaces project, they will be field partner.
- MSK works in 7 districts in Karnataka with sangha women of which more than 200 have been elected. MSK would be the field NGO in federating and training the EWRs in the shared spaces project.
- In the other three states, the NGOs that will lead the project are Gandhi Gram Rural Institute in Tamil Nadu, Sakhi in Kerala and Lok Satta in Andhra Pradesh. Gandhi Gram Rural Institute provides livelihood opportunities for marginalized groups and builds women's leadership in rural areas. Sakhi helps women access information on gender and related issues. Lok Satta is a people's movement for governance reforms.
- NIAS brought into this process its own considerable experience through action research with EWRs.<sup>vi</sup> NIAS is redefining what effective and engendered governance means. Their research has surfaced the radically different priorities of male and female elected representatives. NIAS would work directly with 45 women in nine Gram Panchayats in three districts of the State. There would also be a multiplier effect through partner-NGO's subsequently. The initial 45 women would become the resource persons-cum-trainers for the women coming in later.
- Institute of Social Sciences, Bangalore would participate in training and research. "Update", their publication can be used to promote the idea of the Federation and its exchange program in Kerala and Tamil Nadu can help EWRs interact.
- Janodaya would participate in awareness programmes in gram sabhas and in panchayat institutions at all three levels in those areas where it is at presently working. (Kolar, Malur, Shimoga (Tharikere, Sowlanga), Mysore-Urban, Mangalore-Urban, Kaup in Mangalore District). Janodaya works with grass roots women, concentrating on socio-eco-legal aspects to help women access justice. Janodhaya will identify within it a new working group to do this work and this can be decided after consultation with other members of Janodaya.
- ISST through its National Resource Center spoke of the organization's interest and commitment in disseminating information regarding the Project through Uma Prachar and in other activities such as documentation and training. ISST would be aiming at reaching 100 women this year.
- Ms. Deepa Dhanraj has said that she would develop films on training materials on issues like gender which could be useful for the network on all the four states picking up the unique points from the four state experiences.

- Ms. Purnima Vyasulu promised to fund the network from the Gram Panchayat Fund of WYTEP, if we can identify 'good' elected women. So it would also be necessary to start the identification process early. Purnima's particular interest lay in identifying women who would be actually working in agriculture.
- Ms. Meera Saxena has supported the project from the Department of Women and Child Development in launching the dialogue at Tumkur and has committed to future support of the project.
- The Honorable Minister of the Department of Information and Broadcasting, Dr. B.K. Chandrashekhara has committed full support to this initiative. The Department personnel participated and brought media presence to the Tumkur meeting.
- The Honorable Minister of the Department of Kannada and Culture, Mrs. Rani Satish has also extended her support.
- The Secretary of the Department of Rural Development, Mr. M.R. Srinivasmurthy has extended the Department's support to the project.
- Best Practices Foundation is committed to the documentation and dissemination of best practices in the fields of development, governance and gender globally and can conduct documentation and media campaigns of the project and its highlights.
- Other individual partners who have committed to partner with the project and extend their support include Laxmi Krishnamurthy, Vinod Vyasulu, Ammu Joseph and Dr. Thelma Narayan.

*Some emerging ideas on operationalising the Network of NGOs and Other Partners:*

- A common letterhead for the Project activities. Partners could claim credit for their contributions.
- Management structure which will ensure prompt communication to all partners regarding all aspects of the Project. It will also ensure the distribution of all relevant materials to all partners. The person who will adopt the nodal role for this purpose will be Suman Kolhar.
- Partners will aim at convergence and congruence through their activities. No problem was foreseen in getting their own internal organisational approvals.
- Partners should draw up their financial requirements and inform SSF so that resources could be located, both inside and outside the Project.
- Need for clarity and specificity on the numbers of elected women who would be covered under the Project. It was agreed to minimize the number of women and carefully select partners so that transactional costs are kept to a minimum but also ensure a solid block of EWRs.

*What is the USP of the Federation?*

A New Form of Training:<sup>vii</sup> Capacity building was necessary, but not sufficient. What was more critical was training of a 'political' nature, where individual strengthening of skills would not be that important. Earlier type of training was more a 'one-on' and 'one-off' affair and what is being envisaged now would be more by way of a hand holding exercise, for the women, throughout their political term. Newly elected women feel the

most isolated. Some kind of pre-selection of women must take place before they are sent for training.

The gender audit process started by the Singamma Foundation could be a good entry point, and the EWRs could usefully learn about this tool.

Advocacy: Other references made were to the Advocacy Studies taken up in NIAS as well as in Pune, the work of DISHA in Gujarat, etc. This kind of a repertoire could build up the capabilities of the Federation and become another USP.

The Component Plan approach could also be a policy tool that could be taken up by the Federation.

Exchanges by EWRs: Kerala EWRs immensely benefited from the Karnataka EWR visit. It helped women to understand what was happening in the other parts of the country in local governance.

### *Structure of the Association*

Prepare the constitution, the bye-laws, the Articles, which will lay down how the President, Vice President, Secretary and Officer bearers are to be elected.

### *Aims and Objectives*

- To train elected women representatives to be courageous with self-confidence and not to be affected by atrocities or yield to pressure, in carrying out GP activities.
- To empower women representatives to solve their problems and assert their rights.
- To foster cordial relationship between EWRs of different gram panchayats.
- To facilitate the sharing of experiences among gram panchayat women not only within districts and states but also between states.
- To encourage women representatives who have completed their 5-year term to stand for elections and impart suitable training and empower them.
- An exercise to build a movement of women leaders to address their issues as their own.
- It goes far beyond a capacity building effort

Note: These aims are to be presented for dialogue to the EWRs and revised based on their input.

### *Documenting the Process*

The three possible areas where the research team could work on:

- ◆ *Documenting the different processes which NGOs used to build federations*: Here the process by which EWRs themselves start to take ownership of the federation and are able to facilitate its spread is important to document. The idea would be to create a

manual like "What Works in Federating?" Further for other states who want to begin this process, such a process documentation would prove useful.

- ◆ *Surfacing what EWRs would like out of a federation:* For EWRs to have ownership over the federation, it is important that first and foremost they define what this federation will do and how it can be useful to them. This will help also surface the few action points around which EWRs can come together.
- ◆ *Documenting what the action group needed:* Here an action plan could be shared in advance with the partners responsible for research so that when specific events take place the researchers can be present.

#### *Final Note*<sup>viii</sup>

All the partners are to work on one objective: namely to build a new process, and thus to enable the recording of this process. The spirit of the meeting was in line with a dream of the inverted pyramid namely, these will be pillars on which partners work and would submit joint proposals to funding agencies towards that purpose. SSF will act like a pump house- the federation needs information, and SSF carries the milestones and pushes forward dream of the federation.

#### *Endnotes*

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# Grassroots democracy at its best

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JUNE 1. Sharanamma Peersab Kalasghar is no orator but she had the audience spellbound.

Nobody thought she would have anything to say as the rustic woman shared the dais with the Governor, Ms. V.S.Rama Devi, with the "pallu" of her sari on her head.

But as she started speaking everyone had to take note of her. A gram panchayat member from Keribosga on the outskirts of Gulbarga, the gritty woman gave the examples of her courageous work and how she tackled man's world.

This was at the inaugural session of the two-day regional seminar on "Women in local Governance: experiences and effective interventions in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu", organised by the Institute of Social Studies Trust here on Thursday.

She was like any other woman when she was elected. But after attending a few meetings, she started taking interest in matters, for they concerned her and her neighbours. Within months, she knew the nuances of the gram panchayat administration.

Determined to get things done, she told her fellow members of the panchayat to

rid the area of unhygienic environment and garbage being dumped near the hamlets in her constituency. But the men remained unmoved. "I cleared the garbage myself. I had to threaten those who opposed it."

Then there was the problem of drinking water. When her pleas fell on deaf ears, she

mobilised the people of her area and staged a "rasta roko". When the Tahsildar sent her a message saying that the problem would be tackled and that she should withdraw the dharna, she did not relent.

She withdrew only when the officer arrived on the scene and took steps to ensure water

supply. "Soon, the pipes came and we had water." The men who were apparently envious of her, found an opportunity to run her down when she opposed their move to divert funds meant for repair of a temple.

They told her that funds were insufficient for temple's renovation and challenged her to do it on her own. "I accepted the challenge. I completed renovation by pledging my gold ornaments," she said.

But then the power did not corrupt her nor make her power-hungry. She declined to contest the elections held recently. "Women wanted me to contest again. But I told them it was not enough if only I know what is what." Now, another woman, Bhagyamma, won the seat. Saying this, she folded her hands humbly and went back to her seat. Her speech was translated into English.

The Governor was all praise for Sharanamma. She said men should work in tandem with women while the latter should fight their case assertively but with grace and not aggression. For ages, women suffered and the reservation of seats in electoral posts gave them an opportunity to emerge as equals to men.

After the inaugural function, Sharanamma had many women congratulating her.



The Governor, Ms. V.S.Rama Devi, Inaugurating a workshop on women in local governance in Bangalore on Thursday. Also seen are (from left) Ms. Mahadevi, an elected representative from Gulbarga, Dr. Swapna Mukhopadhyay, Director, Institute of Social Studies Trust, Mr. M.R.Sreenivasa Murthy, Secretary, Department of Rural Development, and Ms. Meera M, Associate Director of ISST.

THE HINDU

4 JUN 2000



State to set up receiving stations at all taluk headquarters

## Video conferencing to be part of Panchayat Raj system

DH News Service

BANGALORE, June 1

The State government will soon set up receiving stations at all the 175 taluk headquarters to enable panchayat members to have direct interaction with Rural Development and Panchayat Raj officials and experts through live video conferencing facility for effective implementation and functioning of Panchayat Raj system in the State.

Delivering the key-note address of a two-day regional seminar on "Women in local governance: Experiences and Effective interventions in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Karnataka", here today, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Secretary M R Sreenivas Murthy said that frequent live interaction between experts and panchayat members was necessary to make Panchayat Raj system a success in the State. He said that the government was in the process of setting up a full-fledged studio at the Abdul Nazir Sab Institute of Rural Development in Mysore from where the video conferencing would be carried out.

Mr Murthy said that the State government had embarked on a similar exercise through satellite communication a few years ago and found that the facility was extremely successful in bridging the gap between the government officials and panchayat members. Therefore, the government had decided to make this a permanent

fixture by setting up receiving stations at all taluk headquarters. Satellite uplinking would also be soon provided to these stations, he added.

He said that the government would invite panchayat members once in a week or two at the taluk headquarters and initiate a debate between them and the panchayat raj experts on doubts, issues, clarifications and functions relating to Panchayat Raj system, through the live video conferencing system. This, he felt, would go a long way in strengthening the foundation

of Panchayat Raj institutions in the State.

**TRAINING CAMPS:** Mr Murthy said that the State government would take up training programmes for the newly-elected gram panchayat members in the month of June in association with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in the field of Panchayat Raj.

Subsequently, training camps would also be conducted for the zilla and taluk panchayat members, he added.

The training camps would be of three-four days duration and would orient and

assist the panchayat members towards learning their role in Panchayat Raj system, he explained.

**DRAWBACKS:** He pointed out that there were several drawbacks for women to actively take part in the Panchayat Raj system in the State.

Quoting a recent survey of panchayat members' educational background in four districts of the State, Mr Murthy said that 35 per cent of women members were found to be illiterate while just 9 per cent of men were illiterate. Illiteracy was one of the major setbacks for lesser role of women in Panchayat Raj, he said.

However, the State government had provided adequate opportunity for women to take part in this. Though the official reservation for women in Panchayat Raj system was 33 per cent, it came up to 45 per cent in Karnataka because of reservation for women candidates hailing from Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, he explained.

Delivering the inaugural address, Governor V S Ramadevi called on women to actively take part in grass-roots democracy like Panchayat Raj system. Women, she felt, were no less to men in any field and it was time they realised their potential for the good of society.

She honoured panchayat members from various parts of South India.

The seminar was organised by the Institute of Social Trust (ISST).

Its Director Dr Swapna Mukhopadhyay and Associate Director Meera M also spoke on the occasion.

## Well-deserved honour for role model

DH News Service

BANGALORE, June 1

She has made a difference to her village and is now a role model for other women panchayat members. It was a rare but well-deserved honour for Ms Sharanavva, a former gram panchayat member, to share the dais with Governor V S Ramadevi at a regional seminar on women in local governance, held here today.

Mrs Sharanavva, an exemplary gram panchayat member (1993-99), hailing from a tiny hamlet Keribosaga in Gulbarga district, was today felicitated by the governor at the seminar for showing what women could do in Panchayat Raj. Mrs Sharanavva, who was a member of the Bheemanahalli Gram Panchayat, had played an instrumental role in improving the basic facilities of her village.

Not only she convinced her fellow-women folk to take up the job of clearing garbage that had become an environmental hazard, she took it as a challenge to provide drinking water to her village. Besides, she also prevented the 'diversion' of funds, which were meant for repairs of a local temple.

Now as a former member, she is promoting others to take part in Panchayat Raj. "When will other women learn about their role in Panchayat if I continue to cling on to power," was Mrs Sharanavva's explanation for 'retiring' from grass-root democracy.

# ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯ ಪರೀಕ್ಷೆಗೆ ಇದು ಸಕಾಲ - ರಮಾದೇವಿ

ಜನಪಾಟನಿ ಕರಡಿ ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು, ಜೂನ್ 1

ಅಡಳಿತ ನಡೆಸುವಲ್ಲಿ ಪುರುಷರಷ್ಟೇ ಸಮರ್ಥಳು ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ತೋರಿಸಲು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ಇದೀಗ ಕಾಲ ಕೂಡಿ ಬಂದಿದ್ದು ಕ್ರಿಯಾತ್ಮಕ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಗಳನ್ನು ರೂಪಿಸುವಂತೆ ರಾಜ್ಯಪಾಲರಾದ ವಿ.ಎಸ್. ರಮಾದೇವಿ ಅವರು ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಕರೆ ನೀಡಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

ಇನ್‌ಟ್ಯೂಟ್ ಆಫ್ ಸೋಷಿಯಲ್ ಸೈಡೀಸ್ ಟ್ರಸ್ಟ್ ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಹಮ್ಮಿಕೊಂಡಿರುವ ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಂಘಟನೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿಯ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸದಸ್ಯರ ಅನುಭವಗಳಿಂದ ಕಲಿಕೆ ಎಂಬ ಎರಡು ದಿನಗಳ ವಿಚಾರ ಸಂಕರಣವನ್ನು ಗುರುವಾರ ಉದ್ಘಾಟಿಸಿ ಮಾತನಾಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು.

ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆಯ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಪುರುಷರಿಗಿಂತ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಅನುಭವ ಇರುತ್ತದೆ, ಅದರಿಂದಾಗಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಗೆ ಅಧಿಕಾರ ದೊರಕದರೆ ಆ ಪ್ರದೇಶ ಸಂಪೂರ್ಣವಾಗಿ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಯಾಗುತ್ತದೆ, ಆಗ ನಿಗದಿತ ಅವಧಿಯೊಳಗೆ ದೇಶವೂ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಪಡೆದಂತೆ ಸಾಗುತ್ತದೆ ಎಂದು ಹೇಳಿದರು.

ಯಾವುದೇ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ

ಹಾಗೂ ದಕ್ಷಿಣ ರಾಜ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸಕಾಲದಲ್ಲಿ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳು ನಡೆದರೆ, ಇನ್ನೆಳವ ರಾಜ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ದಶಕಗಳ ಕಾಲ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗಳು ಸೂಪರ್‌ಸೀಡ್ ಆಗಿರುವ ಉದಾಹರಣೆಗಳು ಕೂಡ ಇವೆ ಎಂದು ವಿವರಿಸಿದರು. ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಸರ್ಕಾರಕ್ಕೆ ಚುನಾವಣೆ ನಡೆಸುವುದು ಹಾಗೂ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ಮೀಸಲಾತಿ ನೀಡಿರುವುದು ಶಾಶ್ವತವಾದುದು ಎಂದು ಪ್ರಶಂಸಿಸಿದರು.

ಮುಖ್ಯ ಅತಿಥಿಯಾಗಿದ್ದ ಗುಲ್ಬರ್ಗಾದ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಸದಸ್ಯ ಶರಣಮ್ಮ ಮಾತನಾಡಿ, ಜನರಲ್ಲೆ ಆರಿಸಿ ತಂದಾರೀ; ಅವರಿಗೆ ಚಲೋ ಕೆಲಸ ಮಾಡಿಕೊಡಬೇಕು, ಕೆಲವು ಕಾರಿಗಳೂ ಆರಿಸಿ ತಂದಿದ್ದು, ಆಗ ನೀರಿನ ತೊಂದರೆ ಇತ್ತು, ಗಂಡು ಮಕ್ಕಳಿಗೆ ಹೇಳಿದ್ದು, ಕೇಳಲಿಲ್ಲ ಅದ್ದರಿಂದ ಹಣ್ಣು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ತಹಕೀಲ್ದಾರ್ ಕಚೇರಿಗೆ ಹೋಗಿ ರೋಡಿನ ಮೂಲೆ ಕುಂತಿದ್ದು, ಎಮರ್ಜೆನ್ಸಿ ಪ್ಲಾನ್ ಹಾಕಿ ಬೋರ್‌ವರ್ಲ್ಡ್ ಕೊರಡು ಕೊಟ್ಟು, ಗಂಡು ಕಿವಿರಿಗೆ ಹಣ ಬಂದಿತ್ತು, ಗಂಡು ಮಕ್ಕಳು ಇದನ್ನು ಶಾಲಾ ಮಕ್ಕಳಿಗೆ ಬಟ್ಟೆ ಕೊಡಿಸೋಣ ಅಂದು, ಆದ್ರೆ ನಾನು ಒಪ್ಪಲಿಲ್ಲ, ಒಂದಕ್ಕೆ ಬಂದ ಹಣವನ್ನು ಇನ್ನೊಂದಕ್ಕೆ ಉಪಯೋಗ ಮಾಡೋದು ಬ್ಯಾಡ್ ಎಂದು, ಈ ಸಾರಿ ಎಲೆಕ್ಷನ್‌ನಿಗೆ ಮತ್ತೆ



ಗುರುವಾರ ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಆರಂಭಗೊಂಡ ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಂಘಟನೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿಯ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸದಸ್ಯರ ಅನುಭವಗಳಿಂದ ಕಲಿಕೆ ಎಂಬ ವಿಷಯ ಕುರಿತು ಎರಡು ದಿನಗಳ ವಿಚಾರ ಸಂಕರಣವನ್ನು ರಾಜ್ಯಪಾಲರಾದ ವಿ.ಎಸ್. ರಮಾದೇವಿ ಉದ್ಘಾಟಿಸಿದರು.

ಕೆಲಸ ದೊರಕದರೆ ಶ್ರದ್ಧೆಯಿಂದ ಕೆಲಸ ಮಾಡುತ್ತಾರೆ, ಪುರುಷರಲ್ಲಿ ಇಂತಹ ಶ್ರದ್ಧೆ ಬಹಳ ಕಡಿಮೆ ಎಂದು ವಿವರಿಸಿದ ರಾಜ್ಯಪಾಲರು, ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಅಭ್ಯಯನಗಿರುವ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ತರಬೇತಿ ನೀಡಬೇಕೆಂದು ಸಲಹೆ ನೀಡಿದರು.

ಯಾವುದೇ ಮುಷ್ಕರದಲ್ಲಿ ಪುರುಷರು ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಸ್ಥಳಕ್ಕೆ ಹಾಳು ಮಾಡಿದರೆ, ಅದೇ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಆ ರೀತಿ ಮಾಡುವುದಿಲ್ಲ ಅದರಿಂದಲೇ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಅವಕಾಶ ಸಿಗಬೇಕಾಗಿದೆ ಎಂದರು.

ನಿಲ್ಲಿಸಿದ್ದು, ಹಣ್ಣು ಮಕ್ಕಳಿಗೆಲ್ಲ ತಿಳಿಸಿದೆ, ನಾನೊಬ್ಬಳು ಶ್ಯಾಣ್ ಆಗೋದು ಭಲೋ ಅಲ್ಲ, ನೀವು ಬರೀ ಅಂತ ಮತ್ತೊಬ್ಬಳು ನಿಂತು ಆರಿಸಿ ಬಂದಾಳೀ ಎಂದು ತಮ್ಮ ಅನುಭವವನ್ನು ಎಳೆಎಳೆಯಾಗಿ ಜಿಡಿಸುತ್ತಿರು.

ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣಾಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಮತ್ತು ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ರಾಜ್ ಇಲಾಖೆಯ ಕಾರ್ಯದರ್ಶಿ ಎಂ.ಆರ್. ಶ್ರೀನಿವಾಸಮೂರ್ತಿ ಮಾತನಾಡಿದರು. ಐಎನ್‌ಎಸ್‌ಟಿ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕಿ ಡಾ. ಸ್ವಪ್ನ ಮುಖ್ಯೋಪಾಧ್ಯಾಯ ಸ್ವಾಗತಿಸಿದರು. ಸಹ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕಿ ಎಂ. ಮೀರಾ ವಂದಿಸಿದರು.

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆ ಬಂಗಾಳಿ, ಮಹಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರ

# ಪುರುಷರ ನೆರವಿಲ್ಲದೆ ಕೆಲಸ; ಪಂ. ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸದಸ್ಯರಿಗೆ ಕರೆ

ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು, ಜೂ. 1: ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಅರಿಸಿ ಬಂದ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ತಮ್ಮ ಸಾಧನೆ ತೋರುವ ಸಮಯ ಬಂದಿದೆ ಎಂದು ರಾಜ್ಯಪಾಲ ವಿ.ಎನ್. ರಮಾದೇವಿ ಇಂದಿಲ್ಲಿ ಅಭಿಪ್ರಾಯಿಸಿದರು.

ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಅನುಭವಗಳು ಕುರಿತ ವಿಚಾರಸಂಕರಣ ಉದ್ಘಾಟಿಸಿ ಅವರು ಮಾತನಾಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು.

ಪಂಚಾಯತ್‌ನಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಸಂಘಟನೆಯೊಂದು ಗಂಡಸರನ್ನು ಹೊರತು ಪಡಿಸಿ ಅವೇ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗೆ ನಿಂತು ಜಯ ಸಾಧಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಚುನಾಯಿತ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳಾಗಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಗಂಡಸರ ಸಹಾಯವಿಲ್ಲದೇ ಸ್ವಶಕ್ತಿಯಿಂದ ಕೆಲಸ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ಕೈಗೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕು ಎಂದು ಹೇಳಿದರು.

ರಾಜ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ರಾಜ್ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ಜಾರಿಗೆ ಬಂದಿರುವುದು ಶ್ಲಾಘನೀಯ. ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಈ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ಪರಿಣಾಮಕಾರಿಯಾಗಿ ಬೆಳೆಯಲು ಆಸಕ್ತಿ ತೋರಬೇಕು ಎಂದು ನುಡಿದರು.

ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ವಸ್ತುಗಳನ್ನು ಹಾಳುಗಡವೆ ಶಾಂತ ರೀತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಮುಚ್ಚರ ನಡೆಸಿ ತಮ್ಮ ಬೇಡಿಕೆ ಈಡೇರಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುತ್ತಾರೆ ಎಂದು ಹೇಳಿದರು.

ವಿಡಿಯೋ ಕಾನ್ಫರೆನ್ಸ್ ತರಬೇತಿ ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ಸದಸ್ಯರಿಗೆ ಸೂಕ್ತ ಸಲಹೆ ಹಾಗೂ ತರಬೇತಿ ನೀಡಲು ಉಪಗ್ರಹ ಸಂವಹನ ಮೂಲಕ ವಿಡಿಯೋ ಕಾನ್ಫರೆನ್ಸ್ ನಡೆಸಲು ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ರಾಜ್ ಇಲಾಖೆ ನಿರ್ಧರಿಸಿದೆ.

ಗ್ರಾಮ, ತಾಲೂಕು ಹಾಗೂ ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳನ್ನು ಪ್ರತಿ



ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಅನುಭವಗಳು ಕುರಿತ ವಿಚಾರ ಸಂಕರಣವನ್ನು ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಗುರುವಾರ ರಾಜ್ಯಪಾಲ ವಿ.ಎನ್. ರಮಾದೇವಿ ಉದ್ಘಾಟಿಸಿದರು. ಗುಲ್ಬರ್ಗ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆ ಗ್ರಾಮ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಯೊಂದರ ಮಾಜಿ ಅಧ್ಯಕ್ಷ ಶರಣಪ್ಪ ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ರಾಜ್ ಕಾರ್ಯದರ್ಶಿ ಎಂ.ಆರ್. ಶ್ರೀನಿವಾಸಮೂರ್ತಿ ಉಪಸ್ಥಿತರಿದ್ದರು.

ತಾಲೂಕು ಹಾಗೂ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ನಡೆಸುವ ವಿಡಿಯೋ ಕಾನ್ಫರೆನ್ಸ್‌ನಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಶೋತ್ತರ, ಸಲಹೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳ ನಿರ್ವಹಣೆ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಚರ್ಚಿಸಲಾಗುವುದು ಎಂದು ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣಾಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಹಾಗೂ ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ರಾಜ್ ಇಲಾಖೆ ಕಾರ್ಯದರ್ಶಿ ಎಂ.ಆರ್. ಶ್ರೀನಿವಾಸಮೂರ್ತಿ ತಿಳಿಸಿದರು.

ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳ ಅಡಳಿತದಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಅನುಭವ ಕುರಿತ ವಿಚಾರ ಸಂಕರಣದಲ್ಲಿ ಮಾತನಾಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ಅವರು, ಉಪಗ್ರಹ ಸಂವಹನಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಮೈಸೂರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಸ್ಪಡಿಯೋ ಸಿದ್ಧವಾಗುತ್ತಿದೆ. ಶೀಘ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ಸ್ಪಡಿಯೋ ಮೂಲಕ ತಜ್ಞರಿಂದ ಗೋಚ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ನಡೆಸಲಾಗುವುದು ಎಂದು ವಿವರಿಸಿದರು.

ಗ್ರಾಮಪಂಚಾಯತ್‌ಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಶೇ.45 ರಷ್ಟು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಅರಿಸಿ ಬಂದಿದ್ದು, ತಮ್ಮ ಸ್ವಕೀ ಮೂಲಕ ಅಡಳಿತದಲ್ಲಿ ಭಾಗಿಯಾಗಬೇಕಾಗಿದೆ. ಸ್ವಯಂ ಸೇವಾ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳು ಆಯ್ಕೆಯಾದ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ವಿಶೇಷ ತರಬೇತಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮ ಹಮ್ಮಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಸಹಕರಿಸಬೇಕು ಎಂದು ತಿಳಿಸಿದರು.

ಉನಯಪಾಣಿ

2-6-2000

# ರಾಜಕೀಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಸ್ವಕೀಯ ಪಾತ್ರಕ್ಕೆ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ಕರೆ

ಜಿಂಗಳೂರು, ಜೂ, 1- 'ರಾಜಕೀಯ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಸಕ್ರಿಯವಾಗಿ ಭಾಗವಹಿಸಿ ದೇಶದ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗೆ ಶ್ರಮಿಸಬೇಕು' ಎಂದು ರಾಜ್ಯಪಾಲರಾದ ವಿ.ಎಸ್. ರಮಾದೇವಿ ಕರೆ ನೀಡಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

ಇನ್‌ಸ್ಟಿಟ್ಯೂಟ್ ಆಫ್ ಸೋಶಿಯಲ್ ಸೈನ್ಸಸ್ ಪ್ರೆಸ್ಟ್ ಗುರುವಾರ ಜವನಾಪುರ ಅಧಿವೇಶನದಲ್ಲಿ ವಿವರಿಸಿದ 'ಸ್ವಕೀಯ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿನ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸದಸ್ಯರ ಅನುಭವಗಳಿಂದ ಕಲಿಕೆ' ಎಂಬ ದಿನಗಳ ವಿಚಾರ ಸಂಕರಣ ಉದ್ಘಾಟನೆ ಅವರು ಮಾತನಾಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು.

ಗ್ರಾಮ, ತಾಲೂಕು ಮತ್ತು ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಉತ್ಸಾಹದಿಂದ ಭಾಗವಹಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರೇ ಆರಿಸಿ ಬಂದರೆ ಹಳ್ಳಿಯ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಗಮನ ಪರಿ ಸುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಆದರಿಗೆ ತಮ್ಮ ಹಳ್ಳಿಯ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆ, ಕುಂದು-ಕೊರತೆ, ಶಾಲೆ, ಪರಿಸರ ಸ್ವಚ್ಛತೆ, ನೀರು ಮುಂತಾದ ದಿನ ನಿತ್ಯದ ಮೂಲಭೂತ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆಗಳನ್ನು ಬಗೆಹರಿಸಲು ಶ್ರಮಿಸುತ್ತಾರೆ ಎಂದು ಅಭಿಪ್ರಾಯಪಟ್ಟರು.

ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ಮತ್ತು ಮಹಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರ ರಾಜ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಗ್ರಾಮ, ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗೆ ಸ್ಪರ್ಧಿಸುವ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಪುರುಷರ ಸಹಾಯವಿಲ್ಲದೆ ಚುನಾವಣೆ ಪ್ರಚಾರದಲ್ಲಿ ತೊಡಗುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಪ್ರಾಗೈಯೇ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗೆ ಬೇಕಾದ ಹಣಕಾಸಿನ ವ್ಯವಹಾರವನ್ನು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರೇ ನಿಭಾಯಿಸು

ತ್ತಾರೆ. ಇಂತಹ ಪರಿಸರ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ರಾಜ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲೂ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣ ವಾಗಬೇಕು ಎಂದರು.

ಪ್ರಿ-ಪುರುಷರು ಪರಸ್ಪರ ಸಹಕಾರದಿಂದ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ ತಮ್ಮನ್ನು ತೊಡಗಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕು. ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಪುರುಷರಷ್ಟೇ ದೈಹಿಕ ಮತ್ತು ಮಾನಸಿಕ ಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯ ಸ್ಥಳವರು. ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಪುರುಷರಿಗಿಂತ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಶ್ರೀಮಂತಿಕೆ ಉಳ್ಳವರು ಎಂದು ಮೆಚ್ಚುಗೆ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಪಡಿಸಿದರು.

ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ತಮ್ಮ ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಶಾಂತಿಯುತ ಪ್ರತಿಭಟನೆ ಮೂಲಕ ಈಡೇರಿಸಿ ಕೊಳ್ಳುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಆದರೆ ಪುರುಷರು ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಅಸ್ತಿ-ಭಾಸ್ತಿ ಸಂಪನ್ಮೂಲವ ಮೂಲಕ ಪ್ರತಿಭಟನೆ ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಾರೆ ಎಂದು ಟೀಕಿಸಿದರು.

ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ತಮ್ಮ ಸಾಧನೆ ಮತ್ತು ಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯ ತೋರಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಸಮಯ. ಈ ಸಮಯವನ್ನು ಸದುಪಯೋಗಪಡಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕು ಎಂದು ಕಿವಿ ಮಾತು ಹೇಳಿದರು.

ವಿಶೇಷ ತರಬೇತಿ: ಮೈಸೂರಿನಲ್ಲಿರುವ ಅಬ್ಬಲ್ ನವೀನ್ ಸಾಹ್ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ರಾಜ್ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯು ಗ್ರಾಮ, ತಾಲೂಕು ಮತ್ತು ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಚುನಾವಣೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಆಯ್ಕೆಯಾದ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸದಸ್ಯರಿಗೆ ವಿಶೇಷ ತರಬೇತಿ ನೀಡಲು ಸದ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಮೈಸೂರು ನಗರದಲ್ಲಿ ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ನಿರ್ಮಿಸಲಾಗುವುದು ಎಂದು ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣಾಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಮತ್ತು ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ರಾಜ್ ಇಲಾಖೆ ಕಾರ್ಯದರ್ಶಿ ಎಂ.ಆರ್. ಶ್ರೀನಿವಾಸಮೂರ್ತಿ ಈ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ತಿಳಿಸಿದರು. ಈ

ಸ್ಥಳೀಯದಲ್ಲಿ ವಿದಿಯೋ ಕಾನ್ಸರೆನ್ಸ್ ನಡೆಸಿ ಆ ಮೂಲಕ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಸದಸ್ಯರ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆ, ಅಡಳಿತ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ಮುಂತಾದ ವಿಷಯ ಕುರಿತು ವಿಶೇಷ ತರಬೇತಿ ನೀಡಲಾಗುವುದು ಎಂದರು.

ಇಂದು ಗ್ರಾಮ ಮತ್ತು ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ರಾಜಕೀಯ ನಾಯಕರ ಕುಟುಂಬದ ಸದಸ್ಯರೇ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಭಾಗವಹಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಇದರಿಂದ ಕೆಳವರ್ಗದ ಹಾಗೂ ರಾಜಕೀಯ ಹಿನ್ನೆಲೆ ಇಲ್ಲದ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಈ ಅವಕಾಶಗಳಿಂದ ದೂರವಾಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಈ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ನಿಲ್ಲಬೇಕು ಎಂದು ಅಭಿಪ್ರಾಯಪಟ್ಟರು.

ವಿಚಾರ ಸಂಕರಣದಲ್ಲಿ ಹಾಜರಿಟ್ಟ ಗುಲಬರ್ಗಾ ಗ್ರಾಮ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಮಾಜಿ ಸದಸ್ಯ ಶರಣವ್ವ ತನ್ನ ಅಂದಿನ ಗ್ರಾಮ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ಅಡಳಿತ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ಅನುಭವ ಹಂಚಿಕೊಂಡರು.

'ಗ್ರಾಮ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗೆ ಆರಿಸಿ ಬಂದ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಹಳ್ಳಿಗೆ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಬೇಕಾದ ನೀರು, ಶೌಚಾಲಯ ಶಾಲೆ ಮುಂತಾದ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಗಮನವರಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು. ನಾವೆಲ್ಲರೂ ಊರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಶಾಲೆ, ನೀರಿಗಾಗಿ ಹೋದಾಟ ನಡೆಸಿ, ಅವನ್ನು ಪಡೆಯಲು ಯಶಸ್ವಿಯೂ ಆದವು ಎಂದು ನೆನಪಿಸಿಕೊಂಡರು.

ಸಮಾರಂಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಐವನ್ ಬಿ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕಿ ಡಾ. ಸ್ವಾಮಿ ಮುಖೋಪಾಧ್ಯಾಯ ಮತ್ತು ಸಹಾಯಕ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕಿ ಎಂ. ಮೀಲಾ ಭಾಗವಹಿಸಿದ್ದರು.

ವಿಜಯ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ

4 JUN 2000