

**Report**

**Of the Project**

***Women in Local Governance:  
Networking and Dissemination at  
UMA Resource Centre***

**Submitted to**

**Action Aid**

**By**

**Institute of Social Studies Trust  
Bangalore**

**2000**

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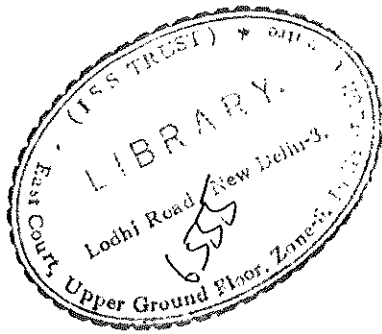
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1. **Project Title:** **Women In Local Governance: Networking And Dissemination at UMA Resource Centre**
2. **Themes / Issues:**
1. Study of Women's participation in Gram Panchayat.
  2. Information dissemination to EWR and EMR of Gram Panchayats, Community leaders.
  3. Information dissemination and networking with Research Organizations, NGOs, Government and other concerned Individuals.

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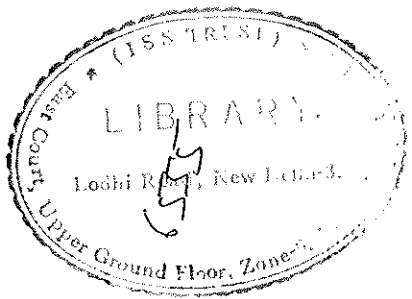
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## CONTENTS

	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>2. UMA Resource Centre: Activities</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>2.1 Research</b>	
2.1.1 Resource Collection	
2.1.2 Documentation	
2.1.3 Dissemination	
2.1.4 Production	
<b>2.2 Field Activities</b>	<b>07</b>
2.2.1 Focus group discussion with Chandapura GP Members	
2.2.2 Horizontal Interaction (Haryana & Karnataka)	
2.2.3 Resource Persons for Training Programmes	
<b>2.3 Workshops</b>	<b>11</b>
2.3.1 Melkote	
2.3.2 Guledagudda	
2.3.3 Bellary	
<b>2.4 South Regional Seminar</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.5 Study of All Women Gram Panchayat</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.6 Networking</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3. Strengthening Steps</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>4. Plans For the Future</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5. Case Stories</b>	<b>25</b>
5.1 Case of the Caste @ Chandapura	
5.2 Kidnap Case @ Melkote	
5.3 Raasta Roko @ Melkote	
5.4 "My Story" by Aswathamma@Chandapura	
5.5 Story of Jaibun Bi @ Guledagudda	
5.6 "My Story" by Margaret Mary @ Dindigul	
5.7 "My Story" by Thresiamma Antony @ Ernakulam	
5.8 "My Story" by Sharanavva @ Keribhosga	
5.9 Patterns from the Election @ Karnataka	
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>7. Annexure</b>	<b>38</b>

## 1. Introduction

*“Political space belongs to all citizens but men monopolize it”*. This is evident in the abysmally low representation of women in all elected bodies. These figures mask the more disturbing fact that women are given no role in the organisation and running of political parties within which major strategies are formulated. Women with political inclinations face a veritable obstacle course unless they are closely associated with powerful male politicians or traditionally political families.

At the local body level however there has been substantial improvement in political participation by women. Karnataka is considered a pioneer in enacting legislation reserving seats for women in elected local bodies. Although the Karnataka legislation only stipulates a minimum of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reservation for women, 44% of the elected representatives in panchayats are women. This is due to the State decision that wherever there was only one seat for a particular category of reservation (eg., SC, ST) that one seat be set aside for women. However, presence in local bodies does not guarantee effective participation in debates and decision making. In many cases, women have been placed or elected as proxy candidates, made to play second fiddle to powerful men and their political designs. This gets coupled with their low ability to articulate and voice issues affecting all women or women of lower castes and class; in order that women’s problems can be discussed, issues incorporated into Panchayats agenda, justice delivered and finances allocated to fill the gaps in services or structures.

Increasing the representation of women is certainly a welcome step especially so towards reaching the ‘critical mass’ but the nature of participation also needs to change and improve. Facilitation Programmes assume crucial significance towards this objective.

## 2. UMA Resource Centre: Activities

Institute of Social Studies Trust at its Bangalore Unit had initially undertaken a Project (Phase 1 – May 1993 to September 1995) to strengthen the participation of women in local governance in the wake of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 1993, reserving one-third of seats in all levels of the Panchayat structure for women. The thrust of this project was two-fold. The first was to design and implement training cum awareness generation programme for women representatives in local bodies. During the second phase of this project an UMA Resource Centre on women in local governance was created.

Support extended by Action Aid India proved vital to carry forward our endeavor towards the objective of further strengthening political space for women, Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), in particular. And this lead us to the current Project (July 1995 to August 2000) where we continued to concentrate on documenting, disseminating information and developing resource materials from the UMA Resource Centre along with continued field programs and networking.

On the basis of experience gained through action and research at the grassroots UMA team identified a few areas of prime focus for strengthening women's political participation.

- The first was demystification of complex official documents brought out by the state such that these could be accessed and understood by a larger audience, especially elected women representatives (EWRs).
- The second was to help portray development issues through 'gender eyes', whereby knowledge gathered could then be used to translate the perspective into action that can begin to make some empowering changes in the lives of EWRs and other women as a whole.
- The third area was to document experiences of elected women in the execution of their role as political participants.

In order to address these issues, it becomes crucial to build and strengthen network among activists, researchers, grassroots organisations, media and others. This was done through a number of methods including dissemination through newsletter, relevant information on individual and group activities concerned with local governance. A simultaneous effort was made to interact with officials of the state government in order to sensitize them to be supportive of representation by women in local governance.

The UMA Resource Centre as a forum has developed in a manner that provides a platform for knowledge transfer and expand networking. Participants at the UMA Resource Centre have easy access to information collated at the Center and the number of users of UMA Resource Centre is expanding.

The activities of the UMA Resource Centre are categorized into four broad categories.

- The first deals with documentation and collation of resource materials on development, women's issues and concerns with particular emphasis on women's participation in grassroots governance.
- The second pertains to a range of field based activities including facilitation programmes through which we keep in constant touch with grassroots women.
- The third is concerned with production of new research outputs in the form of resource books and dissemination of relevant information.
- The fourth relates to strengthening and expanding network activities.

Towards reaching these objectives we planned to undertake the following activities:

- Continue with field level programs
- Continue the publication of UMA Prachar in English, Hindi and Kannada
- Continue with our documentation and networking activities of women in local governance.
- Hold regional seminar towards creating a forum for information dissemination, sharing of experiences and expand networking activities.



## 2.1 Research

### 2.1.1 Resource Collection

The UMA Resource Centre was developed since 1995 and at present it has a collection of over 400 valuable books as well as approximately 700 information-based papers in English and other regional languages.

Documents	Upto June 1999	Upto Aug 2000
Books on Gender, Politics, PR, Finance etc	85	95
Workshop/Seminar/Conference reports	88	91
Select papers on PRIs by Experts	57	115
PR Bills/Acts/Amendments legislated by various state governments	52	68
Select papers on PRI Finance & Health	8	11
Training Materials	50	61
Papers related to Women and PRIs	51	70
PRI related papers in other vernacular languages	179	182
<b>Total</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>693</b>

### 2.1.2 Documentation

The collected materials are classified and documented under user friendly sections and also made into an 'Annotated Bibliography', which is updated regularly. A small section on audio-visual tapes in different languages is also available. A directory of organisations / institutions working on Panchayat issues titled "Who's Where?" is compiled and updated regularly, since 1994.

### 2.1.3 Dissemination

One of the main purpose of disseminating and sharing information is to strengthen solidarity and enhance capabilities of women in local governance by fulfilling their long felt need for information exchange and networking among individuals and organisations working towards this goal. And one of the ways in which this is being accomplished on a regular and continuous basis is through the publication of the newsletter "UMA Prachar", designed to serve as a channel for exchange of ideas and news on Panchayat Raj. The newsletter 'UMA Prachar' is published in three languages namely English, Hindi and Kannada and contains case studies, profiles of elected representatives, newspaper clippings, articles related to networking, news from the field etc. Uma Prachar reaches nearly 1000 individuals/organisations in English, 750 in Kannada and 500 in Hindi all over the country.

#### **2.1.4 Production**

*As We Did It* (English) – This is a training manual developed for women in Panchayat Raj. This manual is an expression, a sharing of the commitment, hard work and aspiration, which UMA Project as part of ISST has dedicated over the years. The manual is a sharing of initiatives taken up in the field of training by UMA in a comprehensive way. It works as a guide for those who are involved with the training of EWRS.

*What Works* (English) – This is a compilation of the various training techniques used by several groups, especially for facilitating neo-literate and illiterate women and men group. These techniques are documented in a manner that is interesting and easily applicable by any committed practitioner who wishes to conduct such programmes. All the techniques in some way or the other are related to the empowerment of women in Panchayat Raj. These techniques can be employed in a variety of situations, for a variety of subjects and themes that enable women to experience the joy of sharing and learning.

#### ***Newspaper Clippings on Panchayat Raj***

A compilation of newspaper clippings on Panchayat Raj related matters both in English and Kannada has been prepared since 1994 and the recent one for 1999-2000 is also ready.

#### ***Annotated Bibliography on Panchayat Raj (Updated)***

The resource collection at the Resource Centre is made into an Annotated Bibliography and this is the updated copy.

#### **In Progress (Kannada)**

***Gram Panchayat Budget***

***Gram Sabha Handbook***

***Compilation of Case Studies* (In English & Kannada)**

#### **(In Malayalam)**

***Irutil Ninnum Velichathilekku***

(Translation of our resource book 'From Darkness to Light')

#### **(In Tamil)**

***Irutilirundhu Velichathukku***

(Translation of our resource book 'From Darkness to Light')

### **2.2 Field Activities**

Field based activities of ISST team are designed to ensure continuous interaction with Gram Panchayats in various districts of Karnataka for proper assessment of training needs and priorities at the grassroots level. We believe that these interactions are most important for our learning; for understanding priorities and developing relevant resource materials; to strengthen documentation, dissemination and networking components of our endeavor to strengthen women in local governance.

**Salient Programmes organized and conducted by ISST (July 1999 – August 2000)**

Sl. No.	District/ State	Taluk	Gram Panchayat	Date and Year	Event	No. of Participants
1.	Bangalore	Anekal	Chandapura	6 <sup>th</sup> July 1999	Gram Panchayat Assessment Programme	7
2.	Tamil Nadu	Arepalayam	Arepalayam	30-31 <sup>st</sup> August 1999	Training Programme	20
3.	Mandya District	Nagamangala Pandavapura	Nagamangala Pandavapura	12-13 Nov. 99	Workshop	35
4.	Bangalore District	Devanahalli	Devanahalli	19 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 1999	Workshop	25
5.	Bangalore District	Anekal	Chandapura	26 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 1999	Horizontal meeting	30
6.	Bagalkot District	Badami	24 GPs of Badami Taluk	6-10 <sup>th</sup> April 2000	Training Programme	42
7.	Bellary District	Selected Taluks	Bellary	26 <sup>th</sup> April 2000	Facilitation Programme	46
8.	Andhra Pradesh Karnataka Kerala Maharashtra Tamil Nadu	State level	Bangalore	1-2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2000	Regional Seminar	40
9.	Gulbarga District	Atzalpur Taluk	All Women Gram Panchayat	17 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> August 2000	Preliminary study visit	16 of AWGP TP, ZP NGOs etc.

**2.2.1 Focus group discussion at Chandapura Gram Panchayat on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1999**

Visit to Chandapura Gram Panchayat was organized with the objective of assessing the performance of EWRs in Gram Panchayat, their confidence levels, their political behavior, factors that influence their political behavior, political plans, influence on Gram Panchayat agenda, awareness of gender issues, etc.

This Panchayat constituted a total of 15 members of which 7 were women. A woman President Smt. Aswathamma headed this Gram Panchayat and she was the pillar of strength for this GP. She had also managed to gain full cooperation from most of her members. During their tenure as panchayat members they have successfully executed their responsibilities by providing drinking water facility, street lights, hospitals, anganwadi centres, houses etc to the village people. The members successfully increased their GP revenue through tax collection from Rs. 1,29,290 in 1994-95 to Rs. 9,72, 627 and took up developmental activities.

Members strongly felt that the presence of women in Panchayats has definitely led to “formulating better policy, take better decisions and good works for the community”.

“Women have proved themselves capable”. It was observed that this new role has given them a lot of visibility as a person. They have become more courageous, become better informed; which in turn helped them to function more confidently and efficiently. It was also seen that these women basically work without expecting any returns. And this is a pattern observed during our interaction with most of the EWRs.

Most often it is seen that EWRs take their role very seriously, feel totally accountable to the community, aspire to do a lot for their Panchayats, make their best efforts in spite of the disadvantages bestowed upon them and do manage to accomplish a lot, relatively. However by the end of it all, their socialization, sincerity and modesty makes them feel that because they are women they have not been able to do a good job. This gets started and / or gets reinforced by the community, village-political vested interests, even by the family and so on. In spite of all the work taken up and accomplished, many EWRs, most often than not are left with a feeling of not having done enough, fatigue of managing multiple roles, repulsion from the “dirty political games” that one gets forced to play.

### *2.2.2 Horizontal Interactive Meeting Between Chandapura Gram Panchayat Members, Mahila Mandali Members & Gram Panchayat members, Mahila Mandali members of Khori Centre, Haryana on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1999.*

A horizontal interactive meeting was organised by ISST team with Chandapura Gram Panchayat members and Mahila Mandali members with those of Haryana at the request of Khori Centre, Haryana. The agenda of this meeting was to know the functioning of the PRIs and Mahila Mandals in Karnataka as compared to those of Haryana and Rajasthan.

One of the structural differences in the PRIs found between the two states was that of Vice-President’s post. In Haryana there is no Vice-President’s (Upa-Sarpanch) post.

Main issues discussed were the functioning of Gram Panchayats, Gram Sabha, the innovative methods that women have used in solving their problems, how they have created their own informal political spaces and mechanisms to participate effectively in panchayats in Karnataka. The Haryana team was very impressed by the way the EWRs in Karnataka are functioning, stepping out of the deep-rooted patriarchal constraints.

### *2.2.3 As Resource Persons for Training Programmes*

#### *a) Training Programme on Panchayat Raj System in Tamil Nadu for the staff of Myrada at Myrada Campus, Arepalayam, Tamil Nadu from 30<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> August 1999.*

A resource team of ISST, Bangalore was invited by MYRADA, Arepalayam, Tamil Nadu to provide a two-day residential training for the staff of MYRADA. Their objective was to make their sangha members aware of the principles of PRIs, its structure and significance of Panchayats. The group was keen to understand the principles of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, which incorporated new local governance, to provide a strong foundation for decentralized democracy.

Exhaustive discussion ensued on the need and importance of PR system, decentralised governance, Gram Sabha and its functions, three-tier system, their functions, linkages between them and the standing committees. The participants critically analyzed the role of bureaucracy in implementing the development programme. It was felt lack of co-operation between various govt. departments and presence of gender disparities comes in the way of effective functioning.

The members expressed their satisfaction about the training programme. They shared that this training would go a long way in mobilizing people towards their goal of building social capital and sustain rural development.

**b) *Training programme on "Panchayat Raj and Women's Health" organised by Community Health Cell, Bangalore on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1999.***

Community Health Cell, Bangalore in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Government of India had organised this workshop. It covered participants from five districts of Karnataka, who were from Mahila Sanghas and Mahila Samakhya groups. The members explained the problems they face while carrying out their work. It was felt that there was an urgent need to improve the status of women's health in rural areas. Poor access to health facilities, poverty, ignorance and high gender disparities make rural women give up their priorities and adjust themselves to the existing conditions.

The resource team from ISST, through participatory method, explained factors affecting health of women, possible ways of improving rural women's health and within their reach. Emphasis was laid on the role of Panchayat members in creating general awareness and importance of nutrition through ANMs, Anganwadi workers, Doctors, Mahila mandals, grassroot level workers and elders of the community. Also focussed on the roles and responsibilities of the EWRs with special mention to Gram Sabha in brief.

**c) *Workshop on "Panchayat Raj and Women's Health" organised by Janodaya, Devanahalli, Bangalore on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1999.***

Janodaya, Devanahalli had organised a workshop on "Panchayat Raj and Women's Health" for Mahila Sangha members. Since most of the participants had newly joined the Sangha and were fresh, they knew very little about either Panchayat Raj or Women's Health. The resource persons from ISST began from the basics to facilitate effective learning.

The principles; scope and structure of Panchayat Raj Institutions was explained with the help of "*Gram Panchayat Kaipidi*". The principles of PR Act, Decentralisation, Gram Sabha, Social Justice and Economic development, including roles and responsibilities of the elected members were dealt in detail.

With this as background, the resource persons initiated a discussion on Panchayat Raj and its role in improving women's health. They explained as to how sangha members can motivate panchayat members to take up health issues in the Panchayat meetings. A flow

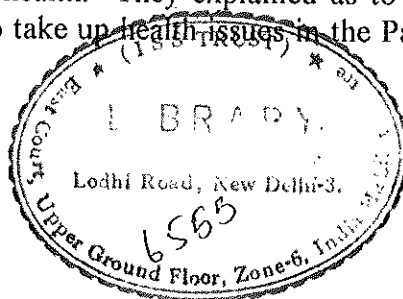


chart was used to emphasize the role of Panchayat members in creating general awareness and the importance of nutrition, linking up through panchayat level functionaries like ANMs, Anganwadi workers, doctors, Mahila Mandals, NGOs, parents and elders of the community.

d) *Training programme on "Panchayat Raj" for community organisers from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh organised by SAKTI, Bangalore.*

SAKTI, of Bangalore conducted "Community Organizers' Training Programme from May 1999 – January 2000. In this regard, it had arranged a two day session on "Panchayat Raj" on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> January 2000. The group consisted of 16 participants from Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The resource team from ISST was requested to take on societal analysis, leading to the history of PRIs, emergence of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act and the principles of this Act. Structure & scope of Panchayat Raj Institutions, roles and responsibilities of elected members with their specific roles, Gram Panchayat meetings, Grama Sabha, financial sources of PRIs were discussed at length using participatory methods.

## 2.3 Workshops

2.3.1 *Melkote:* UMA Resource team organised and conducted a two day workshop for EWRs of Gram Panchayats in Nagamangala and Pandavapura taluks of Mandya District from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1999. The total strength of the workshop was over 35 with participants coming from Melkote and other nearby Gram Panchayats.

The workshop comprised of two types of participants – one being the EWRs, the other – the future contestants. In the group, the future contestants were more than the EWRs. EWRs felt that 'their term was almost completed and what could they do at this point of time, gaining knowledge about Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat budget'. On the other hand the future contestants were enthusiastic to know about Panchayat Raj as they were new to this area and also they were potential leaders and were active in Mahila Mandals/Sanghas and other community development programmes. A bridge between the two was forged during this workshop so that each would support the other.

With Gram Sabha forming the foundation for PRI, ISST team thought it essential to make the EWRs and future contestants aware of its importance and need to strengthen the same. Through previous experiences it was felt that the EWRs in particular and also the rural population in general had very little awareness about Gram Sabha and their roles in Gram Sabha.

Most of the EWRs knew very little about the resources available in Gram Panchayat level in spite of serving a whole term. Awareness and handling of financial and technical issues in Panchayat by women was minimal rather nil. Total distancing from matters like

panchayat budget was evident. The session on Gram Panchayat budget using participatory techniques was received as a welcome change.



### *The participatory two-day workshop at Melkote*

Issues related to Gram Panchayat budget like the meaning of Gram Panchayat budget, types of budget, sources of incomes, expenditures, grants and auditing were dealt with. During the sessions one of the participants who was the sitting President of Gram Panchayat gradually contributed a lot on her experience with GP budget and in her own way facilitated peer group clarity.

The two-day workshop was participatory in nature facilitating group sharing of information, experiences and greater understanding. As always use of posters, charts, games and group exercises proved most useful.

Finally during review of the two-day programme, participants expressed joy for being part of this process and that they have gained a lot. The EWRs held the view that they needed such workshops from the beginning of their tenure so that they could discharge their duty in a better manner. The future contestants were at a gain as they could know panchayat activities before hand. They expressed to have many more meetings like this so that they could know all about the Panchayat Raj System. After having gained a fair amount of knowledge regarding Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat budget the participants were firm enough to make the forthcoming Gram Sabha in the village a successful one.

### 2.3.2 Guledagudda

Women have entered Panchayat Raj Institutions through election or through consensus. Being first generation 'politicians' their need for information, preparedness is immense. They needed to be empowered not only to be effective in delivering their duties as members of Panchayats but also to handle a barrage of changes within her own "self", in her world view, management of her own energy, time, multiple responsibilities.

In this direction ISST had organised a workshop for the newly elected women representatives of Badami taluk in Bagalkot district, which is one of the newly carved north Karnataka district. The workshop was held from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2000 in collaboration with a local NGO Sri Sharada Vidyalaya, at the training centre at Guledgudda. This is one of the interior areas and plagued with water problems and extremely high temperature. In fact, we decided to go ahead with the training in April in spite of scorching summer heat and severe water problems particularly because this group was just elected, very keen to begin work, had no earlier exposure and mainly to subscribe to the EWRs' often expressed need for training at the beginning of their tenure.

There were 42 EWRs from 24 different Gram Panchayats of Badami taluk. This being soon after the elections, training began with eager sharing of election experience which threw light on the village dynamics, its system of political patronage etc. Overlapping and Interplay of 'partyism', casteism, class and patriarchy was most evident.

Through the use of participatory exercises such as games, stories, role plays, and group discussions; Introduction to status of rural women; historical perspective, strengths-struggles of women's movement including suffragate movement were shared in brief; Various aspects of Panchayat Raj Act, its principles, structure, reservation policy for women, roles and responsibilities, importance of Gram Sabha including Gram Panchayat Budget were the modules touched upon.



*Dreaming, learning, sharing .....*



This being their first ever programme most of them were very hesitant in the beginning. And gradually moved out of their shells by the end of Day One. By the second day there was nothing to stop them from dreaming, learning, sharing, arguing and even playing!

The EWRs shared that this programme made them fight self-doubt, their shyness and made them courageous. They said “ well, now we know why we are in the Panchayat, what we can do and that we better learn to clarify doubts...!”

One of the stars of the programme was Jaibun Bi, a member of Kelavadi Gram Panchayat who had passed SSLC many years ago. She had on her own kept a record of the proceedings and in well-refined Kannada. When we discovered this the second day morning, it was only apt to start with her presentation of previous days report. And she did a wonderful job of that not just in terms of her confidence but also in capturing the content and nuances of the discussion. Every one there felt a sense of pride in what she did and the collective spirit received a big boost!

During the valedictory session when the EEOs of Badami taluk had joined us Jaibun Bi read out and a few others shared the highlights of the entire programme which visibly shook the officers. Because they had started their informal speeches with the premise that women don't talk, don't come out and take their role seriously etc. etc. The officers immediately changed their assessment and extended all support and cooperation to the EWRs.

One of the salient aspects that emerged during this programme was the eagerness with which they considered a possibility we proposed, for them to keep in touch with each other even after the programme. Various ways were explored to build and sustain such a solidarity network among them. It is of course, not an easy task to snatch a few moments from all their responsibilities to even say '*namaskara*' to each other; however since this was one of the ways to strengthen their positions within the political spaces and also since they kept wishing for more such spaces through out the training program we also felt it is worth exploring.

### **2.3.3 Bellary**

ISST in collaboration with Mahila Samakhya of Bellary conducted a one day meeting on Panchayat Raj on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2000. The participants included 46 women sangha members and Mahila Samakhya Panchayat Committee members. Among them 3 had contested for the recently held Gram Panchayat elections and had lost while 2 others had withdrawn their nominations.

The purpose of the meeting was to create a space for women to ventilate their feelings both those of who had lost or withdrawn their nominations succumbing to multifarious village dynamics and pressures, during recent elections. And to motivate them to contest for taluk panchayat and zilla panchayat elections that were to be held shortly.



*Ventilating their feelings...*

ISST, Bangalore was requested to be the resource team to facilitate and provide necessary input and to analytically document the process.

The discussions touched on various aspects such as motivating factors to contest the election, steps taken after deciding to contest, supporters, non-supporters, affect on their personal life, family and community, suggestions from them for ways in which they could have been supported, role of organisations in the whole process, future plans in Panchayats and Grama Sabha etc.

Some of the reasons for losing the election as listed out by the participants were: the lack of unity among sangha members and split in their votes, lack of support from the family, division of same caste votes due to the fact that the opponent was also of the same caste, lack of support from community and villagers, and political inexperience.

The members felt that it is very essential to win the confidence of the people, to take the permission from family members, the community people and the villagers before deciding to contest the election. And being 'non-selfish' and developing unity among sangha members were the other factors to be taken care of.

According to most of them, sangha had played a very big role of motivating them, doing all the formalities required to contest till campaigning and all other sort of support. However from their sharing it emerged clearly that sangha support was only one part of a larger whole in this game of votes.

#### **2.4 South Regional Seminar**

As a part of this project, ISST organized a two day seminar on "Women in Local Governance: Experiences and Effective Interventions in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu" to create a platform and to facilitate sharing of experiences of women in Panchayat Raj in these states and to understand effective strategic interventions

and insights from experiences. This would go a long way in sharing and consolidating experiences for planning future initiatives to strengthen women in local governance both within and across the states.

Towards this objective we brought together academicians, activists, officials, media representatives and elected women representatives in Panchayat Raj Institutions. EWRs from the southern states actively participated, presented their experiences and shared valuable insights. Papers on state experiences, effective interventions were also presented by activists, researchers and govt. officials.



### *Sharanavva...with confidence and conviction*

The seminar was inaugurated by Smt. Sharanavva, Gram Panchayat member from Gulbarga, one of the backward districts in North Karnataka and Honorable Governor Smt. Rama Devi, Sri Srinivasmurthy, Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department delivered the keynote address. Conscious efforts were made to have EWR from the front lines deliver inaugural address along with the first lady of the State. Every person present including the press had many words of appreciation for practicing the democratic values that is most often only preached. Sharanavva was extremely confident, comfortable and spoke with the strength of conviction and commitment. All efforts were made to break media habit of giving coverage to only "VIPs" words!

### **Salient points that emerged during deliberations in the seminar**

1. The language, ethics and value system of politics is not women friendly. This language has to be demystified and de-constructed.
2. The existing environment is not conducive to decentralisation. Structures put in place now is not sufficient for decentralized governance. We have to think of what will make it possible to demand a better system of true decentralised planning.
3. 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 solidarity networks, a support and accountability mechanism for the EWR. These are fundamental to the transformation of politics.
4. Kerala government has shown political will. People's Plan Campaign has brought in a new development perspective. Devolution is necessary, but it is not enough for women's empowerment. Remote planning and just earmarking funds eg. as women's component plan, 30% reservation for women etc. by itself does not deliver women's rights, equality, etc.
5. Members of local bodies are expected to work for the community's development without being corrupt. But they have been given no facilities even partially as that provided for MPs and MLAs. It is unfair to expect a Gram Panchayat member to show results even if it means spending from her own pocket. In fact suggestions were made to cut unnecessary expenses provided for by the state to MLA, MPs and to channellize that to PRI members.
6. Women members are much closer to home in more than one sense. It has been oft recorded and inferred that women members take up issues that are closer to local realities and reflect local priorities much more.
7. 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 out how the system functions, it is time to step down; and on the other hand the feeling that someone else can develop as leaders is also there. 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.
8. On the other hand in view of nurturing a constituency and to make real the objectives of the reservation policy it was felt that reservation of a particular seat should be for 2 terms. Otherwise women who are very keen have only 2 options. One is to either migrate to another reserved constituency or field themselves from the General seat.

9. In this context we shared a vital observation. Once during a field visit it was shocking to see some panchayat level official printed document saying '*samanya seat*' (general seat) as '*samanya purusha seat*' (general men seat). When such an anomaly was shared during a meeting with the minister for Rural development and Panchayat Raj he 'pacified' us by saying it is just a mistaken terminology! Well, we convinced him the gravity of the matter and he committed to look into it. But the fact remains that elections for this term were over and this pronounced social reservation for men has meant lost opportunity for those women (though few) who mustered some courage to try and contest under the general seat!
10. Our experience is that the proxy phenomenon is not confined to women alone; male members are also subject to this especially those coming from the reserved category. Only the power behind could well be the village landlord or religious head and so on.
11. 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.
12. Training/Capacity Building initiatives need to incorporate gender perspective as a generic component but conveyed in a simple and relevant manner. It is more than clear that good governance need not and most often does not mean gendered governance.
13. Gram Panchayats have to evolve innovative ways of generating revenue and also make full use of Common Property Resources and funds from the community.
14. Self Help Groups (SHG) can play a positive role only when it is formed and managed in a process oriented manner with clear social mandate. However it is seen that when this is 'hijacked' by any dept./agency/organization this will be only a quick-fix delivery mechanism for government schemes. Experience of SSP (Swayam Shikshan Prayog), Mumbai clearly demonstrates the potential strength of SHGs in decentralised planning. When these SHGs have a responsible role to play they can forge alliances with local bodies with excellent results.
15. 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 would find it very hard to contest and win 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 this system and try to eliminate corruption of all kinds.
16. The autonomous women's movement should now think more about Political spaces for women.

17. The political women activists within political spaces need not abandon the party but see how well they can work through it. Intervention strategies could include functioning as pressure groups within the party; work with party support; through individual networks or garnering support from outside.
18. We should be concerned about the environment we are creating. Is it an orderly system of governance where we can channelise our findings to evolve better strategies? We need to work towards ensuring that the panchayats are enabled to maintain national interests and local priorities.
19. Political might is necessary. A woman's forum, which breaks all party barriers, is essential. Any major change for good can be brought about only through a vibrant movement and not by a single party or a few groups.

## 2.5 All Women Gram Panchayat at Athnur, Gulbarga District, North Karnataka

A preliminary study visit was made to the All Women Gram Panchayat (AWGP) at Athnur, Afzalpur Taluk of Gulbarga District on the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2000. We felt it was important that an initial visit be made to understand and document the impressions early on in their tenure. In tune with ISSTs plan to do a baseline study of this unique panchayat during the course of another year.

Structured and unstructured meetings were held to gather initial opinions regarding the AWGP from villagers, village leaders, former panchayat members, AWGP members, NGO and organizations like Mahila Samakhya Gulbarga unit and its sangha women. An initial understanding of supporting factors and non supporting factors were made.

During Focus Group Discussion with the members of AWGP their perspective, plans, fears, sharing of their election experience, changes in their lives as of now, problems, constraints, etc. were discussed.

Mainly, the objectives are to study the factors that led to the genesis of AWGP role of NGOs, political parties in it. Functioning of AWGP; women as members and political leaders at the grassroots; to learn as much as possible along with them, to assess their need for training and networking; to document and disseminate information through UMA Prachar. Also study reactions and actions by the officialdom.

As this is an ongoing process we present only some of the opinions / observations that emerged at a glance:

The Extension Officer shared as follows:

“The reasons for the formation of All Women Gram Panchayat is political compulsion and party polarisation. Because in Athnur there is only one party. And the leader, an Ex-Zilla Panchayat member has a stronghold on the villagers. He is happy that AWGP has

been formed in Gulbarga district. Now women's participation has increased, because there are only women members they don't hesitate to speak. They all discuss among themselves. Women are coming to meetings without anyone's company. Another important benefit from the AWGP formation is that corruption is reduced and women work more sincerely. He felt more such AWGP should be formed and the reservation quota should increase to 50% from 33%".

Indifference to AWGP and reverence to the local political leader *Annadata* (One who feeds them/landlord) was obvious.

The Villagers: "The AWGP has been formed to give chance to women for 5 years. We (men) have enjoyed the power for 50 years. We don't discuss problems with these women (members). "*Talemele Seraguhaakhi kooruvara hattira naavenu heluvathu*" (What do we tell those who sit with their heads covered in sarees). "If required, we discuss matter with their husbands".

Out of the 16 members, 3 were into their second term. When asked about the differences they could see between the previous and the present GP, they said:

"In the previous tenure when both men and women members were there, we never attended the meetings. We used to sign the register which was sent to our homes. Whenever we attended the meeting, we used to sit in a corner quietly, have biscuits, tea and come back. We were never given an opportunity to speak".

All member of the AWGP are eager to do justice to their roles.

Future Plans in their own words...

"To achieve something which nobody has done so far and to get good name".

"We want to do something exclusively for women. They have problem for drinking water and sanitation – so these are our first priority. There are no toilets in the village, which is causing inconvenience for women.

"To make more facilities for women (schools and hospitals). Provide housing for poor and the backward".

"Education of children and health facilities for the community will be improved by increasing the number and service of schools and hospitals".

## 2.6 Networking

Networking is an important component of the Project for strengthening women's participation in PRIs. The belief that strength lies in solidarity and that different types of groups have different base of public and political support is evident and often expressed to us in several meetings and workshops. The UMA Resource Centre took the initiative of organizing common platforms where EWRs could learn and exchange information and it is gaining greater ground.

A. As a part of networking activity, research team of ISST attended the following Programmes:

- “Power, Patronage and Accountability in Karnataka’s Panchayats and Democratic Decentralisation and Participation of Women: A case study in Karnataka” on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1999 organised by ISEC, Bangalore.
- National conference on Women’s Studies IX IAWS Conference held in Hyderabad from January 7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> 2000.
- One-day seminar on “Re-allocation of budget in Panchayat Raj Institutions” on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2000 organised by TIDE, Bangalore.
- Gendered Governance – Consultation organized by National Institute of Advanced Studies on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2000.
- One day meeting on “Collective for Associating EWRs in PRIs” on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2000 at SSF, Bangalore.
- Women’s Political Empowerment Day celebrations – Women and Gram Sabha on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2000 organised by ISS, Bangalore.
- Associating Elected Women Representatives in PRIs – ISST as part of its Documentation Committee. Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2000 organised by SSF, Bangalore.
- “Strengthening Women’s participation in district level governance” – a district level conference in Tumkur organised by SSF, Bangalore in collaboration with Zilla Parishad, Tumkur on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.
- National Seminar on “Gender Dimensions of HIV/AIDS” organised by ISST, Delhi on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.
- Associating EWRs in PRIs – ISST as part of conceptualizing committee. Meeting organised by SSF, Bangalore on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2000.
- Consultation meet with NGOs and activists to review the progress achieved in the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action organised by Women and child development, Govt. Of India at NIPCCD, Bangalore on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2000.
- Associating EWRs in PRIs – Action committee meeting organised by SSF, Bangalore at Mahila Samakhya, Bangalore on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2000.
- A meeting on “Inputs on Rural realities of Women’s Health” organised by Sub Committee for women’s Health of Task Force for Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2000.



- ISST presented a paper on “Women’s Health Re-visited: Role of Panchayat members”, at the meeting on “Women’s Health” organised by Task Force on Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2000.
- Workshop on “Preparation of policy document and strategy for women’s development” organised by the Dept. of Women and Child Development, Govt. of Karnataka, at Administrative Research Institute Bangalore on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2000.
- A three-day training of trainers on Health organised by Community Health Cell, Bangalore from 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> June 2000.
- A one-day consultation on ‘Violence against Women’ organised by NIAS, Bangalore on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2000.
- Presented Inputs on “Promoting Girl Child’s Education Through Panchayat” organised by Dept. of Mass Education, Government of Karnataka at NIAS on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2000.
- Consultation on “Panchayat Raj and Natural Resource Management” convened by Centre for budget and policy Studies at Hotel Harsha, Bangalore on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2000
- Presented Inputs on “Primary Education and Gram Sabha” organised by District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Govt. of Karnataka and Federation of NGOs at Kannada Bhawan, Bangalore.
- Consultation meet on Challenges of Working women in the new millenium 3-4 August 2000 organised by NIPCCD, Department of Women And Child Development, at Bangalore.
- Consultation Meeting on “Preparation of Policy Document Towards Empowerment of Women” convened by the department of Women and Child Development, Government of Karnataka.
- A two day consultation meeting on “Evaluation of Training Initiatives: Towards Empowering Women and Redesigning Policy” and “Access to Credit and Finances” organised jointly by ISST and Best Practices Foundation on 28-29<sup>th</sup> August 2000 at Ashirwad, Bangalore.

#### Visitors

Our networking efforts also grew to include several individuals who visited us from within India and outside. Some amongst them are

- Canada International Development Agency (CIDA) team.
- Best Practices Foundation – Bangalore
- Ms. K.M. Manjunatha, Research Scholar, Kuvempu University, Shimoga.
- Ms. Jenna Beveridge, Ms. Elizabeth Edmanas and Mr. Ravi Selvaggi, USA
- Dr. Seemanthini Niranjana, Hyderabad.

- Members from CWDS, New Delhi; Aalochana and Khori Centre from Haryana visited ISST.
- Dr. Chandra Y. Mudaliar, Visiting Professor, Women's Studies & Centre for Advanced Studies of International Development, Michigan State University.
- Ms. Monia, Dept. of Peace & Development Research, Sweden
- Mr. Roger Bernhelm, Journalist from London
- Ms. Aliyamma Vijayan, SAHAYI, Trivandrum
- Ms. Nora Cundy, Brandeis University, USA
- Mr. Vaheesh, Ph.D Student, Osmania University, Hyderabad
- Ms. Anita Kukanur, Ph.D Student, Rural Home Science College, UAS, Dharwad, Karnataka.
- Dr. Susan Blankhart, Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation
- Ms. Shyamala Hiremath, Ms. Meera Halkatti of IDS, Dharwad
- Mr. Pille Gowda, Professor, University of Agricultural Sciences, Hebbal, Bangalore
- Ms. Hemalatha H.M, Centre for Women's Studies, University of Mysore, Karnataka

### 3. Strengthening Steps

- ❖ There have been so many situations where small or passing expressions of EWRs, activists, researchers, such others have given us a clear sense of having touched their lives in many positive ways. The 'time, space and thought' created as part of this endeavor has added strength to the EWRs, individuals and organizations committed to the cause.
- ❖ To share a few specifics, our inputs on Gram Sabha and the Budget was found very useful and informative at the micro-level. The response was indicative of the fact that many such workshops are necessary to provide such focussed inputs.
- ❖ Government documents such as the Gram Sabha notification is not easily available to public. Publication of that notification in the Prachar was widely appreciated and found to be significantly useful.
- ❖ Resource books catering to grassroot organisations are very popular and much in demand. Two of them namely *As We Did It* and *What Works* were presented at the IX IAWS conference held in January 2000 at Hyderabad.
- ❖ Participated and presented two papers for a Three day seminar on "Women in Panchayat Raj" organised by Dept. of Political Science, University of Hyderabad and UNICEF, Hyderabad from 29<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2000. Various points shared by us engaged the deliberations very constructively and even lead to many new ideas and plans not only for the state of Andhra Pradesh but also to the delegates from Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- ❖ Presented a paper "Women's Health Re-visited: Role of Panchayat members" in a high powered meeting convened by the sub-committee on Women's Health of the Task Force on Health constituted by Govt. of Karnataka. This paper gave a clear

perspective on the role of Panchayat members as being empowered partners in development and decentralized planning. And to do away with the present approach of viewing them as mere instruments of implementation, most often Women Panchayat Members are seen in lieu of ANMs, Anganvadi workers at the grassroots. Though we were requested to present on the “role of women panchayat members” we took a conscious detour. Beginning from the title it was emphasized that women’s health and all other women’s issues should not be the concern of only the women members instead such ghettoization should be broken and women’s concerns must be the concern of everyone including all Panchayat members. This had policy implications and the State Plans saw substantial perspective shifts.

#### **4. Plans For the Future**

##### **▪ Zonal / Clustre level Participatory Trainings**

For Elected Women Representatives

Identified from preferably zonal/regional clusters/ groups of Gram Panchayats  
2<sup>nd</sup> level follow-up training is also planned.

##### **▪ Exchange Programmes**

For All Women Gram Panchayats

For interested potential achievers/active women members identified during zonal/regional participatory trainings.

Inter-Gram panchayats/Inter-zonal/Inter-regional

##### **▪ Panchayati Parihar – Possible solutions for Panchayati Problems/Questions**

This is in response to a felt need among the Elected Women Representatives for a ‘listening-sharing-sounding’ post to ask/share/think aloud common problems/questions. This is hoped to help build their problem sharing and solving capabilities and possibilities.

##### **▪ Study of All Women Gram Panchayats**

Focus group discussions with the two All Women Gram Panchayats of Karnataka. Baseline study of the factors that led to their genesis; its influence on the functioning, participation levels and activities planned / taken up by them.

##### **▪ Wall Magazine – Namma Panchayati**

A large number of EWRs and EMRs in GPs are neo-literates. It is also a known fact that gaining access to information particularly in a rural milieu is determined by various inherent factors like gender, caste and class, along with literacy.

Namma panchayati wall magazine is being planned with an objective to break barriers built around information and in response to the urgent need for easily accessible relevant information. This is aimed to be illustrative and simple.

#### ▪ **Resource Books**

As the resource books have been very useful and widely received this component deserves continuation. This will continue to be based on the field experiences and will help in disseminating and sharing information to strengthen the solidarity and enhance the capability of the elected representatives. They have been also used as communication tools for field workers.

### 5. **Case Stories**

#### 5.1 **Case of the Caste @ Chandapura**

The Vice President's post in Chandapura Gram Panchayat remained vacant throughout the tenure of Panchayat office. A story lies behind this. The post was actually reserved for a ST woman. As this post was specifically reserved for a ST woman, all the political parties wanted their party members to occupy this position. But one party in order to get its member to that post, changed the caste of one of its members. This lady basically a Brahmin from South Canara had shifted to Chandapura as her husband was employed in a factory there. The party members, in order to bring her to that post, changed her caste to a ST and subsequently prepared all the necessary certificates.

Immediately after she occupied the post of Vice President, life for Sharadamma changed drastically. Earlier she was leading a peaceful life. But after this new caste identity became public all the villagers started viewing her in a very different manner. They treated her like an untouchable. She had problems in fetching water, going to the pond or to the flourmill. Her life became a misery. For her that was it. She decided to quit the post. She resigned in spite of several requests by her party to continue. For her caste proved more important than the position of Vice President because she did not want to lose the luxury of being a high caste. In fact, for once in her lifetime she got exposed to the torture meted out by her own caste to others they consider lower. One can only hope that experience would bring some changes in her.

In this process, the Panchayat was the loser in any case. The post remained vacant for that entire term.

#### 5.2 **Kidnap Case @ Melkote**

An elected woman representative of Melkote Gram Panchayat had an interesting experience to relate during a workshop. This woman has a daughter who is already married and is also a member elected but to another Gram Panchayat. The President of her daughter's Gram Panchayat was dominating the show and was making

everyone dance to his tunes. Fed up with him the other members thought of bringing a no-confidence motion against him.

The daughter of this EWR was very much a part of this and wanted to bring down the corrupt President. As the day of no-confidence motion was nearing, moves from both sides were plenty! On the final day came, all of a sudden the daughter vanished.

It was later known that actually daughter's husband had 'kidnapped' her to a different place, just to ensure that she does not vote against the President. Because the moment the President came to know about the daughters role, he managed to book her husband and took him into confidence to stage this political drama.

### 5.3 Raasta Roko@ Melkote

Laxmamma, a potential leader and member of Mahila Mandal, is an illiterate. She was hardly exposed to the outer world. She was concerned of the water problem in the village and was consistently going to the concerned departments to see that this problem is solved. Every time she approached the officials, she was ignored, snubbed or shouted down. After several such 'encounters' with the officials went in vain, Laxmamma realised that she had to explore different ways to gather support. It was then that she turned to other women in the village.

One day when she came to know that officials from taluk panchayats, and zilla panchayats were visiting her village, Laxmamma along with her women's group staged a "Raasta Roko" along with empty buckets and pots. This act of hers strengthened by other women's presence, made the concerned officials take up the issue seriously and eventually borewells for her village got sanctioned.

### 5.4 "My Story" by Ashwathamma @ Chandapura

"I belong to a farming community, but was also associated 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 'Khaata' 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 not agreeing 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 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 *khatha* and the matter was settled.



*Ashwathamma sharing her experience*

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:

- overhead tanks
- 26 shops
- form 66 Mahila Mandals and DWCRA supported Self Help Groups
- a Granary
- 98 houses for the homeless
- compound walls as protection for children at 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 Women leader from ISST. I am also the proud recipient of a Common Wealth Award for my success as an elected woman representative”.

## 5.5 Jaibun Bi @ Guledagudda

Jaibun Bi, belongs to the Muslim Community, given in marriage to Kaji Budihal village. This village comes under Kelavadi Gram Panchayat of Badami Taluk in Bagalkot district. The family she was married to was very conservative. Her mother-in-law was also very religious. She never allowed her to go out. All her sisters-in-law were married and nobody else was there to look after the domestic chore.

When the dates of Gram Panchayat election was announced, out of 15 seats of their Gram Panchayat, 2 seats (1 for male and the other for female) were reserved for their village. All the villagers forced her to get nominated to the GP election because she was the only woman who had completed her SSLC and was the 'highest' qualified villager. She refused the offer saying that it is not possible for her, as she had no time; she had to look after her four children and her housework. Moreover she did not know anything about the Panchayat activities. But when her husband also forced her she agreed and contested for the election and was unanimously elected. In their GP office there are 5 female members including the Vice-President. The President is a male. Clashes she says are very common between them.



*The "Highest" qualified villager*

This workshop was the first programme she attended after she became the Panchayat member. No meeting had so far taken place. She was looking for such opportunities to go out and to speak. She participated actively in the workshop. Her skill to write and read became the groups asset and it was common to see other women get some short notes written by her in their own files. And Jaibun Bi was seen more than eager to record for them.

"I'm now all set to see the world in my own eyes. Not that I have no fear, it is not fully gone but I can face the challenge" she says. And words like these give us the strength to move on.

#### 5.6 "My Story" by Margaret Mary @ Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu

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.



*Margaret Mary sharing her experience*

In a workshop organised 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 their husbands represent them. 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 Attur 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 Attur 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 Attur, 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 politicised 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 neighbours in our villages, how can we demand that we get water from our neighbouring state through the Kaveri?

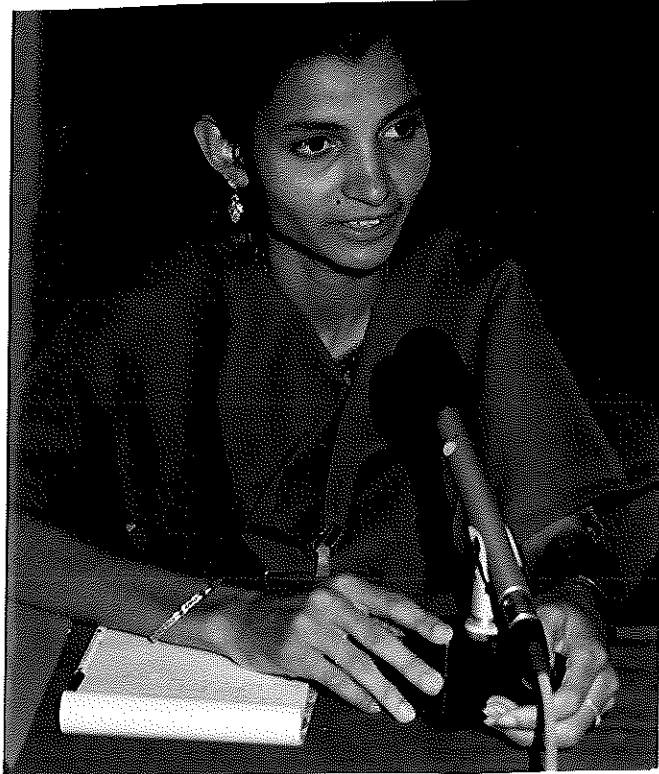
I am convinced that the root cause of many problems is the corruption of the leaders who encourage this system of throwing money to get their work done. People are so corrupted by it that no work gets done without being bribed. What then is the fate of those who are sincere and conscientious but cannot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

### 5.7 “My Story” by Thresiamma Antony @ Ernakulam District, Kerala

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.



*Experience sharing by Thresiamma Antony*

I did not make many promises when I stood for elections. To go to my ward, I had to cross a river through ferryboat, 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 ferryboat 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 people’s representative.

Because one of the ferryboats 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 ferryboats.

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. Planned 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.

## 5.8 "My Story" by Sharanavva @ Keribhosga, Gulbarga

I am here to share my experiences as an elected woman representative. The Mahila Samakhya (MSK) *sahayogini* 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 won'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 which 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.

### More about Sharanavva...

Sharanavva's friends in the Mahila Samakhya 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 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. She then organised the support of people of her community and with the support of her sangha friends she got the garbage cleared.

Sharanavva shared that her village was facing a 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, stopped buses and refused to budge till the *Tehsildar* and the Deputy Commissioner of Gulbarga came and promised them immediate water connection. Only once 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'; 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 whatever way she can.



*Sharanavva narrating her experiences*

## 5.9 Stories from Panchayat Raj Elections @ Karnataka

### Profile of patterns that emerged during the recently concluded elections:

Fresh amendments and government orders were put in place as a result of which the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act stated that an aspiring panchayat member needs to comply with the "toilet rule" ie; a member can be disqualified if there is no toilet facility for his or her family. There was a hue and cry over it and when challenged, the court allowed for a conditional relaxation of this rule on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February which also coincided with the last date for filing of nominations. This prevented many aspirants from filing nominations. In many cases, the court order and messages to the DC did not reach the panchayats on time creating lot more confusion than clarity.

In many more cases, this "toilet rule" was used as a pretext to stall strong and capable aspirants from filing nominations by local vested interests and local Administrators. This brought out into the open more than ever before the negligible or total lack of access to reliable and authentic information by the poor, marginalised sections of the society especially in the rural areas. And this situation gets doubly worse for a poor rural woman.

- Rotation of reserved seats have been detrimental to potential candidates from the reserved categories especially women. This has not allowed nurturing of constituency by women which is ever so vital for political longevity.
- There was little or no congruence between the composition of the local population and the reservation of seats for categories.
- Very few sitting women members were re-nominated. It was pointed out that the rotation of reserved seats was the single important reason behind this. However, strangely this does not seem to apply to male sitting members as they managed to retain their nominations by shifting their constituencies or by contesting as general candidates.
- In sharp contrast, women have hardly contested on general seats. The general seat was seen as "general male seat" or reserved male seat. Not only the local party leaders and community leaders but officials too used terminology's like "general male seat" for unreserved seats, legitimising this false conception.
- The seats which are termed as "General" "OBC" "SC" & "ST" when not reserved for women are interpreted as a seat in which only male candidates can contest. This was glaringly evident in all the panchayats, the official letter listing the reservation of seats per ward stated the General seat as "Saamanya Purusha" (general male).
- The crucial question that haunts us on the field: "Has 1/3rd reservation for women meant 2/3rd reservation for men at the grassroots?"

- It was also observed that assertive, confident women who had established their credibility and commitment in their previous term have been denied nomination on the grounds of providing 'opportunity' to other women. However this generosity and philosophy of sharing opportunities and power has never been propagated or applied in the case of men in politics!
- Also interesting is the fact that a large proportion of members have been unanimously elected. This is more so with respect to women members. Much higher proportion of women members have been elected unanimously.
- Questions that seem very crucial are –
  - How unanimous is unanimously elected in a rural context?
  - What does being elected unopposed actually mean in reality?
  - Who did not oppose? And who proposed?
  - Where do the loyalties lie when members are elected unanimously/unopposed?
  - Who do they perceive they are accountable to?
  - Does unanimous election always reflect popular opinion?
- In the same breadth one needs to also examine the traditional, local power centres within villages, their nexus with the Panchayat Institutions and how deciding a role they play?
- The KPRA 1993 clearly states that the GP are apolitical units of local governance. Further it states that elections to these bodies have to be conducted on a non party basis. However, pre-election observation proved the contrary.
- Influence of political parties in GP elections is clearly visible at all stages. Contestants showed no hesitation to reveal their party affiliations. These meetings were invariably attended by the local party leaders and supporters, who then decided on the candidate to be supported.
  - Party leaders and workers at all levels have actively involved in finalising list of candidates. They even forced potential candidates to withdraw in favour of their own candidates.
  - Before and after the elections results were announced, political parties convened meetings at all Panchayats to either celebrate their strength or when at the losing end to condemn opposition party's gimmicks that got them votes to win.
  - Though party symbols were not used, many pamphlets had photos of party leaders printed
  - Women's involvement in the entire pre-election process was minimal, almost insignificant except in areas where the women had support from local woman's sanghas.

- Wherever the women contestants had the support of women sanghas there were visible differences in the style and strategy used to campaign. They seemed to really own the process from beginning.
  - Even where the involvement was very partial and limited, remarkable changes in the levels of confidence of the women contestants was seen. Many women who shied away from interacting with the public gradually came forward to make short speeches.
  - Interplay of class, caste and party alliances play an important role in both selection of candidates as well as in the calculations for 'winnability'.
  - It is a paradox situation where in spite of being named as a non political governing body we see large scale party interference at all stages.
  - Even in a non-political body, the calculations seem to favour political personalities, all indicating of the 'vibrant' party politics and its deep rooted intertwining with culture and society.
  - 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 country, which actually favours repeated re-elections of political persona.
- Do Gram Panchayats provide the space for formalisation of the informal system of patronage that has so far been in existence, is another crucial question.

## 6. Conclusion

In spite of all apprehensions complexities and challenges we appreciate and act upon the monumental contribution of the 73rd Amendment in making the disadvantaged sections especially women to access both institutional and socio-political space.

Women, who are challenged by multiple hurdles, loaded with multiple burden and juggling to render justice to all the multiple roles set forth by patriarchal norms have now stepped onto the political arena that has hitherto been a male bastion.

Policies, Processes and Enabling Support Structures need to be put in place to address gender needs of EWRs so that they are empowered to play a pro-active role in grassroot democracy.

In this journey there is no 'arriving' at the end of the road. New goals emerge in response and as part of a constant endeavor for just and equitable status for one and all in the society.



## Annexures

**Table - 1: Combined table of Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat results in Karnataka**

GRAMA PANCHAYATS						
Year	Total No. of Members	Women	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Backward Classes (A&B)	General
1993	80267	35305	17918	7575	26828	28306
2000	78460	35187	14604	7368	26117	30371
TALUK PANCHAYATS						
1995	3340	601	601	169	1117	1453
2000	3255	1375	583	244	1093	1335
ZILLA PANCHAYATS						
1995	919	-	165	47	306	401
2000	890	339	158	54	299	379

**Table - 2: Abstract of Reservation of seats in Taluk Panchayat Constituencies (2000-2005)**

Sl. No.	Name of the District	No. of seats	SC	ST	BC-A	BC-B	General
1.	Bangalore (U)	68(28)	18(7)	3(3)	19(6)	4(3)	24(9)
2.	Bangalore ( R )	139(57)	28(11)	8(8)	37(16)	9(1)	57(21)
3.	Chitradurga	115(48)	27(11)	22(10)	31(12)	8(3)	27(12)
4.	Davangere	115(46)	25(10)	14(6)	30(12)	7(3)	39(15)
5.	Kolar	181(78)	48(19)	16(11)	50(22)	11(3)	56(23)
6.	Shimoga	99(47)	18(10)	7(7)	26(14)	7	41(16)
7.	Tumkur	195(80)	36(14)	18(10)	53(20)	13(6)	75(30)
8.	Chickmagalur	103(50)	20(10)	7(7)	28(14)	7(1)	41(18)
9.	D. Kannada	115(48)	9(5)	6(5)	31(12)	7(3)	62(23)
10.	Udupi	88(34)	5(3)	4(3)	24(9)	6(2)	49(17)
11.	Hassan	139(58)	25(10)	8(8)	37(16)	10(3)	59(21)
12.	Kodagu	46(19)	5(3)	5(3)	13(6)	3	20(7)
13.	Mandya	144(60)	20(9)	7(7)	39(14)	10(4)	68(26)
14.	Mysore	152(62)	31(12)	8(7)	42(15)	10(5)	61(23)
15.	Chamarajanagar	81(33)	20(8)	4(4)	22(8)	6(2)	29(11)
16.	Belgaun	287(110)	33(14)	12(10)	75(25)	19(9)	148(52)
17.	Bijapur	124(49)	25(10)	5(5)	32(10)	9(4)	53(20)
18.	Bagalkot	99(41)	17(6)	6(6)	27(12)	6(1)	42(16)
19.	Dharwad	66(33)	5(5)	5(5)	17(10)	5	34(13)
20.	Gadag	66(32)	9(5)	5(5)	18(10)	5	29(12)
21.	Haveri	109(47)	16(7)	8(7)	30(14)	7(1)	48(18)
22.	U. Kannada	123(67)	12(11)	11(11)	33(22)	11	56(23)
23.	Bellary	112(47)	24(9)	14(8)	29(14)	8(1)	37(15)
24.	Bidar	101(43)	23(10)	10(5)	30(10)	5(5)	33(13)
25.	Gulbarga	198(82)	51(19)	13(10)	54(20)	12(6)	68(27)
26.	Raichur	107(43)	20(8)	12(7)	27(10)	7(3)	41(15)
27.	Koppal	83(33)	13(6)	6(4)	22(8)	5(2)	37(13)
	<b>Total</b>	3255 (1375)	583 (252)	244 (182)	876 (361)	217 (71)	1335 (509)
	<b>1995 Total</b>	3340 (1343)	601 (261)	169 (104)	894 (390)	223 (51)	1453 (537)

Source: Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Government of Karnataka

Note: Figures in brackets indicate seats reserved in favour of women

**Table - 3: Abstract of Reservation of seats in Zilla Panchayat Constituencies (2000-2005)**

Sl. No.	Name of the District	No. of seats	SC	ST	BC-A	BC-B	General
1.	Bangalore (U)	17(7)	4(2)	1(1)	5(2)	1	6(2)
2.	Bangalore ( R )	38(15)	8(3)	1(1)	10(4)	3(1)	16(6)
3.	Chitradurga	31(12)	7(3)	6(2)	8(3)	2(1)	8(3)
4.	Davangere	31(13)	7(3)	4(2)	8(3)	2(1)	10(4)
5.	Kolar	47(18)	13(5)	4(2)	13(5)	3(1)	14(5)
6.	Shimoga	27(10)	5(2)	1(1)	7(2)	2(1)	12(4)
7.	Tumkur	52(19)	10(4)	4(2)	14(5)	3(1)	21(7)
8.	Chickmagalur	30(12)	6(2)	1(1)	8(3)	2(1)	13(5)
9.	D. Kannada	31(12)	2(1)	2(1)	8(3)	2(1)	17(6)
10.	Udupi	24(10)	1(1)	1(1)	6(2)	2(1)	14(5)
11.	Hassan	37(14)	7(3)	1(1)	10(3)	2(1)	17(6)
12.	Kodagu	26(9)	3(1)	2(1)	7(2)	2(1)	12(4)
13.	Mandya	39(15)	5(2)	1(1)	10(4)	3(1)	20(7)
14.	Mysore	41(15)	8(3)	1(1)	11(4)	3(1)	18(6)
15.	Chamarajanagar	21(9)	5(2)	1(1)	6(2)	1(1)	8(3)
16.	Belgaum	76(27)	9(3)	2(1)	20(7)	5(2)	40(14)
17.	Bijapur	32(12)	6(2)	1(1)	9(3)	2(1)	14(5)
18.	Bagalkot	26(10)	4(2)	1(1)	7(2)	2(1)	12(4)
19.	Dharwad	18(8)	1(1)	1(1)	5(2)	1	10(4)
20.	Gadag	17(7)	3(1)	1(1)	5(2)	1	7(3)
21.	Haveri	29(12)	4(2)	2(1)	8(3)	2(1)	13(5)
22.	U. Kannada	35(13)	3(1)	1(1)	10(3)	2(1)	19(7)
23.	Bellary	32(12)	7(3)	3(1)	9(3)	2(1)	11(4)
24.	Bidar	26(9)	6(2)	3(1)	7(2)	2(1)	8(3)
25.	Gulbarga	55(19)	14(5)	3(1)	14(5)	4(1)	20(7)
26.	Raichur	29(11)	6(2)	3(1)	8(3)	2(1)	10(4)
27.	Koppal	23(9)	4(2)	2(1)	6(2)	2(1)	9(3)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>890 (339)</b>	<b>158(63)</b>	<b>54(31)</b>	<b>239(84)</b>	<b>60(25)</b>	<b>379(136)</b>

Note: Figures in brackets indicate seats reserved in favour of women

Source: Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Government of Karnataka

**Table - 4: Abstract of Reservation of seats in Gram Panchayat Constituencies (2000-2005)**

Sl. No.	Name of the District	No. of Gram Panc-hayats	No. of seats	SC	ST	BC-A	BC-B	General
1.	Bangalore (U)	112	958(749)	263(181)	4(112)	244(213)	104(10)	343(233)
2.	Bangalore ( R )	216	1864(1440)	394(298)	19(218)	469(419)	207(10)	775(495)
3.	Chitradurga	182	1609(1175)	369(281)	274(255)	375(346)	171(8)	420(285)
4.	Davangere	222	1539(1255)	351(290)	145(243)	354(366)	198(7)	491(349)
5.	Kolar	302	2395(1915)	673(482)	133(289)	529(600)	296(5)	765(539)
6.	Shimoga	253	1244(1175)	195(291)	9(248)	282(329)	197(1)	561(306)
7.	Tumkur	320	2809(2099)	515(420)	156(323)	682(631)	310(13)	1146(712)
8.	Chickmagalur	220	1041(1057)	211(240)	8(220)	247(284)	160(4)	415(309)
9.	D. Kannada	202	1511(1320)	63(205)	39(205)	385(355)	172(23)	851(532)
10.	Udupi	143	1171(994)	20(144)	27(145)	301(267)	131(20)	692(418)
11.	Hassan	247	1772(1526)	328(302)	4(247)	421(442)	232(6)	737(529)
12.	Kodagu	96	564(527)	48(99)	38(101)	128(148)	91(1)	259(178)
13.	Mandya	227	1974(1562)	245(249)	- (227)	508(444)	205(22)	1016(620)
14.	Mysore	235	2170(1619)	436(341)	53(244)	565(462)	220(17)	896(555)
15.	Chamarajanagar	121	1088(834)	272(196)	29(128)	284(237)	104(18)	399(255)
16.	Belgaum	476	3920(3229)	360(537)	64(489)	1018(861)	414(94)	2064(124)
17.	Bijapur	199	1778(1387)	366(275)	8(201)	444(396)	191(22)	769(493)
18.	Bagalkot	161	1368(1095)	227(191)	6(162)	326(322)	152(16)	647(404)
19.	Dharwad	122	814(756)	26(123)	2(122)	201(205)	110(11)	475(295)
20.	Gadag	102	762(639)	105(120)	3(102)	187(177)	94(7)	373(233)
21.	Haveri	190	1301(1152)	147(209)	36(190)	299(327)	179(12)	640(414)
22.	U. Kannada	203	1170(1158)	46(310)	8(204)	290(310)	168(11)	658(423)
23.	Bellary	185	1560(1197)	322(247)	152(228)	366(349)	174(15)	546(358)
24.	Bidar	170	1397(1094)	330(238)	100(180)	323(337)	159(13)	485(326)
25.	Gulbarga	333	2781(2206)	739(531)	86(346)	673(655)	322(16)	962(658)
26.	Raichur	164	1545(1128)	297(521)	153(194)	380(331)	153(24)	562(355)
27.	Koppal	132	1157(899)	174(159)	53(136)	289(265)	126(12)	525(327)
	<b>Total</b>	5535	43273 (35187)	7521 (7083)	1609 (5759)	10581 (10078)	5040 (418)	18522 (11849)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate seats reserved in favour of women

Source: Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Government of Karnataka

