CHAPTER IV

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN KARNATAKA

It is a basic principle of democracy that adult citizens from all walks of life should have equal access to participation and decision making and leadership. Ideally all groups in a democracy have the right to represent their specific interest and perspectives and participate directly in the decision making process and leadership to ensure that their agenda of issues are considered and the decisions taken subsequently are incorporated. But in practice we can see that specific interest groups are systematically and deliberately excluded from direct participation in decision making on the grounds that others can speak for them. This kind of representation in the decision making process is called as domination/control over and so on. 

Women are excluded from this kind of participation because traditionally, male and female roles have been quite distinct in Indian society. Men function in the public sphere, while the private or domestic sphere is the domain of women\(^1\). Within the private or domestic sphere women’s entire identity is defined by familial roles: daughters, wife and mothers. This gives them little opportunity to make decisions or develop leadership skills outside the family context. It is against this social backdrop that women during the

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freedom movement, for the first time crossed the threshold and participated in public life.

They participated in processions, meetings and even court arrest and supple imprisonment. These women were mainly elite group women and it was possible for them to be part of the freedom struggle because the aim was to achieve political independence. To achieve political independence it was necessary for Indian society to project itself as a modern society. These women basically concentrated on education of women and legal equality and did not threaten women’s performance of their familial role\(^2\). Once India got independence, the constitution guaranteed legal protection and created an illusion of equality which these elite women seemed satisfied with. This led to a gradual withdrawal of women from the political mainstream. Even to this day few women are represented in political organizations and decision making process. The trade unions, peasant federations and civil society associations are all male dominated. The following table highlights the position of women from Karnataka at various levels of decision making such as Lok Sabha, Vidhana Sabha, Panchayats, judiciary and executive levels that is bureaucracy.

The percentage representation of women in the three levels of Panchayat Raj Institutions Grama Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat are 43.02 % 41.7 % and 37.11 % respectively. The total number

\(^2\) Everett Matson Jana: 1979, Women and Social Change in India, Heritage, New Delhi, P94-98
of judges in Karnataka state during the year 2011-12 was 764 of which the number of women judges was 176 and the male judge were 588.

**Table 4.1: No., of Women Candidates Contested and Elected to LokSabha seats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women contested</th>
<th>Women elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Chief Electoral Officer*

**Table 4.2 “No., of women candidates contested and elected to Vidhana Sabha seats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women Contested</th>
<th>Women Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Bye Election from 2008-2010</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Election 2013</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Chief Electoral Officer*
The number of women IAS, IPS and IFS officers in Karnataka in 2013 is given below.

### Table 4.3: Women in Bureaucracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian Administrative Service</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>264</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>248</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>241</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>239</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>249</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>247</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>221</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.4: Women in Bureaucracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian Police Service</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>136</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>135</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>129</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
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<td>133</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus women do not share power in decision making in proportion to their population. Decision making in Public spaces such as mentioned above was always a male domain and women's participation in these spaces has
been low. It is important to note that representation of women in power structures and decision making process and their empowerment is crucial as it not only gives control over resources: human, financial and physical, but also the rights to their own belief, values and attitudes. This means the right and freedom to participate and influence the political process which effect society and individual lives. In order to ensure women’s equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making many measures were taken by the government. Since representation of women in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha is only elitist representation and do reflect the society as a whole for sake of understanding political empowerment of women the study focuses on participation of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions. A brief historical background is discussed in order to understand the context in which women came to participate in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

After independence economic development was the goal of government. To achieve economic prosperity the government favoured centralization of power rather than decentralization. Centralisation though was able to accelerate economic growth poverty remained a major challenge especially in rural areas despite of the rural development programmes like the Community development programme and IRDP. The local problems could not be addressed in the centralized system of governance.

As a result the government appointed the Balwant Ray Mehta Committee (1957) to look into the working of the Community Development Program. The committee observed that the failure of the Community
Development Program was due to the conspicuous absence of the people participation. It suggested that "a set of institutional arrangements to make the participation meaningful and effective. The committee recommended the creation of a three tier system of Panchayat raj institution with direct or indirect elections with special representation to women, SC and ST and persons with experience in administration and public life through co-option. Thus a new experiment in decentralization for rural development began. In 1977 when the Janata Government came to power at the centre it worked towards decentralization of power and authority.

A national committee on Panchayat Raj Institution was appointed headed by Ashok Mehta. The Committee report was submitted in Aug 1978. It recommended that Panchayat Raj Institution would undertake democratic development, management under conditions of rapid change continuous growth and sustained innovations in all spheres of rural life. The committee also recommended the method of “co-option by election” that is direct election of members with adequate representation of SC, ST and women. Many states apposed its recommendations.

Another significant recommendation with regard to women in PRI’s was the National Perspective Plan for women, 1988- 2000. It emphasized that power and access to positions of decision making and authority are

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critical prerequisites for women equality in the process of nation building. It suggested that participation of women in Panchayat Raj Institution would be a step forward to equality, enhanced representation is likely to remove isolation of women and that women would get more visibility and strength to be more assertive and to take part in decision making. The core group that prepared the National Perspective Plan recommended reservation of 30% seats for women in Panchayat Raj Institution\(^5\). In 1993 the 73rd Constitutional Amendment introduced by Sri Rajiv Gandhi was a major step forward in strengthening and revitalizing of Panchayats. It envisaged the establishment of a democratic decentralized development process through people’s participation in decision making implementation and delivery. The most important features of 73rd Constitutional Amendment:

- Three Tier System at village, intermediates and district level with elected representatives
- Seats reserved for SC and ST at all levels on the basis of proportional representation.
- 1/3 rd of the seats reserved for women at all levels.
- To endow Panchayats with powers and authority to enable them to function as institution of self governance.

All the states have enacted new acts or incorporated changes in their existing acts in conformity with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment It must be

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noted that decentralization was imposed from the top and there was no such a movement or demand from the grassroots level to decentralize. Taking cue from the successful implementation of these provisions several attempts to enact legislations relating to reservation of seats for women in higher legislative bodies was made. In 1996, 1998, 1999 constitutional Amendment Bills were introduced to reserve seats for women in the Lok Sabhas and state legislative assemblies. All three Bills lapsed with the dissolution of their respective Lok Sabhas. The bill introduced in 1996 was examined by the joint committee of Parliament. Many of its recommendations have been included in the 2008 Bill except the recommendations on reservation for OBCs and in the upper Houses have not been included. The constitution (108th Amendment) bill 2008 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha. The salient features of the Constitution(108th Amendment) Bill 2008 are

- 1/3rd of all the seats in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative assemblies are to be reserved for women. The allocation of reserved seats is to be determined by such authority as prescribed by parliament.

- Reserved seats are to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state and union territory.

- 1/3rd of the total number of seats reserved for SC and STs are to be reserved for women from these groups.

- Reservation of seats for women is to seize after 15 years from the commencement of the amendments act.
The bill was passed by the government despite the threat of withdrawal of support by Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janatha Dal was passed by a 2/3rd majority of the votes polled. 186 have voted in favour of the bill and only one was against the bill. This Bill though was passed in the Rajya Sabha, the Lok Sabha has not yet voted on the bill till today.

In Karnataka Panchayat Raj was introduced on Nov 1st 1959 when Mysore Village Panchayat and Local Boards Act were passed within the broad framework of Balwant Ray Mehta Committee Report. This was only an attempt to have uniform legislations; there was no effort to confer real powers and resources to the Panchayats Raj Institutions. In 1972 when Devaraj Urs became the Chief Minister he took to improve the economic conditions of the disadvantage sections in the society through a number of innovative welfare oriented programmes. To ensure that his welfare programmes reached the disadvantage Urs decentralized the planning machinery of the state. The Taluk Development Boards (TDB) was vested with powers and resources to function as crucial institution for the distribution of benefits to the rural poor. The TDB were indirectly constituted and were not representative institutions of the people. But in 1975 the TDB and many village Panchayats were superseded and placed under administrators. This measure had brought about an awakening among the disadvantage groups in Karnataka, who now were aware of the benefits that they could receive from the government. When Gundu Rao became the Chief Minister he over

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centralized power in his hands and delegated powers to civil servant. This lead to practically alienating all the section of the society. Having seen benefits given by the government coming to the door step for the first time during Urs rule the downtrodden sections of the society were the most aggrieved. It was among them that Ramakrishna Hegde made his constituency and was able to defeat the congress for the first time. This also explains the context in which decentralization was introduced in Karnataka.

The Janata party came to power in 1983. Ramakrishna Hedge who became the chief Minister took a decisive step to give direct representation to disadvantaged section in decentralized Panchayat Raj Institution. In August 1983 Hegde and his Rural Development Minister Abdul Nazir Saab introduced Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat samitis, Mandal Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayats bill in the state assembly. The Bill became an act in July 1985; it was brought into force with effect from 14th August 1985 and was called The Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayat Act 1985. This Act was more or less based on the Ashok Mehta Committee Report. The Objective of the Act are to give highest priority to rural development, increase agriculture production, create employment, eradicate poverty and bring about all-around improvements in the rural economy, through peoples participation. The Panchayat elections were held in 1987, to the Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayats and its members were elected as per the

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provision provided in the act. Taluk Panchayat Samitis was not an elected body. For the first time 25% of the total number of the members of the Mandal Panchayats and Zilla Parishad were women. Mention must be made here that reservation were given before any powerful women’s lobby emerged in Karnataka to press for the move and before there was any popular groundswell of opinion in favor of women’s reservation. Women were caught quite unprepared by this development and were brought into this system as one dimension of this complex process and it defines the context in which they have to function.

This experiment in Karnataka encouraged the congress government under the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the centre to pass the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Karnataka’s ministers for Rural Development and Panchayat M.V Ghorpade presented the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayats, Mandal Panchayats (Amendments) Bill 1993 for the consideration of the houses on April 3rd. In the assembly debate issues like delimitation, transfer of power to Panchayat Raj Institutions, whom to appoint as CEO’s reservation for SC and ST’s were debated at length. But 33% reservation for women and matter relating to their effective participation were not raised in the debate. This reflects the patriarchal mind set of the legislators. The bill was presented haphazardly and though the important

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10 Poornima and Vyasulu Vinod: 1999, Women in Panchayat Raj: Grassroots Democracy in India, experience from malkudi, Background Paper No 4, Meeting on Women and Political participation; @1st Century challenges, UNDP, New Delhi.
issues raised in the Bill were not properly articulated. The minister hoped that the Karnataka Panchayat Bill he was presenting would serve as a model for the rest of the states in the country\textsuperscript{12}. The Bill was passed and Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 replaced the earlier Act of 1985.

It established a three tier system of fully elected decentralized Governance. 33\% of the seats are reserved for women at all the levels and another 33\% are reserved for the backward classes additionally seats are reserved for the SC and ST in proportion to their population. The post of Adhyaksha and Upadhyakshas are subject to reservation by rotation. The Grama Sabha comprising of all registered voters is established by the act.

To strengthen the Panchayat Raj Institution the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 has been amended several times. In August 2010 Karnataka Panchayat Raj (Amendment) bill 2010 was passed and a gazette notification was issued reserving 50\% of the seats for women in all three tiers of the Panchayat Raj set up. In December 2010 Zilla and Taluk Panchayat election 50\% of the seats were reserved for women. Polls were held for 997 Zilla Panchayat in 30 districts and 3659 Taluk Panchayat seats in 176 taluks. 498 and 1,829 seats were reserved for women in all Zilla and Taluk Panchayats respectively in the state\textsuperscript{13}. Since election to the Grama Panchayats was held in May 2010 the new act could not be implemented and 33\% reservation continued at the Grama Panchayat level. 50\% of the seats for women shall

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} The Hindu: 2010, 10th August, Taluk, Zilla, Panchayat polls likely in December.
be reserved at the Grama Panchayats level from 2015. The percentage representation of women in the three levels of Panchayat Raj Institutions in Karnataka Grama Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat are 43.02 % 55.15 % and 53.21% respectively.

Karnataka has been considered a pioneer in devolution to Panchayats. This has led to impressive development particularly in rural infrastructure such as water supply, roads and school buildings over the past two decades. Karnataka was also the first state in India to introduce the policy of reservation for women in Panchayat Raj institutions. This Act has had a tremendous effect on rural women in the state by legitimizing not only the entry of women in great number into hitherto male dominated public space but also by giving them functional decision making powers, no matter how limited and constrained over public resources\textsuperscript{14}. Though many women have entered the Panchayat Raj institutions at all levels and also have become Adhyakshas and Upadhyakshas a closer look at the ground realities reveals a complex picture. Mere participation of women in the Panchayats cannot be termed as empowerment. There are various social constraints and institutional constraints which have interfaced to form a very complex structure within which women have to function. This chapter identifies these constrains which are in particular effecting women and argues that these constraints are limiting women’s ability to make strategic life choices. Discussions with elected women representatives and NGO’s in three districts

and reports published by the Government of Karnataka are collated to identify the constraints.

Social constraints

In Karnataka villages are been dominated by powerful peasant proprietors whose wealth derives mainly from cultivation, that is to say they are members of the two well known jati clusters the Vokkaligas and Lingayats. Karnataka rural social organization and village level dominance are not based wholly on caste. The poorer villagers perceive inequalities and exploitation which are to large extent products of class difference, but they tend to express this in language heavily laced with caste cliché. And that is not entirely inappropriate since caste as material reality plays an important role in sustaining inequalities and exploitation. The kind of people that one finds in dominant roles has barely changed over the decades, due to legislative interventions and changing economic conditions the disadvantaged communities like SC’s and ST’s were able to claim their rights over spaces which was denied to them so far. But in case of gender there was no separate category it is almost always alloyed with caste, class and religious factors. The reservation in Panchayats was provided so that the traditional gender, caste and class roles and hierarchies are eroded, but it is

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16 Ibid. Srinivas M.N. 1959.
a long and difficult process because they tend to disguise and take new forms with changing social, economic and political conditions.

The patriarchal system has created hierarchy not only in the family but also in the public space. Women accept this hierarchy because family and extended family is their only support system. The family plays an important role in supporting Elected Women Representatives (EWR) to the Panchayats in performing their role as elected members. The household responsibility is shared by other members in the family so that EWR can attend Panchayat work. In an interview¹⁹ the EWR expressed that they opposed wife beating, harassment by husband and his family, dowry, domestic violence and other such acts but hierarchy within the family was acceptable to them. The women who are victims of such violence attract sympathy from the community only if they are performing their familial roles. Most women do not question the authority of men over women because it is considered a right of the man to question women in his family and even beat them up if they fail to carry out the household responsibility. The men folk in the family take decisions for the women not only within the family but also when women are elected as representatives to the Panchayat. But there are cases where some EWR played a dominant role in the Panchayats and it was accepted by the people because these women belong to families which are economically well off and are politically well connected. Some EWR’s father, husband or father-in laws are former Panchayat members and because of the

¹⁹ 20th to 23rd April 2011: Interaction with Elected Women Representative of Grama Panchayats in Nelamangala
reservation policy have got the women of their family elected into the Panchayat. Such women are proxies for the men in their family and perform their duties as instructed by their male relatives in their family. It has been observed that most of these women do take up such political positions once their term expires. Panchayats represent the patriarchal society from which they are formed. Women have internalized these patriarchal norms and values and think of them to be natural.

The EWR from Bangalore North Taluk, while discussing about their participation in the Panchayats gave an impression that they prefer playing it safe and avoided controversies\(^\text{20}\). The women expressed that they were unhappy with selection of beneficiaries under various schemes. The dominant members distributed them to their favorites. But it is also true that ‘it is difficult to be judicious in the selection of beneficiaries\(^\text{21}\) as the schemes are not demand driven and are target driven. The EWR hesitated to question such irregularities has they feared non-cooperation when it comes to getting work done. The women members felt that the anti social elements in their wards will be encouraged to create trouble for them if they opposed these men in the Panchayats. Many women felt it was better not to get involved and mind only their wards business as they were elected to serve only for five years. Some women members have admitted that they prefer to withdraw from being part of such controversies.

\(^{20}\) 24th to 26th April 2011: Interaction with Dasanapura, Hurallichikkahalli and Hoskoor Grama Panchayat Members.

\(^{21}\) Kumar Girish 2006.
But in case of women from Hunsur Taluk due to the support from women's organization called Mahila Samakya the women have emerged as pressure groups for demanding facilities and benefits and have built an excellent rapport with the local Panchayat members. The women trained by this organization and support the EWR and ensure that facilities under various schemes are made available to them. The women along with the EWR had also protested and demanded that the liquor shop near their village to be shut down and even threatened to burn the shop if it was not closed. They were successful and the liquor shop was shifted to a distant place. It must be remembered that in our culture liquor consumption is looked down as a vice so when women take such issues it may not be difficult for them to get support from the community. Women admitted the fact that they failed to prevent their men from consuming liquor.

Illiteracy is a basic problem among the newly EWR as they have to depend upon others due to their ignorance of basic matters including putting their signatures on documents and other such correspondence. Another problem which was highlighted during the discussion with the educated EWR was that they find the language of the rules and guidelines issued by the government very difficult to comprehend. Thus they were completely dependent on the officials for all correspondence. In such circumstances government officials tend take advantage and dominate. It also shows the insensitivity of our system to the peoples requirements.

22 22nd March 2011: Interaction with Women Panchayat members trained by Mahila Samakya, Mysore.
Institutional constraints

Election to the Panchayats is not only delayed for all levels there are many irregularities that have been reported. Elections to the Grama Panchayat are conducted in accordance with the provision of the Karnataka Panchayat Raj (Conduct of Elections) rules 1993. These rules state that elections to the Grama Panchayats shall be held on apolitical basis but 2010 Grama Panchayat election it has been noticed that political parties have left no stone unturned and are fielding their candidates obviously without party symbols, with a larger aim to gain strength in the grass roots bodies. Media reports have it that a new brand of politics has been introduced for the Grama Panchayat elections in which low profile candidates are being eased out to ensure unanimous elections\textsuperscript{23}. In Hoskote Taluk of Bangalore rural district four Grama Panchayats did not go through the process of elections in 2010 Grama Panchayat elections and as many as 111 Grama Panchayats seats had their representatives getting elected unopposed.

Since 1993 a new Phenomenon has emerged politics in rural areas has become a profitable enterprise. The reason being, Panchayats are giving construction contracts under various schemes. The Grama Panchayats do not follow tendering process and the contracts of such work are awarded to the relatives or those who are close to elected representatives\textsuperscript{24}. To get these contracts the contractors put up their proxies who are less assertive to

\textsuperscript{23} The Hindu, 2010 24th April, Politics Creeps into Grama Panchayat Election\textsuperscript{7}.

contest or support and campaign for candidates who will favor them. They do everything needed to get their candidates elected. It was only because of the reservation policy that women are pushed to contest the elections. Most people in rural areas are concerned with these contracts and not about the how women are going to be benefitted by participating in the Panchayats. It is also true that without the support of such people winning an election is difficult. By putting up women to these positions the contractors/men within the family with vested interest try to retain their influence in the Panchayats. EWR have confessed to have favored the contractors who have helped them win the elections.

In 2010 Zilla Panchayat and Taluk Panchayat elections 50% of the seats were reserved for women. To abide by this rule the BJP, Janata Dal (secular) and Congress struggled hard to find women to contest these elections. Leaders cutting across party lines admitted that several women matching the profile of a Panchayat member has turned down offers. According to them most women perceive politics as a dirty game from which they cannot emerge with their reputation intact. Also the domination of MLA and MP’s do not allow women to function independently once in power. Well aware of this women prefer not to enter politics. Educated middle class women prefer to take employment which assures them a fixed income and to live with respect than politics in which they have to risk their reputation. This led to party member’s convincing women from their family to contest in these elections. Madhu Kishwar, a writer and academician points out that woman

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have relatively less ability to use money, muscle power and other forms of influence in the public sphere\(^{26}\).

In Karnataka a system of accelerated rotation has been adopted since 1998. Reservations in respect of leadership posts are rotated once in every 20-month for ZP and TP Adhyakshas and Upadhyakshas, and once in 30 months for Gram Panchayat Adhyakshas and Upadhyakshas. Thus there are 3 reservation rotation exercises in every 5-year term of the ZP and the TP. Similarly there are 2 rotation exercises in respect of Gram Panchayats in one 5 year term. This has caused harm as it is does not allow Panchayat leaders to gain experience. It also does not allow them to gain a long term perspective. This has undermined the post, prevented emergence of good leadership and snowballed into an even faster pace of turn-by-turn occupancy of leadership posts, through local political arrangements. Women in such circumstances do not lobby like their male counterparts nor do they try to manipulate the situation in their favor. Women accept positions like Adhyakshas and Upadhyakshas because of the reservation policy.

During an interaction with the women member said that they did not participate in the process of planning budget\(^{27}\) making which was one of the most important functions of the Grama Panchayats. For this the women must prioritize their local needs and voice it before the Grama Sabha and Grama


\(^{27}\) 24th March 2011 Interaction with Elected women representatives of Grama Panchayats at Indian Institute of Social and Economic Change
Panchayats which many women were not aware. Further analysis revealed that Section 241 of the Karnataka Panchayat Raj act enjoins the secretary /PDO of the Grama Panchayat to prepare the budget and place it before the general body meeting of the Panchayat, which is scheduled to be called between first day of February and the tenth day of March. The budget as passed by the Grama Panchayat will be sent to the Taluk Panchayats for better consideration and follow up action. Thus plans made by Panchayats turn out to be Plans made by the officials and not by the people. Though Panchayats are supposed to be self governing institutions but in actual they are run by government officials.

The 73rd constitutional amendment has laid the foundation for bottom up planning approach by introducing the District Planning Committee as third level of planning and Grama Sabha/Ward Sabha committee as fourth level of planning at the grass roots. But planning for development was not given due importance by the members of the Grama Panchayat. Even if the plans are made they do not take into account medium and long term vision and overall integrated development and are just placed before the District Planning Committee for Customary approval. Most Elected Women representatives were under the impression that their only duty was to identify the beneficiaries and help them to apply under various schemes and to get construction work done in their constituencies. This is what was done by men members in the Panchayats and women tend to follow the same pattern. Only EWR who were associated with women’s organizations were aware of the planning process. Thus development activities are not taken up and the
role of Panchayat is limited to implementation of various government schemes. Moreover the Panchayats have to function within the given rules and guidelines which leaves them with little options for governance and innovations.

International forces, national and regional governments have played a dominant role in bringing about development. Vulnerable sections of the society especially women had to constantly adjust to the various development strategies; it may be centralization, decentralization liberalization; all these were top down approaches imposed on women. Women were not involved in planning these strategies of development and are thus only participants in them. The development strategies have fixed goals and objectives and women were made to cater to these goals and objectives.

The Panchayats play an important role in developing rural infrastructure but have failed to empower women who participate in them. The Panchayats are mere delivery agencies of various welfare schemes and distributors of construction work for contractors. The Panchayats enable women to meet the practical needs like drinking water, sanitation facilities, roads etc but do not enable women to challenge the hidden structures like class, caste, gender, patriarchy etc which shape the distribution of resources and power in a society and reproduce it over time. When EWR are able to voice their needs through the Panchayats and these needs are converted into policy by the state and national governments only then development will
reach women. For this to take place the Panchayats Raj Institution must be strengthened so the caste, class and gender issues do not dominate the functioning of the Panchayats. Effective participation in the Panchayats will expand the ability of women which will lead towards empowerment.