CHAPTER- 5

PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the concept of participation has moved much farther than just right to vote in a democratic structure. The efforts towards democratic decentralization have tried to introduce the same concept of participation at the local level. The Grama Panchayats are the locally elected bodies that can be held responsible by the people in the grama sabha. Yet with regard to actual participation one needs to answer following questions:

1. In terms of decision making, implementation, benefits and evaluation, one needs to look at: Who is participating and how is this participation occurring?

2. How is the participation of the marginalized groups influenced by the local development actors?

Participation in Grama Panchayats:

Five dependent variables were selected to answer the questions “who is participating?” and “How is this participation occurring?” The variables selected to assess participation were:

a. Information (about panchayat elections, candidates, grama sabha meetings and schemes),
b. Voting,
c. Attendance (in grama sabha meetings),
d. Decision making (with regard to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes candidates) and
e. Dispute resolution.

1. Information

Information has been perceived as power everywhere. And to a large extent information is also the basis of decision making. However, the deprived masses especially in the rural areas are so engrossed in their basic fight for survival, that it is almost impossible for them to even contemplate questioning administrative and political authorities to procure necessary information. To understand their participation in the Grama Panchayats it was important to know their levels and source of information about various aspects. The study began with questions related to information.
a. Information about elections:

It is held by some scholars that the democratization of the Indian state was a 'gift' of the elite to the masses\(^1\) and that the newly formed democratic state in 1947 inherited the political traditions of a colonial past. However, even though the concept was an inherited one, it offered the masses the means of influencing decision-making through representation guaranteed by elections.

Elections are the basic minimum requirement in the democratic framework to enable citizen participation. One of the most essential features added through the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act to give the local government institutions the necessary status and dignity was holding regular elections in the panchayats.\(^2\) From the state's point of view regular elections would be a means of empowering people at the very local level. Till the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in April 1993, holding of panchayat elections was not mandatory. According to the records, before 1993, there were only three states where panchayat elections at the village level, had always been held on time though periodically.\(^3\) These states were Maharashtra, Gujarat (since 1963) and West Bengal (since 1978). After the implementation of the provisions of the act elections have been regularly held in Karnataka and Kerala but the experience in Bihar has been quite different.\(^4\) The issue of dissemination of information on the elections was carried out with two objectives: one, how relevant are the panchayat elections for people (do the elections matter at all), and two, what is their source of information?

Regarding the source of information about elections, the respondents were given four choices. First choice was local interaction. Contrary to atomized individuals of the


\(^2\) See Appendix no. 2 for the main features of the 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment Act.


\(^4\) Girish Kumar, 'Bihar Panchayat Elections: Overcoming State’s Resistance’, in Economic and Political Weekly,19, May 2001 pp.1681, “An important phase in Bihar’s Panchayati Raj Institutions came when Laloo Yadav took charge in the 1990s. During his first term the 73rd constitutional amendment was enacted. To abide by the constitutional requirement for all the states to bring new legislation by April 24, 1994, the Yadav government legislated its Panchayat Act in August 1993. However, no real efforts were made towards actual devolution of functions and powers below the state level. Issues of reservation of seats for the OBCs in panchayati bodies lead to a series of litigation at the level of the appellate courts, delaying the panchayat elections.

On April 13, 2000, the Patna High Court directed the state government to conduct the panchayat elections. The Bihar government approached the Supreme Court to obtain stay on the high court orders. On August 29, 2000, the Supreme Court directed the state government to hold the panchayat elections. The State Election Commission issued a public notice on February 6, 2001, announcing the commencement of long awaited Panchayati Raj Institutions electoral process. In order to hold free and fair voting, the Commission also decided that the polling would be completed in six phases during April 11-30, 2001.”
urban society, the rural masses are more in communication with each other on a one to one basis. Discussion on matters of national or political relevance is one of the usual activities in the evenings. The option of media source included newspapers, radio and television. With the provision of electricity, increased levels of income and affordability of electronic goods, the information of panchayat elections reaching the masses through the media source was a very obvious option. Next option was panchayat meetings followed by the candidates during election time.

**Table 6**

*Information about panchayat election across the states.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information about panchayat election</th>
<th>Bihar</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>Karnataka</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Source</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panchayat meetings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidates (during election)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table depicts, 48.7% respondents in Bihar are informed about the elections by the candidates themselves during election time. But in Kerala and Karnataka the majority populace (57.9% and 63.7%) is aware of the election phases, dates etc through the media source, especially television.

In the three districts of Kerala the dissemination of information is done by panchayats either in form of pamphlets or through the ward sabhas held by respective ward members. Party plays a very important role in canvassing and projecting the presidential candidate. There is no role of the block office in information dissemination. In Karnataka also, Grama Panchayat are primer in informing people about the elections. But in Karwar and Raichur blocks, local leaders (either associated with political parties or Dalit political groups) were actively involved in informing the people and motivating them to vote. In Bihar Grama Panchayat elections are perceived to be another violence ridden affair. Women are generally not interested in elections. Information about election is given by the candidates who distribute money
and alcohol in Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes tolas to vote for them. In Katihar, the Scheduled Tribes are not interested in voting because it means losing a day’s work and wage. Their vote is cast by someone else.

b. Information about Candidates
The Supreme Court in one of its judgments delivered on March 13, 2003, declared section 33B of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act of 2002 as ‘unconstitutional’.

As a result the citizens would be able to know the antecedents of electoral candidates as a constitutional right. This ruling is for the candidates fielded by the parties for the elections for the parliament and legislatures. However at the local level it is a benefit that the contestants for the Grama Panchayats are local residents of the area and their antecedents are well known. To quote Bardhan

"Citizens are viewed as principals and their elected representatives as agents. The local government has better means (in the form of information) to be responsive, also better (electoral) incentives. In the case of centralization, the number of principals is very large, while the number of agents are few whereas in the case of decentralization, there is one agent per locality. The larger the number of principals, the more serious is the problem of lack of coordination in contracting with agents."

This is the view of the state for a decentralized form of governance where peoples’ participation would be more effective if there is face to face interaction with their representatives everyday. It is because the only local political bodies elected by the villagers and accountable to them on a day to day basis are the village panchayat. Other elected agencies are not local and no other local agencies are elected.

In an other view, Verba et al describe political participation as “information rich” acts and opine that: “From the electoral outcome alone, the winning candidate cannot discriminate which of dozens of factors, from the position taken on a particular issue to the inept campaign run by the opposition ...,was responsible for the electoral victory”.

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5 Samuel Paul, 'Right to Information on Candidates How Will the Voters Know?', Economic and Political Weekly, 12 April 2003, pp 1449. ‘Section 33B of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act of 2002 said “Notwithstanding anything contained in the Scheduled Castes judgment of May 2, 2002 or in the consequent order passed by the EC on June 28, 2002, no candidate shall be liable to disclose or furnish any such information, in respect of his election, which is not required to be disclosed or furnished under this Act”.


Thus it is very crucial to analyze the factors behind the motivation to hold public office and the determinants of electing a ‘good’ candidate\(^9\) (Besley: 1999) for the median voter. The respondents were first asked about who they think is a good candidate? The response was overwhelmingly “honest and one who would work for our good”. The next question was whether there were such candidates for panchayat elections? The answers were usually smiles, hearty laughs and very occasionally “sometimes”. This was followed by the final question: *What is the most favourable factor for a candidate to win panchayat elections?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Most favorable factor for candidate to have won the elections</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support of dominant caste</td>
<td>Political support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most favourable factors for a candidate to win elections varied from state to state. Let us consider state-wise account of the factors that the respondents considered important.

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Bihar:

**Factor 1: Inheritance**

As the table shows 35.3% respondents in Bihar believe that inheritance plays a major role in winning the elections. This factor becomes all the more important if the seat is reserved for women candidates. Mukhia (women) have a background/history of active family participation by their family members and it was candidly put forth by them that but for the support of the family they would have never won the panchayat elections. They also admitted in the discussion that they attend the grama sabha meeting and sign the papers but the decision and discussion is done by their relatives. Given below are some of the cases that support the above quotation.

**Case 1: Mukhia, Uttari Simaria grama panchayat, Korha Block, Katihar District, Bihar.**

Amina Khatun, age 43 years, was elected as mukhia in 2006. She is Shershahwaadi muslim (dominant caste) from Daroga, Tola, Simaria Village of Uttari Simaria grama panchayat. Her Family owns about 25 acres of land in the village. She has 4 daughters and 3 sons. Shershawaadi Muslims are included in the Extremely Backward Castes category in Bihar. Some of the villagers informed that they migrated from Murshidabad (UP), some said that they are originally from Bangladesh but migrated long back, before independence. In the local folklores they are known as 'mitti-ka keeda' or 'worms of the soil' that can make even the arid soil fertile.

Amina Khatun's husband, Mohd. Siddiqui Hussain, was elected as Mukhia in 2001 panchayat elections and served as sarpanch of the panchayat for 22 years before that. This time when the seat was reserved for women, he made his wife contest. The people of this village supported her completely and she won with huge margin. According to the people, M.P. saheb (Mukhia-pati) has been an eminent person of the village and would continue to help in need if his wife won. So majority in this panchayat voted for Amina Khatun. All the questions related to grama sabha meeting, schemes, or elections were answered by him. After a lot of persuasuation to speak something, all that one could hear behind the veil was "aaj tak inke some nahi bole toh ab kya belonge." (Did not speak anything in front of him till this age, how can I say anything now).

**Case 2: Mukhia, Kandi Grama Panchayats, Gaya Sadar Block, Gaya District, Bihar.**
There were twenty candidates for the seat of mukhia which was reserved for women this time. Seven candidates from Bitho (Kushwaha Tola-2, Yadav Tola-1 Muslim tola-3, Manjhi tola-1), 4 from Kandi (yadav tola -1, paswaan tola-1, muslim tola-1, kushwaha tola-1), 7 from Habipur and 2 from Agrailli (Yadav tola) contested for the post of Mukhia. Previous president of the panchayat was a Muslim. That time current mukhia-pati had contested in the G.P elections. But lost by 15 votes in spite of being in jail. So this time when the seats was reserved for woman he made his wife contest and since he managed everything himself this time, she won the mukhia election.

This information about panchayat was given by the mukhia-pati. One had to go to the village on two consecutive days to talk to the mukhia. The first day, Mukhia was present but her husband- had gone out of the village. A very soft-spoken lady, mother of three was ready to talk about anything except her panchayat and information related to any scheme. According to her, I wouldn’t get any authentic information from her because her husband only manages everything. She didn’t have much idea about the village because she hardly came out of the house- Ghar ka aurat log ghar samhalegi ki gaon main baooaati phirrgi..bataiye? (Ladies should stay at home and take care of the household).

Case-3: Mukhia, Kumaripur Grama Panchayat, Manhari Block, Katihar District, Bihar.

Kumkum Devi, 35, belongs to Rajput caste which is in minority in this village-panchayat. Her family owns about 80 acres of land, in this village, and most of the Scheduled Castes have been their 'raiyaat'. Her father had been mukhia of this panchayat from 1962 to 1976. After that her sister's husband served as mukhiya. A person from backward caste won in 2001. But now the seats were reserved for women so people elected her as mukhia and her brother's wife as sarpanch. The reason cited for her winning the election is again the same: politically powerful family, rich and landed (most of the SC labourers work on their fields), any other candidate would have any way worked on their directions. Once again all the questions were answered by her father. On being requested to answer the questions, her reply was 'inhi ko sab maloom hai, hum is sab phera mein nahi padte" (he knows everything, I don't indulge in such things). "Such things" meant every issue related to her grama panchayat.

Factor 2: Support of dominant caste
This factor occupied second rank in the response of the people. 27.8% of the respondents believed that support of the dominant caste was an important factor to win the panchayat election.

Case 1: Gokhulpur Korhar village, Shri Rampur Panchayat, Bihta Block, Patna District, Bihar

This time Shri Rampur Panchayat seat was reserved for the EBC women. This panchayat is quite big consisting of 6-7 villages in the radius of approximately 7 Km. different villages are dominated by different castes for e.g. Korhar by Rajputs, Gokhulpur and Bishambharpur (native village of mukhia and sarpanch) by Yadavs. There were 4-5 candidates for mukhia’s post this time. There was close contest between Prabha Devi (Kumhar, Korhar) and Champa Devi (Mali, Bishambharpur). As told by the VSS secretary (Kamta Prasad Singh, caste: Rajput) Prabha Devi is an intelligent, smart, educated (graduate) and vocal person, whereas, Champa Devi is a simple, meek housewife who is less educated. The interest of Yadavs was for Champa Devi as she is from their village and easy to be controlled.

Now, Mukhia is guided by a group of yadavs who are ‘Bahubali’ in this area. No one dares to oppose them as they are rich, politically strong, landed and violent. Since 1952 there have been only Yadav MLAs from this constituency irrespective of party. Situation has become better after Nitish Kumar has come to power. In Lalu Yadav’s time Yadav caste was very powerful. In one of the incidences narrated by women in Musahar tola, once Lalu Yadav had to visit this area so all the women had been taken from their houses and made to sit on roadside by yadavs. But when Ram Vilas Paswaan had come Yadavs remained indoors as if someone had passed away in their house. (Sab Yadavji log chhuppe baith gailan jaise ki gharwa mein kaono marni ho gailil hava)\(^\text{10}\).

Case 2: Sherpur village, Sherpur Purvi Grama Panchayat, Maner Block, Patna District, Bihar

Mukhia belongs to mali (Malakar) community. This seat was reserved for OBC woman for the first time. Earlier there had been one mukhia for 22 yrs. He is from upper caste (Bhumihar Brahmin) and much respected due the works that he has done for the village. The Dominant castes in the village are Bhumihars and Yadavs. They

\(^{10}\) Kabutri Devi, age 35, caste Paswaan, Gokhulpur Korhar village, Shri Rampur Panchayat
were the favored lot during Lalu Yadav's regime. New political regime has discouraged their high handedness but now also they resort to violent and don't hesitate in taking out guns in order to get their things done. New mukhia is a puppet in the hands of group of yadavs without whose prior approval she doesn't commit, sign or even meet any one. She was a poor, lower caste candidate who got votes form harijans. But after becoming mukhia no one can approach her. She recently got a pucca house constructed.

**Factor 3: Political Support**

In Bihar the involvement of political party in Grama Panchayats is non existent. On being asked about this feature, the response was (a) lack of funds in panchayats (b) panchayat system being at the rudimentary stage of evolution (c) caste being the supreme factor in any kind of elections.

**Factor 4: Vote-on-cash**

Distribution of money and other utility items such as lamps, blankets, utensils or medicines were next on importance. 22.7% believed that this factor made the candidates win. Cash distribution during election is a routine feature. Some times the candidate gets more votes if more money is 'spent' during election. "Elections are the times when people openly ask for such things from the candidates. If they are made happy then they vote otherwise they are made to vote for that candidate." This was the response of the upper caste village leader in Chakhand, Gaya. Tribal residents of Kalishthan tola (in Kumaripur, Katihar) explained that they are given money and alcohol of by the candidates before election but not in exchange of vote. It is considered to be auspicious. As far as voting is concerned, they vote for the person they consider efficient.

A detailed account was provided by the residents of Kanauhli village about the Mukhia of Sadasopur panchayat. She comes from a well to do family. Her husband is a railway employee (group B) and father-in-law and elder brother-in-law are local orthopedics. It was also told by some (for eg. A Panchayat member and several others in Kodai and Bhoma tola)\(^{11}\) that her family had spent a lot of money on food and alcohol to get the votes. One of the major problems of this village is alcoholism.

\(^{11}\) Nandji Rai (age 45, caste Yadav) panch of this panchayat, Bedamo Devi (age 40, caste Ravidas), Renu Devi (age 25, caste Paswaan), Shiv Bachan Chaudhari (age 45 caste Ravidas).
Another candidate had spent more money than the present mukhia but latter had the good-will of her in laws too, so she won.

Kerala:

Factor 1: Political support

In Kerala choice of candidate primarily depends on the party that he/she belongs to. So more than 50% (52.8%) respondents elect the candidate on party basis. Political affiliation ranged from being a party worker, member of any group or organization working for the welfare of the people, or good connections with the higher political officials of the state. Individual attributes of caste or education were considered the least. Political parties play a pivotal role in influencing people’s choice of the candidates. In Kerala, parties are officially involved in the elections. It plays a vital role in the Grama Panchayats. Right from the selection of the contestants to campaigning to bargaining for the post of president, it is the party that manages everything. Generally the left parties (CPI, CPM) form the ruling coalition in the Grama Panchayats and Congress is in the opposition. The term of the ruling president is also decided according to the strength of the winning candidates. Suppose out of 19 seats of Grama Panchayats CPI gets 6, CPM gets 4 and Congress 9 then the Left coalition gets majority in panchayat. Grama Panchayat president of CPI gets 3 years and CPM gets 2 years in the office. According to the president of Nenmeni panchayat, out of 25 panchayats in Waynad 22 have CPIM majority.

Voting is also done on party basis and no other factor such as caste plays any role. One has to be a party member in order to contest in the elections. Involvement of party at every level leads to politicization of every little issue. Local party leaders try to hog the limelight even for the payment of compensation money. More than 50% of the respondents in Kerala believed the political support to be the most favourable factor.

It was explained by the State Vice-President AITUC, Peermade, that role of political parties has been effective in implementation of various schemes in the panchayat. It also reduced other social hindrances of caste, corruption etc. Since the candidates are from the panchayat itself people have all the information about his/her credentials.
Secondly, funds are easily manageable if the same party is in power in the state, otherwise distribution of funds in the 999 panchayat of Kerala is a big task.

Similar information was provided by the District Secretary Adivasi Congress, (IHDP colony, Ward No.14, Idukki-Kanjikuzhi G.P. Thodupuzha block, Idukki, Kerala). According to him, flow of funds depends a lot on the party in power in state and panchayat. For example Idukki- Kanjikuzhi panchayat has 17 members, out of which 13 (including the president) belong to Congres, 2 belongs to Kerala Congress (M) and 2 belong to Mani Group. All the panchayats submit their demand to the block office, after which they get funds. 17 wards of this panchayat received only Rs. 6 lakhs that too is instalments. Ward 14 does not have sufficient money to provide houses to poor Scheduled Tribes residents, even there is no fund to build Anganwaadi building. Anganwaadi functions in the Tribal Community Hall which is made for social activities. This make shift arrangement does not enable Anganwaadi to function properly. The income generated by this panchayat is very less and due to paucity of funds it remains an underdeveloped area. Constraints faced by this panchayat are: maintenance of roads, houses, water problem, inspite of having a pump house; lack of higher education facilities for the tribal etc.

Factor 2: Genuine candidate

84% of the respondents voted for a genuine candidate. ‘Genuine’ was a difficult term to understand because it bordered on political affiliation and past experience. If the candidate had performed well during his / her last term, then the chances of winning was more. Performance again depended on the funds that could be procured for the respective wards.

Karnataka:

Factor 1: Genuine candidate

37 % of the respondents looked for genuine candidates. The term ‘genuine’ was interpreted in terms of approachability and capability to resolve the problems of the people. For e.g. the President of Devray Samudra G.P. (Mulbagal Block, Kolar) belongs to scheduled caste (Bhovi). He is serving as the Adhyaksha for second term and this time he won on an unreserved seat. According to him goodwill of the
candidate matters the most. He is illiterate but has been supported by the bureaucrats in understanding the schemes and their implementation process.

**Factor 2 and 3: Support of dominant caste and political support**

32.9% of the respondents found political support to be the most favourable factor whereas 30.1% considered support of dominant caste as very important.

These responses- support of dominant caste and political support- were explained as a resultant of one another. That is to say, the political parties rely on the support of dominant castes (Lingayat in Kolar and Raichur and Konkan Maratha in Karwar, Uttar Kannada). The circle goes like this: dominant caste supports party- party supports candidate (Panchayat) - candidate builds the base for the party in the village.

In the year 2000, in grama panchayat elections, 26 per cent seats of all GP seats in Karnataka were filled by “unanimous” elections (*The Hindu* 2000). The political parties do not give symbol to the candidates but to build a base through panchayat the party workers actively work during the election.

‘Invisible hand of party’ was visible in all three districts surveyed. The major parties are BJP, JD(S) and Congress. Grama Panchayats are quite important since they are manageable easily during the time of elections. In Raichur it was quoted by one of the respondents that the local party leaders generally support their candidate for the election. This support is highly misused if the elected president is illiterate and of lower caste. There are huge funds that are released to Grama Panchayats for various schemes. These funds are mismanaged in such a case.

This issue was corroborated by people of Ballatgi village panchayat where the Grama Panchayat was captured by the party through muscle, money and caste. The secretary of Dalit Sangathan Samiti (Ballatagi Village-Panchayat, Manvi, Raichur) explained that the Adhyaksha and Upadhyaksha, both are supported by congress. Ballatagi has been congress bastion for 20 yrs all the MLAs have won from congress ticket. This time the adhyaksha seat was reserved for ST and Up-Adhyaksha post for SC the present Adhyaksha beongs to Nayak Caste and he is completely in control of the Linga yat political leaders who are the dominant caste in this village.

In Hullibelli G.P. (Bangarpet, Kolar) all the ward members are from BJP. The general caste in the village consists of Gowadas, Reddys, Gollas, Aachari. Among the SC, there are Bhovi and Adi-Karnataka and among the ST, Naika are more in the number.
Out of 5 wards members 2 belong to SC community, 2 are from ST community and one is General category candidate (Gowda). But all of them are supported by BJP.

In Balla Village panchayat (Mulbagal, Kolar) there are 4 wards and 16 ward members. Balla Village has one ward and 4 seats for ward members. 9 members contested for the panchayat election out of which 5 were independent, 3 were from JDS and one from congress. All the independents lost the election. The president and vice-president post is shared by Congress and BJP. The elections were held in 2005. So till 2007 the president belonged to BJP (Lingyat caste) and the next president took over on 21.9.07. She comes from SC community (Adi-Karnataka) was backed by congress. The general castes that resides in the village are Vokkaligas, Gollas, Kurubas, Brahmin, shetty, Vaishya, and Achari. Among the SCs are Dhobi, Bajantri, Bhovi, Adi-Karnataka, Adi-Dravida, Dommar and Thigala. As informed by the Adhyaksha of Banvasi Panchayat village (Sirsi, Uttar Kannada) the category for the rotation of seats in the panchayat is decided by the District commissioner's office. The list of number of seats per ward is also provided from there. That's how the candidates and vice president, the seats are rotated twice in a term of 5 years accordingly the panchayat member select the adhyaksha and upadhyaksha. For e.g. the panchayat elections were held on 23.03.05 (in Banvasi panchayat). So for the first term: Adhyaksha: Female/General Caste. Upadhyaksha: Male/General Caste; 2nd term: Adhyaksha Male/General Caste, Upadhyaksha - Female/General Caste.

This time the rotation was on gender basis. However, the decision of selection president and vice-president is taken on the strength of the parties (a kind of informal coalition) in the G.P. this president is supported by congress.

So one can say that the invisible hand of political parties supported by dominant caste in the panchayat plays a major role in selection of candidates in the election.

c. Information about grama sabha meetings

As mentioned previously, information precedes any kind of participation. So when, one talks about participation of citizens in the grama sabha meetings, the first task to know whether they are informed about the meetings. If yes then how? What are the sources of information? (Sources are important to know because they inform about the network that operates in the information dissemination). If the answer is no, then what are the reasons, according to the respondents that prohibit information flows.
The gram sabha is one of the integral and central features of the 73rd amendment and is also a means to ensure direct democracy in rural areas. Studies have shown that gram sabha meetings are very low on participation either on the pretext of the panchayat members not informing the people or people not turning up due to non-interest.

Table 8
Information about gram sabha meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information about GSM</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement Count in village</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By panchayat members % within State</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not informed Count</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Count</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68% of the respondents in Bihar have replied that there is absolutely no information about the gram sabha meeting in the village. The Grama Panchayat president and his/her coterie record the gram sabha meeting on paper with forged signatures. Even if there is an announcement in the village it is done in the areas where upper castes reside. There is no announcement in the Dom, Musahar or Dusadh tola about the gram sabha meeting. It was very interesting to find out that even the ward members are many times unaware of the meeting.

In Kerala and Karnataka, ward sabha meetings are held regularly, at least once or twice in the month and the people are duly informed either by announcements or by circulating pamphlets in the village. The ward members also inform the people about the subject of the meeting personally. Most of the issues are dealt with in the ward sabha meeting. It is the same situation with the gram sabha meeting too. (This discussion was carried further on the topic of attendance in gram sabha meetings, which is discussed later in the chapter)
d. Information about schemes:
Participation of local communities in public services is instrumental in achieving better development outcomes. However studies have shown that citizens do not participate actively, either because these services are not on high priority on or because they are uncertain about their participation making a difference. To overcome this impediment activists and policymakers have emphasized information, advocacy and awareness campaigns at the community level, as a way of encouraging people to participate more (Jenkins and Goetz 1999; Goetz and Jenkins 2001; Paul 2002). Three schemes were selected for the study for which different set of questions were asked. However, it was important to know whether the respondents knew about government schemes or not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not aware</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 15.2% respondents were unaware about government schemes.

Figure 1

Awareness about Scheme by gender
The percentage of male respondents being aware of the scheme was higher than the females. The most common schemes reported to have been known were the subsidized ration provided on BPL cards, housing schemes and the old age pension scheme.

Figure 2

Awareness about Scheme by Caste

On analyzing the data on caste and awareness, the Scheduled Castes reported to have been more aware of the schemes. The reasons cited by most of the respondents was that mostly the schemes are introduced for them, so they have to know about it.

2. Voting

Definition of democracy involves several concepts other than voting, such as a free press and civil rights etc, yet elections form its fundamental and defining feature (Kimberley:2004:553). Reverting to the Schumpeterian notion, the most important aspect of participation in democracy is, participating in the electoral process. The universal adult franchise makes it a right of the people to vote in elections. Any citizen above 18 years of age can vote in the panchayat election.

But do people actually go and vote for Grama Panchayat elections? So the primary information required was whether they voted in Grama Panchayat election or not?
Table: 10

Voting in grama sabha election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the total respondents, 74.5% admitted voting in the panchayat elections. Some of the replies were a reluctant 'yes' which did not turn into 'no' even after a lot of talking. But very interestingly their answer was not plain yes or no. It was supplemented by their views on benefit or futility of voting. Mostly I was told that it was their right, to vote and they exercised it. Alas! That's what I was there to find: their perception of right, their power that could change their world!!

An overwhelming majority voted irrespective of the caste they belonged to.

Voting in the panchayat elections relies primarily on the identity of the group over the individual. Both in Karnataka and Bihar the villagers are mobilized on the basis of caste. In Bihar Chamar and Dusadh (Scheduled Castes) are politically active. In case of reservation of seats in the Grama Panchayats they are either backed by Bhumihar or by yadav.
### Table: 11
*Caste and Voting*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you vote in panchayat election</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issue of ‘vote buying’ is an important factor in voting factor. (It has been discussed earlier in the chapter). Distribution of money and alcohol before elections is a regular affair in panchayat election in Bihar. It was also reported in Manvi block of Raichur district though the respondents denied getting any money themselves.

3. **Attendance in Grama Sabha Meetings**

Gram panchayats are supposed to be accountable to the gram sabha. For successful working of panchayati raj institutions, increased participation of people in the gram sabha is a critical prerequisite. While democratic institutions provide opportunities for achieving democratic ideals, it is democratic practice through which these can be realized. While both democratic institutions and democratic practice are important for good governance, the latter is not guaranteed by the former.\(^{12}\)

The issue of attendance in grama sabha meeting is crucial because it is the only platform that ensures the participation of people in the governance processes. Whether it is information about the schemes or beneficiaries or any important issue related to the village, the grama sabha is expected to be the platform where people decide for themselves. In kerala and Karnataka the ward sabhas are considered to be more relevant where the participation of the people is more. However, the grama sabha meeting is also attended by them which is more about dissemination of information.

about the activities taken up by the ward members. The number of grama sabha meeting is less as compared to the ward sabha meetings. In Bihar, mostly the grama sabha meetings are recorded with fake signatures.

Table 12

*Attendance in grama sabha meeting across the states.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance in GSM</th>
<th>State</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes Count</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO Count</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Count</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bihar:**

As the table shows, the attendance of the people in grama sabha meeting in Bihar of people in grama sabha meeting is quite low. Only 36% of the respondents admitted attending the grama sabha meeting (just one time). Four aspects came up during discussion with the people (including the ward members and other panchayat members such as panch/sarpanch) for such low attendance.
- **Lack of information:**

As discussed previously, 68% of the respondents in Bihar replied that there is absolutely no information about the grama sabha meeting in the village. In lieu of information attendance can not be imagined.

- **Fake/Forged GSM:**

The GP president and his/her coterie record the grama sabha meeting on paper with forged signature. This aspect was corroborated by the ward members also who were most of the times kept away from the grama sabha meeting.

Ward (3) member (of Gokhulpur Korhar Village, Shri Rampur Panchayat, Bihta Block Patna), does not attend grama sabha meeting even if informed. She recapitulated an incidence where in just half an hour the men (Yadavs) broke into a flight among themselves. The G.P. President, comes from extremely backward caste (caste: mali), and is controlled by a group of Yadavs (Dominant caste in the village). They are informed about the grama sabha meeting only when any senior bureaucrat has to attend it.

Ward (4) member (Kanhaul village, Sadisopur G.P., Bihta block, Patna) explained the helplessness of the Mukhia in involving the people or the ward members in the grama sabha because she herself is a puppet in the hands of Yadavas who made her contest when this time the seat was reserved for EBC women. This ward member is a Scheduled Caste (Paswaan) lady from Bhoma Tola, inhabited by Paswan, Kurmi, Kahar and Chaudhary castes (all SC). This tola voted for another candidate, a Ravidas, who stays in Kodai Tola due to this people of Kodai and Bhoma tola are purposely kept away from any affair of the Grama Panchayat.

Ward (11) member of Kalisthan Tola, Kamaripur Village – Panchayat, Manihari block, Katihar, keeps visiting Mukhia's house to get information about whether or not any GSM is being held (Mukhia's house, because there is no Panchayat building and all the official work is taken care of by Mukhia's father at his place). Due to his activeness Ismail has been lucky enough to attend few grama sabha meetings but

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13 Sulekha Devi, age 23, caste Paswaan.
14 Renu Devi, age 25, caste Paswaan.
15 Ismail, age 45, Sheikh.
neither he was informed about the issues nor taken advice from the Mukhia and her family. Whoever was present was informed about decisions taken. Most recent meeting held was on 13th May 2008 (in Kalisthan, Health Centre) regarding NREGS where it was told to them that job cards would be distributed in Ranidih, Bairgachchi, and Kabir tola. However, no cards have been distributed till now. He had no idea of how the records of gram sabha meeting were kept.

Up-Mukhia (vice-president, Dilarpur Village panchayat, Manihari Block, Katihar)¹⁶, admitted that the mukhia was one of the 'bahubali'. Strong man of the village so it was impossible to question him about anything related to panchayat. Other than the mukhia, all the members of the panchayat are 'toothless tigers' with no power, no information. He finds all the ideas of people's participation futile, irrelevant and empty.

- **Distance / Area Constraint:**

'Northern and eastern areas of Bihar are flood-prone especially the Kosi and Ganga plains. Period between July to October is usually marked by floods. Dilarpur Grama Panchayat is badly affected by floods. Other than floods, there are refugees from other villages whose villages had got submerged when river changed its course. Such places are known as *Diara* area where along with the floods, both the rivers also change their course of flow at certain intervals of time. Due to which huge tracts of the river bank get submerged. The villagers settled in this area get displaced and move to some other village and spend the rest of their life on makeshift tents built on unclaimed lands or some area provided by the government for resettlement. This area is known as the 'seize area. The area where they stay are called 'seize area" and are numbered accordingly for e.g. "8 no. seize" in Dilarpur village is on the embankment built on Kosi river which gets water logged in every monsoon. So neither the panchayat people take effort to inform them about any panchayat activity (grama sabha meeting, information about schemes funds or any visit by the officials), nor do they are inclined enough to question about panchayat activities and invite wrath of Mukhia who is feared for his notorious coterie. (There are 4 such seize areas 5, 6, 8, 9 in this panchayat)

¹⁶ Pappu Yadav, age 28, caste Yadav.
While talking about the constraints of the area one of the respondents in Dilarpur village, elaborated about the "relief culture" that stops the people in participating in the panchayat activities. He informed that rivers are a major cause of displacement in Bihar. The conditions are very severe in the Ganga and Kosi river areas. A good monsoon brings good harvest as well as devastating floods. To quote him, "everyone loves a good flood" in this area. People have developed a 'relief culture' due to the relief measures carried on every year after flood water recedes. This includes getting money, ration and sometimes even job offers from the government. As for the officers, there is huge corruption regarding the disbursement of the relief materials. But a mutual understanding has developed among people and officers where the rule of 'you-eat-I-eat-no complains' is strictly followed. No proper measures are taken to check the flood situation for the next year.

Caste Factor:

Caste plays a very important role in the attendance in the grama sabha meeting. First of all there is no information in the Scheduled Castes tolas about the grama sabha meeting, even to the ward members. The Dom, Bhuinya and Musahars are not informed about the meeting. If at all they go for it they would be turned away. Secondly, they find such meetings a sheer waste of time because they will have to stand mute throughout the meeting and lose their daily wage for that as well. It is better to work and let the upper caste men do all the fighting in the panchayat as they can afford it. Thirdly there is discrimination within the Scheduled Castes, among the Ravidas, Paswaan and the Dom, Musahar and Bhuiyans. The latter are discouraged by the former in participating. According to the Dom and Musahar respondents they are not supported by the dominant castes even if the seat is reserved in the panchayat. Preference is given to the Ravidas and Paswaan on the reserved seat within the village.

The grama sabha meeting is dominated by the dominant caste of the village.

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17 Divakar Pande, age 62, caste Brahmin. 62 years old Divakar Pande, completed his Graduation in 1976 and played an active role in the J.P. movement in Bihar. Other than various districts of Bihar, he visited Belpahar, Sambalpur districts of Orissa, parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan during that phase. Except for this mentality, there are not many disturbing factors such as caste wars etc in this village panchayat.
Karnataka:

82.9% of the respondents attend grama sabha meeting. A week before the grama sabha meeting, ward sabha meeting is held in every ward by the ward members. According to the respondents, most of the people attend the ward sabha meeting and put their applications there. It is then carried further by the ward members to the panchayat president in the grama sabha meeting. According to the adhyaksha, Banvasi panchayat, other than the grama sabha and ward sabha meetings, social audit and Jamabandhi is held twice a year each. It is meant for the enquiry of the panchayat members regarding the expenditure of funds. It is attended by senior officials of the Panchayati Raj Department.18

The issues discussed in the gram sabha meetings, as told by the respondents are:

- Discussion about developmental activities for e.g. construction of roads, houses, maintenance of anganwaadi buildings, panchayat office etc. as told by the Up-adhyaksha (ward 2 member) of Banvasi panchayat, there is a major problem of drinking water in this ward. Other than that panchayat provides for houses for the Scheduled Castes under the state housing scheme ‘Ashrey’. This ward is quite big and majority population is of Scheduled Castes. There are 3 to 4 claims for houses from one family but the ward gets fund for only 15 families in a year so people have to wait for their turn. This was the topic of the ward sabha held recently. The respondents in Ballatgi village informed about schemes that have been sanctioned but no work has been done on it. For e.g. an amount of Rs 20 lakhs had been sanctioned for drinking water pond and 6 lakhs for ‘Dhobi Ghat’ last year but none of them have come up as yet. Even Jamabandhi has failed to provide information for it. People in Makheri village, Sirwar panchayat complained of drinking water problem in the ward sabha meeting but the ward member had no answer. On being asked about this issue, the President replied that people refuse to understand the implementation problems. He told that the provision of drinking water to every house was announced under the ‘Jal Nirman Scheme’. Here 85% of the money was given by the government, 10% came through the public contribution (Rs 1000/ house) and 5% was to be borne by the panchayat. Total budget was of Rs 22 lakhs. Only 75% of public contribution could be collected due to reluctance of the people. On top of that the contractor is not ready to bore wells where there are stones. Due to this the scheme is still incomplete which

18 Pamphlet for the Jamabandhi is in the Appendix.
should have been ready by July 2007. Every grama sabha meeting has a discussion on this problem but nothing has moved till date.

- **Settling disputes:** The president of the Banvasi panchayat and vice president of Badangod panchayat denied the existence of any traditional panchayat. They informed that there is a panchayat level ‘Samajik Nyaya Samiti’ (consisting of president, vice-president and ward members) that looks into the disputes. Matters of disputes are discussed in the grama sabha meeting and if the parties are not satisfied with the decision, they can move to the police station.

- **Information about the schemes:** Respondents informed about many schemes that are going on in the panchayat such as Ashrey yojana (housing scheme) Ambedkar Housing scheme, Mini Water Supply Over Tank, Jal Nirmal Yojana (drinking water), Bhagyajyothi, Kutirjyothi, Rajiv Gandhi Vidyutikaran yojana (electricity), Nirmalaya (sanitation), Ganga Kalyani Yojana (bore wells for Scheduled Castes for irrigation), Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), NREGS(Employment) etc. However most of them were not satisfied with the implementation. For e.g. respondents in Yelesandra village told that electricity under Bhagyajyothi Yojana was free earlier, suddenly the power supply got cut and they came to know that they should deposit an amount of Rs. 4000 to avail that scheme. Another scheme, TSC, has also been a source of disappointment for the people. The panchayat provide them with Rs 1200 for construction of toilets in the houses. However, people can not construct toilets as the actual cost comes around Rs. 5000. The panchayat cannot do more as it is a centrally sponsored scheme.

- **Selection of beneficiaries:** Final selection of beneficiaries is done in the grama sabha meeting. As informed by the adhyaksha of Devraysia, there has to be a gap of six months between two grama sabha meetings. If there is any special issue to be discussed then there has to be proper information for holding special grama sabha meeting. The grama sabha meeting is preceded by ward sabha meeting which is preceded by aam sabha. However, there is a tendency of the villagers of not attending the grama sabha meeting/ward sabha meeting if their application is passed. The enthusiasm lasts only till the funds are not granted.

- **Social audit/Jamabandi:** It has to be held at least twice a year. It is attended by the senior officials. Some of the respondents in Ballatgi village explained the futility of such audits. Many times the records are not made available; if they are then the language used is so technical that people do not understand it. The presence of
dominant caste resists their questioning as the former have a tendency to snub the person who is asking plenty of questions. But still most of the respondents felt that they at least know about the funds granted for the schemes and have a vague idea of the expenditure.  

The power of Grama Sabha  

State: Karnataka; District: Uttar Kannada; Block: Karwar; Grama Panchayat: Hankon  

Hankon village is primarily an agricultural area. In the beginning of 2008 a gram sabha meeting was hurriedly called by some of the panchayat members and the president, and large area of fertile land was allotted for a thermal plant (Ind Bharat Power Ltd.) to be set up. Those whose land was taken for this purpose were promised good compensation. No information was provided about this gram sabha meeting in the panchayat. The villagers got together, discussed the damage to soil, people and environment due to the thermal plant, convinced those whose land was chosen, insisted for another gram sabha meeting and were successful in reverting the previous decision of the panchayat by a thumping majority.

Kerala:  
The response to attendance in gram sabha meeting in Kerala was 100%. Every adult member of the village attends/ has attended the gram sabha meeting/ ward sabha meetings. This doesn’t mean that every gram sabha meeting has complete attendance of the villagers. But they are well informed about the issues of the meeting and attend it as and when they wish to.

4. Decision making vis a vis Elected representatives from marginalized sections of society  

According to J.S. Mill21, the idea of democracy in its purest form is to ensure “a government of the whole body by the whole people, equally represented”. Reservations are a means by which the state, governing a polity divided into many communities, tries, instead of dissolving the communities into one, to construct a supplementary community by representation which will mediate the relations between

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19 Information pamphlet for Jamabandhi in Banvasi Panchayat is in the Appendix no. 5.  
20 All the respondents from this village narrated this incidence in some way or the other.  
the many communities that actually exist and the projected community that will unite all into one.22

Jane Mansbridge23 puts forth three crucial functions of a representative because of which, the disadvantaged groups may want to be represented by individuals who in their own backgrounds ‘mirror’ the typical experiences and outward manifestations of belonging to the disadvantaged group.

First, the representative is an instrument of ongoing communication and consultation. Second, at the legislative level the representatives engage in an “organized deliberative process”; and they need to communicate with each other in an effective manner. In this process of deliberations, the issues that are taken up are largely “uncrystallized” and the representative who does not personally share the experiences of the disadvantaged groups would not be able to spontaneously contribute to such deliberations. Only those representatives who belong to these disadvantaged groups would be able to convince the advantaged groups as regards to the problems faced by the people they represent by drawing instances from their personal experiences.

Third, in the case of a polity, which has a history of legally excluding the members of a particular group from voting and other political rights, there are traces of the feeling that the dominant cultures did not consider the specific group to be fit to rule. Under such historical conditions, it is important that their own people, who would instill the feeling that they are capable of functioning successfully and competently as lawmakers, are representing such groups.

The 73rd Amendment provided that one-third of the seats in all panchayat councils, as well as one-third of the Grama Panchayat President positions, must be reserved for women. Seats and president positions were also reserved for the two marginalized groups, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, in the form of mandated representation proportional to each group’s population share in each district.24 One of the significant

24 Article 243D of Part IX of the Constitutions states, “(1) Seats shall be reserved for — (a) Scheduled Castes; and (b) Scheduled Tribes............
(2) Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes.
(3) Not less-than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women....”
(4) The offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes or women in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide........"
achievements of the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act concerning reservation of seats and political offices in favour of women and the disadvantaged sections of the rural community is that it had improved their awareness and perception levels and has created an urge in them to assert their rightful share in the decision-making process at the local level.

A key feature of this reservation policy in the Grama Panchayats is that the seats to be reserved were randomly allocated, which ensures that the only difference between reserved and unreserved villages is that some of them were selected to be reserved, while some were not.

- **Reservation for scheduled castes/ Scheduled Tribes**

The 'substantive' representation argument in favour of affirmative action for increasing the political representation of disadvantaged groups claims that with an emphasis on numerical increase in representation in the institutions of political decision-making, the focus is on “being something rather than doing something”. It is also argued that the democratic political institutions that are committed to political equality need to resort to specific measures to ensure the representation of those socially deprived groups which would fail to voice its interests and concerns without such measures. (Young: 2000:148). And that correcting the imbalances in political agency leads to a correction of imbalance in other spheres as well. Reservations of electoral seats may therefore be an effective tool to safeguard the interest of the weaker groups.

A necessary condition for the efficacy of the reservation policy is that the elected representatives have independent power and autonomy, over and above not only the direct control of the villagers (exerted through voting or through the Gram Sabhas), but also above the control of the bureaucracy, the parties’ hierarchies, and the local elites.

Table shows the respondents' answer to the question: whether any Scheduled Castes candidate would win on the panchayat seat if it is not reserved?

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26 Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford, 2000, p.148
Table: 13

Chances of winning on unreserved seat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within State</th>
<th>Chances of winning on unreserved seat (for SC candidate)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>178</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>146</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>474</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bihar:

Out of 12 villages covered, 5 panchayats had SC mukhia, coincidentally all women. The seats had been reserved for SC women on which they had been elected. The reply to our question: If any SC candidate contests against the upper caste candidate in the panchayat elections will he/she win? The answers were mostly No chance (63.3%) or Can’t say (28%). Even after reservation the candidates were puppets of the dominant caste/ castes of the village. This was an invariable feature in Gaya and Patna. In Patna the struggle for power was between Bhumihar and Yadav castes that have been the traditionally rich and landowning caste of that area. From spending money to buy votes during panchayat elections to controlling the monetary and other functions of Grama Panchayat all is done by them.

Gram sabha meetings are either conducted by the upper caste men who traditionally have a stronghold in the area or by group of mukhia’s men. The decision of works to be done and who have to be employed is their prerogative. Participation of SC/ST is minimum due to two reasons: one, fear of incurring wrath of the upper caste and two, withdrawal and self alienation from the scheme.

According to one ex GP member SCs do not have much land, they are dependant on the high caste people for work, money, help in case of any emergency (monetary),
how can reserving seat and making them mukhia. How can reserving seat and making them mukhia at one give them that sense of power and control. At the most what they can achieve is a pucca house for themselves and may be a small bank account. Like this present mukhia had a kutcha house but now she has a double story kutcha a house how do explain this sudden development? Everyone wants money and comfort for himself, so one can not blame this mukhia if she has done this. At least one person is happy with this reservation (*kum se kum ek aadmi to khush hai is aarakshan se!*)

The situation of ward members is even worse. They are on the receiving end from the people and not involved in panchayat activities (by the mukhia or group that dominates mukhia.

**Karnataka:**

In Karnataka the situation is better. 50% of the respondents said yes to the chances of Scheduled Castes candidate winning on an unreserved seat. But it is possible only when there is strong backing of any political party behind him. Dominant castes do field their candidates if the seat is reserved but not in case of an unreserved seat. 24.7% respondents said no to the chances of winning. The reasons being lack of unity between various sub castes of the Scheduled Castes. In Ballatgi village this was the reason cited by the people for not being able to do something against the corrupt practices. In Hankon village, on the other hand, the dominant caste hand picked the Scheduled Castes panchayat members and used them if their community interfered in panchayat decision. 25.3% respondents were undecided on this issue.

**Kerala:**

74.7% respondents in Kerala were sure that the Scheduled Castes candidate would win on an unreserved seat in the panchayat if the party fields him. Caste does not form a basis of the election at panchayat level.

The response to the follow-up question (*would you vote for SC candidate on an unreserved seat?*) was very interesting. To the above question, the replies were mostly undecided or if yes then some condition preceded it. So when the respondents were asked whether they would individually vote for a Scheduled Castes candidate on an unreserved seat, the majority answer was yes. In Bihar 42.7%, Kerala 57.9% and in Karnataka 52.1% of the respondents admitted that they would vote in favour.
Table: 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Would you vote for SC candidate on an unreserved seat</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within State</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When they were cross questioned, that on one hand they feel that the chances of winning on an unreserved seat were very slim and on the other if they would vote for Scheduled Castes candidates themselves, why can’t they come together and make the candidate win. Their responses were crystal clear:

a. Individual vote can’t make a candidate win.
b. They are simple villagers not opinion makers.
c. There is no unity or unanimity of choices of people. Everyone have their own preferences.
d. One must have a lot of money to stand against the strength of political parties or dominant castes.
e. It is not just vote but combination of many factors that make a candidate win a panchayat election.

I was convinced!!
It was time to test the second and third premise of Mansbridge’s assertion where it is assumed that only those representatives who belong to these disadvantaged groups would be able to convince the advantaged groups as regards to the problems faced by the people they represent by drawing instances from their personal experiences and would also have faith of their community members. It is also claimed that an enhancement in the inclusion and influence of the social groups that are unrepresentative or under-represented would help the society in confronting the problem of structural social inequality and to find remedies for it (Young: 2000: 141).

So after asking about the chances of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes candidate winning on an un-reserved seat, the next question was: Would having a Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes president benefit these castes of the village/panchayat?

An overwhelming majority in Bihar 77.3% said ‘No’. The reason primarily being that any representative from the same community would be equally disadvantaged in terms of education and information, and, the social and economic conditions (elaborated in previous responses) would never permit him/her to stand for their community. Second reason was that there are various castes within Scheduled Castes. So given a chance a Paswan would promote a Paswan; a Ravidas would do so for a Ravidas. So the development of other castes would still be lacking! Third reason was that the level of corruption among the Scheduled Castes is more than that of the upper castes. This was so because the upper castes are already well off so they do not mismanage money as much as the poor Scheduled Castes representative would. In the latter case, the share of money would be divided among the representative, his/her group of upper caste supporters and bureaucrats, where as the upper caste representative would keep a lion’s share for himself and give some to the officers to keep their mouth shut!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Can’t say</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td></td>
<td>122</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>146</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
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<td>39.0%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>213</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Kerala 68.5% of the respondents said ‘Yes’. But again it was mentioned that the representatives are bound by the funds available in the panchayat. Even while trying for the availability of resources they might be inefficient in promoting the welfare of the people. This difficulty was mentioned by ward members in a number of panchayats.\(^{27}\)

In Karnataka the opinions were equally divided in yes and no, 39% respondents replied for each of the options. However, 27.9% were unsure about the capability of the representatives. The factors of local political leaders (MLA/ Party workers) influencing the candidates, upper caste majority in the unreserved panchayats, lack of understanding of schemes and corruption were cited by the respondents who said no or were undecided.

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\(^{27}\) It has been mentioned else where in the chapter.
Reservation for Women

At the panchayat level the question of identity of women as panchayat leader becomes very important because the constituency consists of family, extended relatives, employer.

Women’s political presence

The understanding of the word “woman” extends ahead of description into the realm of power and politics. Maithreyi Krishnaraj observes, “Gendered division of labour and accompanying relations of power are inseparable in meaning but it gains a political nuance, as it takes on a quality of universality and over ridings. All women spend more time on house work, have more responsibility for child rearing, have less access to many social and material resources, have less access to public spaces and public power”.

The identity of a woman is formed by multiple intersecting forces of caste, class, religion and ethnicity and is not manifested only in terms of ‘gender.’ This social reality has been studied in political institutions like PRIs. (The social conditions surrounding the women within the larger social group such as caste, class, religion and ethnicity, makes it essential to study minority groups within this minority, i.e. women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Bihar:

Triple discrimination of the Dalit Women Panchayat Members

Here, the discrimination is three fold: related to gender, caste and position in panchayat if the mukhia happens to be from Scheduled Castes.

Gender factor:

No woman mukhia talked about her panchayat without her husband or father interfering in between (if at all she was ready to speak). The husband is known as MP sahib (Mukhia-pati) or SP sahib (Sarpanch-pati) in the village. It can be said that Mukhia-pati/ Sarpanch-pati is the de-facto president of panchayat.

In 9 of the 12 panchayats, the mukhia was a woman. The response to the question about reasons for the mukhia to win elections, the answers were mostly spent money

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and husband or father had been associated with the panchayat. The women Mukhias relied absolutely on their husband/ father for explanation of the procedural aspects. In Gaya, one of the woman mukhias pleaded not to be asked anything about NREGA in absence of her husband in the fear of being reprimanded. In Katihar, it was almost impossible to meet two women mukhias. Their husbands insisted on answering the queries themselves. After much request, on the pretext of just greeting them, we could meet them.

Caste Factor:

Women SC panchayat members are no better than any other SC woman. In one of the group discussion in Patna, the respondents narrated an incidence from one of the Grama Sabhas. The Mukhia is SC woman who does household work in the other houses to earn a living. Her husband is a vegetable vendor. She just sits in Grama Sabha Meeting (GSM) but doesn’t participate. Once she interrupted a yadav during the meeting and was badly scolded by him (Ek ta mehraroo, upper se jat ke mali... dher bolbu------- you lower caste woman, don’t speak too much<sup>30</sup>). Such instances are numerous they told.

In another panchayat, there were about 12 candidates for mukhia’s post. But majority votes were cast in favorer of current mukhia. This mukhia is a dalit and comes from very poor family. She was Yadav’s candidate but had sympathy of bhumihar and dalits also. Just before the elections it was decided by caste panchayat that votes would go to her. She used to sell vegetables in the market with her husband. She comes from a very poor family, can hardly speak about anything except selling vegetables. But after winning she can hardly be approached. But it is not her fault also. This mukhia is a mere puppet in the hands of the dominant caste. (Aurat hai, jaat ka kamjor hai, badka malik log ke samne muh koholne ka soch bhi nahi sakti hai, gaon mein rahna hai ki nahi.... poora parivare saaf ho jaiga She is a lower caste woman.... If she dares speak against the upper caste men, it will be impossible for her to live in the village).

Position:

To quote the findings of a study carried out by A C Nielsen ORG-MARG on behalf of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and mentioned in the Study on Elected Women

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<sup>30</sup> This incidence is about Mukhia of Sherpuer Purvi panchayat. It was told by Munder Devi (age 58 caste Paswaan) who is cook in the primary school of the village. This was the only grama sabha meeting that she has attended till now.
Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions\textsuperscript{31} "...number of years of exposure as an elected representative reflects a positive relationship with performance. This is evident among all the categories, except female ward Member. For them, time served as a member has apparently no significant effect on their performance... Caste categories did not seem to have a significantly positive relationship with performance...among the Scheduled Tribes, it is negatively correlated. This implies that on the performance curve they were nearer the bottom, with most representatives from this category appearing not to perform well".

Since the position of mukhia is important (as she is the signatory on the official documents), she is consulted, rather informed, by the ‘real deal decision makers’ about the decisions taken. The ward members are generally kept out of the decision-making process.\textsuperscript{32}

**Kerala:**

None of the respondents underestimated the capability of woman in taking over the charge as the panchayat president. In fact their response was that if the party selects the candidate for the position they won’t go for a weak person otherwise their credibility would be affected. So if the panchayat seat is reserved for the women then the competition among the candidates is quite high. However on an unreserved seat the competition is different. There are candidates who have been members of the panchayat for two to three decades. So when it comes to competing with them the benchmark becomes quite high.

Out of 12 panchayats, two, Vythri panchayat, Waynad and Purakkad panchayat, Alapuzha had women presidents. In the former, the seat was reserved for SC women; in the latter it was reserved for women.

The president of Vythri panchayat had been teaching in a school before contesting for the panchayat elections. So she is known as Kumari Anitha Teacher. Our meeting with her was held in the panchayat office. She explained the problems in implementing schemes for the SCs. According to her the motivation for the students for pursuing higher education is very low. The family is inclined towards getting job as soon as possible, so generally doesn’t support the child economically or

\textsuperscript{31} Study on Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, New Delhi, 2008.

\textsuperscript{32} Detailed account of the inputs from the ward members has been previously mentioned.
emotionally to get go for further studies. Secondly the participation of the people is limited to getting their work done in the gram sabha meetings. Once that is over the attendance becomes less. Participation of the primitive tribes is even less. Regarding the political presence of women in the panchayat, she informed that the grooming is necessary for the first timers. They do not have information about the implementation part even complete knowledge of the schemes, their funding and other income and expenditures of the panchayat. Most of this is done by the party, for the rest the supporting staff of the panchayat office is quite efficient. On the question whether she would like to be back as panchayat once her term is over, her reply was a definite yes. She said that she would like to work a little more for the SC/ST students whether is in power or not.

**Karnataka:**

In Karnataka the opinion for having a woman president was not seen as a handicap for the woman. But the identity getting overshadowed by her husband or son was a prominent factor in the acceptance of woman. One of the ward members of Yelesandra village admitted that her husband mostly attends the gram sabha meeting/ward sabha meeting on her behalf. He has better understanding of the proceedings.

**Dispute Resolution**

Panchayats or village councils have traditionally been seen as an agency of dispute resolution. The concept of 'Panch Parmeshwar' has existed since ancient times. But it is this field that has completely been influence by the local elites. The composition of such customary village councils is embedded in tradition and customs. Srinivas\(^\text{33}\) describes "village councils" (CVCs) as being "informal and flexible" bodies with "no hard and fast rule about who should constitute them". Mandelbaum's\(^\text{34}\) in his study of "village panchayats" from different parts of the country points toward a similar pattern of representation. Basically there are two types of such councils based on the caste composition of the village: (i) in a single caste village the caste panchayat also operates as the CVC; (ii) but in a village with multi-caste population, the CVC is a broader forum that includes the caste leaders of all caste groups.


We have come across traditional panchayats, customary panchayats, caste panchayats in various studies across the states. The aim of this study was to understand the actors that lead to giving importance to these panchayats if at all they exist.

Table: 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnatak</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have any other kind of panchayat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bihar:**

As the table shows 74% of the people accepted that traditional panchayats exist in their village these panchayats are mostly headed by the dominant caste of the village. There may exist more than one such panchayat. That is to say, different castes may have their own panchayat and panchayat-head. But the Scheduled Castes did not have any such panchayat of their caste. They generally went to the head of the higher caste panchayat for resolution of disputes or seeking help to solve their local problems. Such panchayats are known as "Samaj Ka Panchayat" which is headed by the reputed people of the village belonging to that Samaj (Caste). People prefer to go to the mukhia of this panchayat because "sarkari" (elected) panchayat leaders are ineffective if they belong to lower castes. As told by the mukhia-pati in Uttari Simaria G.P. (Katihar) people prefer to go to traditional panchayats for two reasons - one, because its authority is accepted by all; second, because no fees is charged for dispute resolution. In the elected panchayats, Rs.1000 is charged as entry fees for every case, that is registered. Presently there are three people who head this panchayat. (They are known as 'samaj ke mukhia'). One of them, Abdul Rashid, is member of madarsa also.
The other two Islam and Imam have maximum hand holding in the village. Islam is also a member of the Vidalaya Siksha Samiti (VSS).

In Sherpur village (Patna) and Kumaripur village (Katihar) the traditional panchayat is headed by Bhumihar and Rajput caste men respectively. In Sherpur village, the mukhia of the traditional panchayat, was elected as Mukhia in 1964. He served as mukhia for 23 years, Up-pramukh for 5 years and Pramukh for 2 years. He is known as "Bada-Mukhia ji" in the village. He has more than 200 bighas of land, stays in Patna but comes daily to the village to solve the problem of the people.

In Kumaripur panchayat the head of traditional panchayat served as mukhia from 1962 to 1976. He is father of present mukhia and father-in-law of sarpanch of this panchayat and handles all the works of the panchayat himself.

26% of the respondents denied any kind of traditional panchayat in their village.

Dilarpur village - panchayat (Katihar) is a flood affected area. One of the respondents replying to the question on the existence of any other panchayat said that the calamities in the village makes everyone so dependent on the officers that there is no use of having any such panchayats. The disputes and problems are less related to caste or land. The problem is of survival and everyone tries to help one another. Nearby districts like Madhubani and Madhepura are dominated by Brahmin and Yadav respectively (it is a common saying "Rome hai Pope ka, Madhepura hai Gop ka").

Katihar (23 panchayats) is not divided on caste lines.

Karnataka:

In Karnataka, a study by Kripa Ananthpur on customary panchayats shows the importance of the CVCs. She says, “Customary village councils go under a wide variety of local names in Karnataka. In the southern part of the state, particularly in Mysore district, CVCs are known locally as ‘panchayati’ (council), ‘halli panchayati’ (village council), ‘nadu’ or ‘nadu panchayati’ (regional council), ‘nyaya panchayati’ (justice council) or even ‘nyaya samiti’ (justice committee). In northern Karnataka, particularly in the area covered by the former Dharwad district, the terms ‘pancharu’ or ‘hireru’ (village elders) are prevalent, while in one village the CVC is known as the ‘civic board’. In Raichur district the normal term is ‘daiva’ (god).”

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The customary panchayats, play varied role. However, the focus of this study was on dispute resolution and the role of local elites. 61.6% of the respondents refused the existence of any such panchayat but 38.4% accepted such panchayats to be functioning in the village parallel to the G.P. As for the dispute resolution, people go to the police station for bigger conflicts of violence, theft etc. For smaller disputes, they approach the 'Dalpati' of the village who generally belongs to the upper caste and whose position is hereditary. For eg. some of the respondents in Singanodi village panchayat informed about the "Dalpati". He belongs to lingayat caste and his father was also a 'Dalpati'. According to them, if the village does not have a hereditary 'Dalpati' then the 'police station' choose one strong man of the village as Dalpati to resolve small conflicts in the village. It is very obvious such a man has to be rich, landed and dominant caste person because no one would listen to him otherwise. Adhyaksha of Singanodi panchayat stays in Bapur village and her husband is 'Dalpati' of that village. Similarly in Badangod panchayat the Dalpati belongs to Dasankoppa village. It is a bigger village and the panchayat office is situated there. Dalpati belongs to shet community. The Dalpati in Hankon village is from Konkan Maratha Caste. The panchayat headed by him assembles in the temple and people gather there for the solution of their problems. According to one of the respondents, who is also an SDMC member, there was major caste discrimination about 30 years ago. SCs used to stand outside the temple and speak out their problems from there. But now people prefer to talk amongst themselves or go to the police station if the dispute takes a larger form. In Bangarapet, Lingayats community dominates the panchayat. The head of traditional panchayat is known as Patel, who resolves the conflicts, even decides about who will contest the elections and whom should the people vote for.

Kerala:
In Kerala, the elected panchayat members and police station play a major role in dispute resolution. No traditional or caste panchayat exists parallel to the elected one which takes decisions or resolves conflicts of the people. However, the tribes have their community head; he calls meetings and listens to people's problems.

However, the effectiveness of such meeting stops there. According to Sukuma, the head "Urumoopan" of Mannan tribe in Kanjikuzhy village, such leader cannot do much for the people. He can only forward the demands and applications to the panchayat members or officials. Rest everything depends on the availability of funds.
A separate colony has been built by the state for this tribe. It is known as "Mazhuvazhi Ummenchandi Tribal Colony." The present head was democratically elected by the tribe almost 10 yrs ago and will continue to be so far an indefinite period. Such tribal heads are crowned as hereditary leaders or are elected by the people. In Kanimbetta village, the Kuruchija tribe resides in Chitramoola ward (4). Their head is a senior political leader in BJP. This tribe has been a warrior tribe and socially and educationally better than Panniyas, Kattunayakas.

Analysis of issues related to participation:

1. **Primacy of Caste in rural local governance:**
   The implementation of the idea of 'participation of all' is done on the basis of adult franchise which in turn upholds the principle of equality amongst the citizens. At this point one can refer to the perennial debate in social theory about the priority of the individual or the collective. Young opines that social groups provide the contexts within which our identities are shaped, and consequently that the way these social groups are treated has a bearing on the treatment of individual who carry those group characteristics. Her view is that identity is absolutely a social construction and that in modern pluralistic societies that construction takes place in complex overlapping contexts.

   One such context is caste. Caste as a social construct is absolutely different from caste as a political construct. To briefly explain caste as a social construct one can revert to Dumont. He says, "... the caste system is a state of mind, a state of mind which is expressed by the emergence, in various situations, of groups of various orders generally called 'castes'". This state of mind provides “the orientation towards the whole ... which in the eyes of those who participate in it legitimizes their respective positions.” Moreover "to adopt a value is to introduce hierarchy, and a certain consensus of values, a certain hierarchy of ideas, things and people, is indispensable to social life". This hierarchical principle, according to Dumont, is responsible for the "linear order of castes from A to Z ..." such a social construct is found throughout India, including the three states under study, Karnataka, Kerala and Bihar. Kerala was

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38 Ibid., 96
39 Ibid., 54.
one of the most traditional caste system societies in India until about the mid-20th century. However, during the second half of the 20th century Kerala’s rigid caste system underwent massive transformation. Three factors have been crucial in the shaping of a new social order: land reform, international migration, and the democratization of education.\textsuperscript{40} Karnataka has also been highly polarized in terms of caste affiliations. The dominance of Lingayats and Vokkaligas has been witnessed throughout the social strata of the state. As landowners and agricultural labourers themselves, their antagonism towards dalits and other low castes was not just caste based, but had class nuances too. Measures like land reforms, protective discrimination and release of bonded labourers only added fuel to the fire.\textsuperscript{41} Bihar with its completely agrarian set up and compartmentalized social structure has been at the top for its upper caste/ lower caste divide.

Beteille\textsuperscript{42} argues that a true egalitarian recognizes that our social practice is permeated by inequality, but he maintains that it can and should be brought in line with the principle of equality. From states’ point of view the inequality that exists at the social level can be rectified by bringing in equality at the political level. To bridge the gap positive discrimination in form of reservation of seats has also been introduced. And this is the point where the caste becomes a political construct. Inspite of being aware of the political gains on caste basis, there are three factors that were found to be hampering the participation of the Scheduled Castes in the governance processes. The three essential features that restrain the marginalized groups from participating in the governance processes are: Discrimination within Scheduled Castes, Pre acceptance of social order and Irrelevance of education.

2. Scheduled Castes are not a homogeneous category: Discrimination within Scheduled Castes

Socio-political discrimination:

In Bihar one could witness discrimination within Scheduled Castes in participation in Grama Panchayats. Dom, Bhuinya and Dusadh are the sub-castes that are

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Saseendran Pallikadavath, and Wilson, C. ‘A Paradox within a Paradox Scheduled Caste Fertility in Kerala’, Economic and Political Weekly, July 9, 2005, pp 3087.
\item \textsuperscript{41} K G. Gayathri Devi. ‘Telangana’s of Karnataka’, Economic and Political Weekly, 28 April, 2007. pp 1574
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
discriminated against by the other Scheduled Castes such as Ravidas, Paswaan, Passi etc. Their participation in the Grama Panchayats is almost negligible. They are not involved in NREGS works, their children do not go to aanganwaadi or schools (let alone participating in MDM). They are not supported by the dominant castes during the elections because their numeric strength is not as high as that of Ravidas or Paswaan (in the villages covered). The attitude of other Scheduled Castes towards these castes is almost same as that of any other caste. I had to face much resistance in a ‘chamar-toli’(Chamar -hamlet) when I asked them to take me to a ‘bhuin-tola’ (Bhuinya hamlet) which was near by. The reason being that they were extremely dirty and men were drunk all the time, so it was quite unsafe for me to go there. This discrimination was witnessed while talking about their participation in Grama Panchayats, as has been discussed above.

Economic discrimination:
Since the labour wages are high in Kerala, there is huge influx of labourers from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. These labourers have migrated as early as 30-35 years ago and are working in the tea states. They are mostly uneducated and work as temporary workers in the tea estates. Because these Scheduled Castes workers are migrants they do not have the benefit of the Scheduled Castes provided by the Kerala government, such as money for educating children or other plan funds by the panchayats or even claim for the post of anganwaadi worker for the women. The tehsildar has asked them to get Scheduled Castes certificate from their native places. But they cannot afford to go to those places because they can’t spend 3000-4000 on travel and stay in those places till they get the certificates. Some of them have stayed here for so long that they would have to work hard to establish their domicile to their native places and finally if they leave their daily wages the family will starve. There is discrimination between Scheduled Castes who have migrated and those who are natives of Kerala. The natives are economically better, most of them are permanent employees in the estates, are getting better wages and avail facilities provided by the panchayats.

3. Pre acceptance of social order:
The caste system is such a quintessential feature of Indian society that one cannot study any feature of political, economic or social aspect without referring to it. Participation in the governance processes is very much affected by which side of caste
Coming from Scheduled Castes community is pre accepted in all three states but with varying result.

a. Residence demarcated:

In all three states the colonies are demarcated on the basis of caste. In Bihar the village is divided on the basis of tolas. These tolas are named on castes such as Mushahri tola (Mushahars), paswaan tola, Hari tola, chamar toil, bhuin tola etc. Karnataka too has separate Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes colonies. In Kerala the panchayat has provided land and house to the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes in form of colonies that are known as Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes colonies. There is no effort from the panchayat or society to mingle habitation.

**Naluchera (Scheduled Castes colony), Purrakad Village-Panchayat, Ambalapuzha**

It is possible to reach the pace by three modes of transport - car, walk (of about 3 Km) and boat. The place called Naluchera means Nalu ie Four and Chera ie Prison or confinement. This village is surrounded by water on all four sides almost through out the year. Naluchera village is populated with Scheduled Castes Pulaya caste and also Ezhava communities. The village itself is divided into 2 areas: Ikkara and Akkara which means this side and that side dividing both the sides by a canal. Traditionally/historically Ikkara is occupied by the caste hindus and Ezhava community and Akkara belongs to Scheduled Castes, Pulaya community. This is one of the features of the caste system as Scheduled Castes communities have always lived on the exterior portion of the village.

Akkara is flood prone area where there is frequent rise in the water level due to heavy rain. The houses often get submerged under water and they go to Ikkara and make temporary relief camps for themselves. The various small canals connect the tributary of the river to the Thottapally spillover and then flows to the sea. The boats are the medium of transport for the people to the mainland. This Nalluchera colony was established n 1982 under the Integrated Harijan Development Project (IHDP) by the state government. Most of the people are daily wage earners and dependent on fishing. In 1982 these people received some land from the state but it is mostly under water for a large part of the year. Constraint of the colony: frequent floods, land problem (most of it is under water throughout the year), no health centres, sanitation, livelihood (no proper fishing nets), transport (no proper road or bridge for the colony.
with the mainland), LP school and UP school are located quite far (3 and 8 Km respectively in the mainland).

**Kanjikuzhi Panchayat village (Mazhuvazhi Oommenchandy tribal colony (Mannan tribe), IHDP colony (Hindu Ullada Community))**

This village panchayat covers an area of approximately 225 km. all the communities Hindu, Nairs, Christians, muslims, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes stay in this area. Population is mixed and there is no demarcation on the caste lines. People vote in the elections according to party lines. However, the tribal settlements are separate especially two tribes Mannan and Hindu Ullada Community have been give houses by the state with the help of the panchayats. But their assimilation into the mainstream is not complete, both in terms of material factors as well as involvement in the panchayat related affairs.

b. **Scheduled Castes work defined:**

The socio economic profile of the respondents shows that most of the Scheduled Castes are engaged as agricultural labourers, coolies or daily wage private workers. The wages earned are different in three states. There is also gender difference in wage provided for same nature of work done in all three states. Minimum wage is different for different works in Kerala. For example workers in the plantation estates or ginger farms are paid around Rs 250 -300 per day where as for other private or coolie work the minimum amount is Rs 200 per day. In Karnataka the agriculture labour wage ranges from Rs 80 to 50 per day for males and Rs 30 to 50 for females. In Bihar the wage is Rs 50 and Rs 20-30 for male and females working as agricultural labourers.

**ASHA worker:** Shanti Devi, (caste: Chamar, age 50 yrs), is an ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist). She has studies till std 7th and has received training in institutional delivery from a nearby government hospital in Bihta block for one month. For every institutional delivery she gets Rs. 200. But for that she has to take care of the pregnant woman for complete period and has to reach her to hospital for delivery. According to her, now the upper caste housewives are also applying for ASHA training. They have money, contacts even vehicle to reach the patient to the hospital in emergency. So people prefer to go to them rather than come to her. She agrees that such facilities (with that of upper caste ASHA workers) are beneficial to
the patient but laments on the loss of job that has traditionally been identified with her caste. *(Hum ta jaat ke chamain baani.... Aaj jab sarkar ke taraf se paisa milal lagal ta badka log bhi eehe kaan kare laglan...*(traditionally our caste women have been doing this job, but now when it is a paid, government job even the upper caste people have started doing it)

In Kerala panchayat has created posts of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes promoters with a two pronged approach. First is to provide jobs to youth from these communities and second is to procure information about the needs of the people and prioritize their applications for various schemes meant for them. The work of these promoters is to be a channel between the panchayat members/officials and the villagers, their accountability being towards both the sides. However, there is lack of initiative from within the Scheduled Castes members for upward mobility in occupation (for eg getting regular jobs, or moving out of the village in search of job opportunity). The reasons cited were: panchayat has provided house, children are getting free education, and the daily wage is sufficient to sustain their family. Moving out of the village was not seen as a welcome idea as it would bring instability to their household.

4. Irrelevance of education

As has been mentioned earlier, social opportunities can enhance the quality of life. One such opportunity is education. It not only enables one to read and write but also only provides option for occupational mobility.

Kerala has highest literacy rate in the country. There is free education for all till 10th standard. There are several schemes that have been introduced by the state as well as the panchayats for the promotion of the Scheduled Castes. Financial help is given to the families of children going to school along with dress, books, etc provided in Sarva Siksha Abhiyan. Several schemes such as ‘Munnetram’ (Progress), ‘Thodakkam-Thodarashi’ (Beginning and continuity) and Ganitha Padhnam (Mathematics classes) have been started by the state and the panchayat to bring back the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes drop-outs to the school. However, most of these students are not inclined towards studying more. At the most they study till 10th std. and then join coolie/agriculture labourer work. The reason being that they do not have the confidence that higher studies would give them any good job though the Scheduled Castes have reservation in government services and preference in many jobs still the
benefit is reaped by the already well established families. Education is pursued only because the state in Kerala is very particular about the literacy mission.

The benefit of higher education reaped by the already well established Scheduled Castes is share in Karnataka too. The rural Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes community sees no relevance of education. There is no surety of getting work even after getting higher education, so no use of wasting time. They cannot question the authorities (government or political) on any discrepancy or corruption on any scheme (especially the Bhagyalakshmi and widow pension scheme).

In Bihar the scenario of primary education is quite grim. Caste discrimination exists in the seating arrangement of children, lower caste children are made to run errands and teachers do not teach. According to some of the respondents, it was better to send the child to any upper caste house as a house-help than to keep him in the village. There at least he would get good food and manners than staying in the village and get addicted to drinking.

In Karnataka and Bihar dissatisfaction was reported by the respondents regarding the wages provide for the private agricultural works. Given an opportunity they would migrate to other states where better wages were provided. They also admitted discriminatory behaviour towards them in other states but still the income and nature of work were much better to make them migrate to other states in search for work.

NREGS work is interpreted as panchayat work taken up by people of all castes. Generally, men don’t prefer to work for the NREGS job because wage is less and payment is delayed. However women are too keen to work for it because: it is a panchayat work so a government job, payment is made through bank so they can easily apply for the SHG loans and get larger loans sanctioned and lastly an income of around Rs. 12000 is a yearly saving for most of the families.

In Karnataka, the lingayats and other upper caste people do not mix up with the Scheduled Castes while doing the NREGS work. Participation of women is very less. They prefer to stay in the house than do the mud- work.

In Bihar NREGS work is looked down upon as a menial low caste job.

Mid-day meals are expected to lead to social equity by undermining caste discrimination. One such measure is appointment of women cooks from Scheduled Castes communities. In the schools visited in Kerala the food is essentially cooked by a Scheduled Castes women (preferably destitute or widow). There are no caste issues regarding the cooking or sharing of meals. However in Karnataka, the head cook (who
prepares the meals) is an upper caste woman. The assistants for chopping, cleaning etc are from other communities out of whom one has to be fro Scheduled Castes community. The ostensible explanation is of lack of education amongst the women from these communities which has to be followed according to the government orders.

In Bihar there are no regular cooks appointed in the schools. They are hired on contract basis, the terms of which are decided by the Headmasters of the respective schools. The reason cited for this condition was lack of funds and thus irregularity in preparation of MDM. There were many instances where caste factor lead to exploitation of labour and blatant mockery of efforts to bring about social equity. One of them is quoted below.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL (Rajkiya Uttramit Madhya Vidyalaya), Mangarpal Grama Panchayat, Maner Block, Patna**

As told by the headmaster, this was a primary school, but has been upgraded to middle school only few years back. It has 4 classrooms and according to the headmaster MDM is cooked everyday except on Saturday and Sunday. There is only one cook (caste: Yadav) for the work. She is widow with 7 children to take care of.

Mukhia entered while the headmaster was elaborating about the midday meal facility. With the permission of the headmaster, he called the cook and asked her how much did she cook daily. The reply was 12-18 kg khichdi or 14kg rice and dal for at least 160 children per day. According to the payment system (no one had any idea about the source of this system), the cook should be paid 50ps per child per day in this scheme. He then asked the headmaster as to how many days, meals were provided in the school? According to the headmaster 20 days is the minimum number of days when MDM should be served. Mukhia now asks me to calculate how much should the cook be paid? It comes out to be Rs. 1600/ month. However, since her appointment (from January 07 to May, 08), the cook had been paid only Rs 3300/- that too in installments of 300/700/500 etc. Both head master and cook acknowledged that a minimum sum of Rs 500 was promised to her every month according to which she
should have at least got Rs. 6000/- till now (due to some construction work MDM was not provided for 5 months in between). Mukhia warned the headmaster to clear her account and at the same time enlightened me on the kind of corruption that’s happening in this scheme.

5. Disillusionment with the representatives from marginalized sections of the society and the efficacy of the election process:

As quoted in the theoretical framework, Fraser opines that, “institutionalized patterns of cultural value constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction, then we should speak of misrecognition and status subordination."\(^ {43}\)

Culturally and socially inferior groups of the society are perceived as inferior even if they are given political recognition in the local governance processes.

For eg the women stay away from the Gram Sabhas. The general caste women stay away because they consider it to be the forte of the men folk and the SC/ST women do not participate for the fear of being humiliated. Women mukhia belonging to the SC/ST category are doubly marginalized: she is remote controlled by her husband who in turn is controlled by dominant caste local elite. All the decisions of gram panchayat are taken by them. An instance can be quoted from the field. Chakhand Panchayat-village (Gaya Sadar, Gaya, and Bihar) has a women mukhia belonging to SC category (Ravidas). She refused to speak anything without her husband being at her side (*Hum kuchho nahi jante hain, sab who hi dekhte hain...unko aane dijiye wohi batange.*) Next day her husband was present with another person (who is from upper caste and planning to contest for MLA seat from this constituency) who insisted on explaining everything to me because it has been more than a decade that he is looking after panchayat activities.

6. Role of local elites in participation of marginalized groups in governance processes:

Studies show that access to four set of activities: livelihood stability, poverty reduction, employment generation and essential services such as education, health, drinking water etc fulfill the requirement of a better life.44 (Krishna:2002:85).

These activities involve various actors or ‘agencies’ such as political parties,45 caste association,46 patron-client relations,47 government agencies,48 old community leaders, new development oriented leaders etc. the present study tries to analyze the role of four local development actors namely, local elected political leaders, local bureaucracy, local elites and local NGOs.

The only local political bodies elected by the villagers and accountable to them on a day to day basis are the village panchayat. Other elected agencies are not local and no other local agencies are elected.49 Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women in the Grama Panchayats aimed at a three fold outcome: first, empowerment and involvement of this section of society in decision making, approachability for other members of these sections of society and creating awareness amongst them about their rights. All the selected schemes involve panchayats at some level of implementation and it is here that new patterns of inclusion and exclusion emerge.

Local elites play a very important role in nomination of candidates, mobilization of people, and maintenance of harmonious relations or resolutions of conflicts among villagers. Any devolution of powers without taking into account the influence of local elites would not be much successful.

Local Elites:

The interpretation of participation can range from just a nominal membership in a group, and at the other end it could imply having an effective voice in the decision-

making process. The proponents of the social capability approach differentiate between efficiency-based participation and agency-based participation. Former sees participation as an instrumental means to the ends that vary from institutional efficiency to state-defined public interests. The latter concerns itself with the role of human agency in policy and political changes. It emphasizes the empowerment of those who are affected by these policies and political changes, along with an equitable distribution of costs and benefits among them. Participation here becomes a goal in itself.

Participation as a means of ensuring Equity and Empowerment is derived from two broad theoretical foundations. The first is contemporary democratic theory, which articulates a preference for a deepening of the democratization process. The other theoretical foundation to the approach of viewing participation as a means of ensuring Equity and Empowerment derives from Amartya Sen’s work on entitlements and capabilities. As mentioned in the previous chapter the goal of empowerment (focus on enlarging a person’s ‘functioning and capabilities to function’), equity (of both costs and benefits) and human agency need more attention than the issues of efficiency as the main objectives of development. The basic objective of development is expansion of capabilities for their ‘intrinsic value’. For achieving this broad goal, this ‘people-centered’ approach puts human agency and its contribution to ‘changing policy, social commitment, and norms that require collective action’ at the centre stage.

Participation of the poor can be enhanced only if they can be assured of a stake in the political process. But local elite play a dominant role in identification of the direction of policy as they act as the means of coercion for the individual at the village. By treating elite as a hinge group through which new social groups are integrated into the political arena one can examine the pattern in which the voting process is influenced by the power of the elite.

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52 “The bettering of human life does not have to be justified by showing that a person with a better life is also a better producer”. So, development policies should not view people as the ‘means of production’ but as an ‘end’ in themselves Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, New Delhi, 1995, pp 183-85].


In the present study it was found that the rural elite essentially had following characteristics:

I. Politically well connected either to party officials or to local elected leaders.

II. Economically strong, with a good agrarian background

III. Belonged to the dominant caste, where caste played a pivotal role.

IV. Well educated

V. Trusted or feared by the people.

Where political parties are functional elite domination works through indirect means through network formation. For eg in Kerala party workers are actively involved as members of the civil society organizations whether through self help groups (kudumbashree), or in various vigilance committees or in committee related to school management. Their work is to disseminate information to the people regarding schemes and other related activities. But all such effort is initiated by the party and the mobilization at the time of elections takes place on this basis. The parties build their cadre from the village level so individual has little role to play in the choice of candidates. It was also noted that it is almost impossible for an independent candidate to win the election. Even if she does the majority party gets the presidential post.

In Karnataka elite dominance works through a unique combination of caste and party affiliation. None of the two are strong enough to overpower the other. Manor puts forth three factors for the above: first, the coalitions at the state level have ensured that collective leadership usually predominates, second politicians there have risen through the ranks of their parties, so individuals do not emerge larger than parties. It is thus unusual to find a party in Karnataka entirely dominated by one leader. Third, the alternation of parties in power has meant that no leader has been so successful at the polls that he/she becomes more important than the party and can do whatever he/she pleases. Given the diverse social and political changes in the last three decades, importance of caste as a social institution has diminished. It has eventually come to denote ‘difference’ rather than ‘hierarchy’. This has resulted in making individuals matter more than social institutions and groups. Given the two laterally

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56 Ibid.,656..
opposite phenomena, the choice of candidate is governed by: one, whether he is backed by any party and two, whether he has social acceptance of the people.\(^\text{57}\)

In Bihar, caste is the only basis on which politics works. Where the seats are reserved, the candidate is supported by the dominant caste groups (Bhumihar, Rajput or Yadav).

The extent of differentiation and the underlying motivation of the elite functioning as intermediaries in negotiation, the elite can assume a parasitical presence in the politicization of the Indian electorate. Mitra\(^\text{58}\) further emphasises the indispensability of the rural elite who possess a social identity while not a ritual identity. At the same time, the ascendance of the lower social strata leads to a transformation of the local basis of power and caste associations become geared towards directing the demise of the unequal caste hierarchy. Both political and local elites play an important role in the selection and winning of candidates.

\(^{57}\) One can take the example of Dalpati as cited in previous chapter in the section of Dispute resolution.