Chapter – I

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Development without the participation of the people has no meaning. Participation is the people’s involvement in the decision-making process about what is to be done and by whom; their involvement in implementing the programme, sharing benefits, and monitoring and evaluating the programme (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). Policy makers and implementers often mistake development to refer to both human and economic development. “The purpose of development is to help people live longer, more productive, and more fulfilling lives.” This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth (Singla, 2007:23). Some of the issues of human development are gender inequality, the lower status of women, and the consequent low level of participation by women in the decision-making process. Development till date is not sex neutral—it is biased against the fair sex (Joseph, 1997). If more number of women are not involved in the decision making process, it is not possible to hope for a sustainable development. The best way to judge the position of a nation is to find out the status of its women. If the position of women is good, then such society could be called as a developed society.

There is no doubt that women in India have played an important role in history and social life. They have participated in every branch of national activity, from high learning to showing valour on the battlefield. But it is their unobtrusive work in the household, in the village or in the larger community that has moulded the nation (Nehru, 1990). History makes it clear that the women in our country remained socially and politically backward. However, in the Rig-Veda, women were considered as ‘sahadharminis’ to their husband which means that they were fully the equal of men. Thus, the Rig-Veda accorded the highest social position to women of those days. The Upanishads also throws light on the intellectual life of the times in which men and women were equal participants. As far as women participation in politics is concerned, history presents us with some very powerful queens like Elizabeth I, Anne, and Victoria of England, Catherine the Great of Russia, Christina of Sweden, and Razia Sultan, Jhansi Rani Lakshmi Bai, Shanthala, Kittore Rani Chennamma, and Rani Abbakkka (India). During ancient times, the laws of most nations excluded women from succeeding to the throne and so women could play political roles only as wives and mothers or mistresses of kinds (Ambedkar and Nagendra, 2011).
The Indian National Congress on its formation opened its platform to women who spoke, voted and worked as delegates. It is significant to note that Dr. Annie Besant presided over the first annual meetings of the Indian National Congress. The women’s Indian Association along with diverse bodies protested for the women’s franchise to be made similar to men and also for eligibility for women to all elective posts. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy was the first Indian woman to be nominated to the Legislative Council by the Madras Government and also the first to be elected its Vice-President. The women’s movement, certainly, had Gandhi’s blessings but he had been initially averse to women taking an active part in the Salt Satyagrah. This was resisted by Margaret Cousins strongly. Women are of the opinion that no conferences, congresses or commissions dealing with the welfare of India should be held without their presence. Due to their sustained and persistent struggle for equal rights and franchise, women were allowed to take part actively in the provinces and the Central Legislative Assembly. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was the first Indian woman to serve as Minister of Local-self-Government and Public Health in the then UP Congress Government. Aruna Asaf Ali was the first woman to hoist the Indian flag in 1942, in Bombay (Prasad, 2011). The participation of women in local self-government was not satisfactory until the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The women in our country constitute 48 per cent of the total population of which 43.88 lakh women are engaged in the organized sector and 17.77 lakh in the private sector (Singh, 2001). Women play a vital role in the development of the country, but their contribution is neglected and underestimated. The Indian society is male dominated and all the decisions are taken by the male. Opportunity for education, employment, participation in public affairs is very less for women. Even though the Constitution guarantees free primary schooling to everyone up to 14 years of age, very few females attend school. Only about 39 per cent of all women in India actually attend primary schools. There are several reasons why families choose not to educate their daughters. One reason is that parents get nothing in return for educating their daughters. Another reason is that all the females in a household have the responsibility of the housework. So even though education does not financially burden the family, it costs them the time she spends at school when she could be
doing household chores. In addition, even if a woman is educated, especially in the poorer regions, there is no hope for a job. The majority of the jobs women perform are agricultural or domestic in nature which does not require a formal education. Another reason girls are not educated is because families are required to supply a chaste daughter to the family of her future husband. With two-thirds of the teachers in India being men and the students are also predominately male, putting a daughter in school, surrounded by males all day could pose a possible threat to their virginity (Sharma and Bakshi, 2009).

Historians tell us that during the early Vedic period women enjoyed a position of high status and esteem. They had the same educational and social opportunities as men. There were many educated women in those days, though most of them belonged to families of eminent scholars and received their education at home or Ashramas. But around 200 BC., Manu, the architect of the Hindu caste system retrograded the status of women to a position inferior to that of men. The Rig Veda, written sometime around 180 BC or so, however accepted women as equals of men in matter of participation in debates, performance of religious rituals and also other temporal affairs of social life. Efforts to educate women were made, but they generally belonged to high families, and received education in residential schools and became scholars. It was around 500 BC that Mahatma Buddha also advocated education and emancipation of the women. In due course, however, the gradual lowering of the status of women was witnessed, as the renowned Hindu scholar and philosopher Shankarcharya, who lived during 788 to 820 AD, opposed female education. This was an unfortunate development, because, the elite among men, who wielded considerable power, exercised total subjugation, adverse casteism, and domination over the common people-the poor and the simpletons, both men and women- for their perverted and selfish ends. During the subsequent eras of the Rajput rulers, the slave dynasty kings, and the Mughul emperors women were subjected to abject deprivation and humiliating subjugation. The Muslim religious heads prescribed ‘purdah’ and the system of ‘Harem’ or ‘Zenana’ for women. It was during the above period that the practice of Sati, which was originally a voluntary act of self-immolation by a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband, developed in to an extremely inhuman and barbaric practice (Noatay, 2007).
1.2 Significance of the Study

A study on the women participation in Gram Panchayats in selected districts of Karnataka is unique in nature. It is intended to bring out an in-depth understanding on the profile of the elected women representatives in the Gram Panchayats of Udupi and Chamarajanagara districts in Karnataka with a holistic perspective. This understanding would help the policy makers, planners, social workers, and development organizations working on Panchayat Raj Institutions and rural development. This study also helps to ensure gender equality and social justice for the participation of women in Local Self Government with reference to the Gram Panchayats.

1.3 Participation: Conceptual Review

It was in the mid-1970s that the search for an ‘alternative development strategy’ was initiated (Oakley, 1991). People participation is crucial in the effective implementation of any development project. The majority of the developmental projects failed due to the lack of people’s involvement in the planning and implementation of the project. People can participate as consultants, decision makers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. The involvement of all categories of society is essential to achieve sustainable development. In Africa, it has been found that ignoring the women’s farming practices was the root cause for the decrease in farm production (Nelson and Wright, 1995). This highlights the need for the participation of people of all categories like SCs, STs, and women. Participation is a process through which stakeholder’s influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect the people (World Bank, 1996).

Participation is the people’s involvement in the decision making process about what is to be done and by whom, their involvement in implementing the programme, sharing benefits and monitoring and evaluating the programme (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). The core features of participation are - it is a voluntary involvement of the people; the people who participate influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources; it is a process of involvement of people at different stages of the project or programme; and the ultimate aim is to improve the well-being of the people who participate. The people’s participation in the
development programmes is not an end in itself; it is now considered as a means to get the highest benefit from the public programmes and services (Khwaja 2004).

The major reasons for emphasizing participation are as follows:

- Participation results in better decisions.
- People are more likely to implement the decisions that they made themselves rather than the decisions imposed on them from above.
- Motivation is frequently enhanced by setting up of goals during the participatory decision making process.
- Participation improves communication and cooperation (Locke, 1968).
- People may learn new skills through participation; leadership potential may be readily identified and developed (Heller et al., 1998).

Participation at the local level of governance refers to the involvement of people of diverse backgrounds, pursuing particular or common objectives. People have, however, different reasons for participating in an activity or event. This means that there are different drives or needs that motivate a person to participate in an activity. For example, why should a woman contest a panchayat election and participate in local governance? Some of the reasons could be the respect, the status and the popularity, the satisfaction or the chance to solve some of the issues affecting them in the village. There can also be expectations of monetary gains, breaking away from traditional roles, or even escape from the rigorous daily chores. These reasons can be categorized into three types, viz., existence, relatedness, and growth, as explained by Alderfer (Quoted by Robbins, 2002). Increasingly, people’s participation in local governmental affairs is considered an indivisible part of the meaning of democracy at local levels (Cornwall 2004a; Lawson & Gleeson 2005). Pimbert and Wakeford (2001, 23) argue that it is a very defining characteristic of modern democracy, as they state; “democracy without citizen deliberation and participation is ultimately an empty and meaningless concept”.

1.3.1 Grama Sabha

A Grama Sabha is a body consisting of persons registered in the voter’s list of the Grama Panchayat. It is obligatory on the part of the Grama Panchayat to convene a Grama Sabha meeting at least once in six months. All the adults who are in the voter’s list of the village are members of the gram sabha (Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act, 1993).
1.3.2 Ward Sabha  
A ward sabha is a body consisting of persons registered in the voters’ lists of each Gram Panchayat constituency (Ibid. 1993).

1.3.3 Village  
A village specified by the Governor through public notification for the purpose of this Act includes a group of villages so specified (Ibid. 1993).

1.3.4 Grama Panchayat  
A Gram Panchayat is an institution (by whatever name it is being called) of self-government constituted under Article 243B, for the rural areas. According to the Act, a Gram Panchayat is constituted for a population between 3000 and 5000. The area covered by a Gram Panchayat includes a group of villages. There will be one member for every 400 persons. The adyaksha and upadyaksha (president and vice president) are elected from among the elected members (Ibid. 1993).

1.3.5 Taluk Panchayat  
The Taluk Panchayat established under this Act states that for each taluk, there shall be a taluk Panchayat consisting of local representatives from the state legislature and parliament apart from one-fifth of the Grama Panchayat presidents in the taluk chosen by lots every year (in rotation). Members are directly elected from the separate territorial constituencies at the rate of one member for every 10000 population (Ibid. 1993).

1.3.6 Zilla Panchayat  
Zilla Panchayat means Zilla Panchayat established under this Act. Each district will have a Zilla Panchayat consisting of members of parliament and the legislature from within the district, the presidents of taluk Panchayats in the district and elected members in accordance with the scale of one member for 40,000 of the population. The elected members shall choose two members from amongst themselves to the post of president and vice president (Ibid. 1993).

1.3.7 Section 11 - Qualification for membership  
Every person whose name is in the list of voters of any Grama Panchayat constituency shall, unless otherwise disqualified under this Act or under any other law for the time being in force, be qualified to be elected as a member of the Grama Panchayat:
Provided that in the case of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes or Schedule Tribes or Backward Classes and women, no person who is not a member of any of the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes or Backward Classes or is not a woman; as the case may be, shall be qualified to be elected to such seat (Ibid, 1993).

1.3.8 Section 12 - Disqualification for members

A person shall be disqualified for being chosen and for being a member of a Grama Panchayat,

(a) If he is so disqualified by or under any law for the time being in force for the purposes of the elections to the State Legislatures:

Provided that no person shall be disqualified on the ground that he is less than twenty five years of age, if he has attained the age of twenty-one year.

(b) If he has been sentenced by a criminal court to imprisonment for a term exceeding three months in respect of an offence under The Karnataka Excise Act, 1965 (Karnataka Act 21 of 1966), such sentence not having been subsequently reversed or squashed or the offence pardoned; or

(c) If an order has been passed against him under Section 117 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (Central Act 2 of 1974), in proceedings instituted under Section 110 of the Code, such order not having been subsequently reversed or squashed; or

(d) If he has been dismissed from service under any local authority; or

(e) If, having been a legal or medical practitioner or a chartered accountant he has been disenrolled or suspended by order of a competent authority, the disqualification in the latter case being operative during the period of such suspension; or

(f) If he has been removed from membership of any local authority; or

(g) If he holds any office of profit under any local or other authority subject to the control of the Central Government, the State Government or the Government of any other State, other than such offices as are declared by rules made under this Act not to disqualify the holder.

1.4 Political Participation

Political participation is crucial in the effective functioning of a democratic system. The purpose of democracy serves only when people actively participate in the political affairs of the state and influence the policy of the government through exercising franchise, contesting election, by becoming the people’s representative,
holding public offices, criticizing the policies of the government which are against the interest of the public, giving petition and so on. Kumar (2009) in his article on ‘Patterns of political participation: trends and perspective’ mentioned that before turning to the issue of participation, it is better to look at the possible reasons why people do not vote and who the non-voters are. It is highlighted in the study that 60% of the voters have been exercising their franchise in different elections, and about 40% do not vote. Many attribute the non-voting to apathy and disinterest in politics. Non-voting was also because of faulty electoral rolls and the inability of some to produce proof of their identity, which is now mandatory for voting. Though there is no caste or community pattern to this, the lack of identity cards was more among rural than urban voters. Apathy or disinterest in the election was more among voters in metropolitan cities than those living in small towns and villages. Democratic decentralisation is a political ideal and local government is its institutional form of power in a way that the local affairs of the people are managed by means of their positive participation. Known by the popular name of democratic decentralisation, it implies extension of democracy at the grassroots level in view of the act that people’s participation signifies the constitution of a democratic government not merely at the top but also at the foundation level of the political system. It signifies marked devolution of power from the higher to the lower levels in a way that the units of local government exercise their power with the participation of people of that area with occasional control and supervision of the provincial and central governments (Subhash, 2008).

Political participation provides the citizens with “channels of direct access to the sources of authority.” Therefore, healthy, free and fair political participation are regarded as the life-belt of genuine representative government, serving important functions for both the citizens and the political system. It also relates to shaping and reshaping of power, authority or influence (Prasad, 2007). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) similarly, in their more recent work on political participation in America offer what they describe as an “expansive definition”: “Political participation is action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values.” According to the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 (N.P.P), a document of the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India, “Political participation includes an involvement in any form or activity that
affects or seeks to affect, these power relationships.” Political participation is an “activity that is intended to or has the consequence of affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action” (Verba et al., 1985:9). Political participation is not only related to electoral activities but is also about problem solving involving the members of the community in resolving the mass problems affecting the community. People’s representatives should develop a very good rapport with the officials and community people to work towards the empowerment of the community.

1.5 Evolution of Panchayat Raj Institutions

India has a great history of the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) beginning from the Vedic period. The Panchas of the village are considered as “Pancha Parameswara” that is representatives of the god. The Panchas played a crucial role in all matters related to the administration and legislature of the village. Various authors have used different stages to trace the history and functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institutions. Maheshwari (1963) has classified the history of Panchayat Raj System into six periods: Ancient India; Medieval India; Early British Period-1882-1919; Later British Period- 1919-1947; Post-Independence era-1947-59; Era of the beginning of the Panchayat Raj on October 2, 1959. The history of Panchayat Raj in India can be divided into the following periods from the analytical point of view:

1. Vedic era
2. Epic Era
3. Ancient Period
4. Medieval Period
5. British Period
6. Post-independence period (Joshi and Narwani, 2011).

The village panchayats is as old as India’s history, and they were responsible for finding solutions to village disputes. The members of the Panchayats were highly respected by the people and it has its unique administration pattern.

1.5.1 Vedic Era

‘Panch-Ayat’ is a group of five persons selected by the villagers. Indirectly, it denotes the system through which rural people are governed. It indicates that there was some method of self-government. In the old Sanskrit scriptures, there is a word
‘Panchayatan,’ which means a group of five persons, including a spiritual man. But, gradually the concept of the inclusion of a spiritual man in such groups vanished. In the Rigveda, there is a mention of ‘Sabha,’ ‘Samiti,’ and ‘Vidatha’ as local self-units. Subsequently, the panchayat became a group of any five selected persons of the village to decide the village disputes. The concept of ‘Panch Parmeshwar’ or ‘Panch-the God’ existed in the ancient age. There is a description of ‘Sabha’ and ‘Samiti,’ which were the democratic bodies at the local level. The king used to get the approval of the ‘Sabha’ or ‘Samiti’: regarding certain functions and decisions (Joshi and Narwani, 2011). In the Vedic age the concept of local self government is visible and these units had prominence in the administration.

1.5.2 Epic Era

Epic era indicates the two great epic periods of India, that is, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The study of Ramayana indicates that the administration was divided into two parts - ‘Pur’ and ‘Janpad’ or city and village. Villages were ‘Janpad’ and the village people were called the ‘Janpada.’ ‘Gram,’ ‘Maha Gram,’ and ‘Ghosh’ (Village, big village, and group of villages) are mentioned in the Ramayana. ‘Pattan’ were neither towns nor villages and served as ‘Mandi’ or market for the villagers. ‘Shreni’ and Nigam were there as local bodies but no description regarding their constitution is available in the Ramayana. In the whole of the state, there was also a Caste Panchayat and one person elected by the Caste Panchayat was the member of king’s Council of Ministers. Self-government of a village finds ample expression in the ‘Shanti Parva’ of the Mahabharata; in the Manu Smriti as well as in Kautilya’s Arthashastra. ‘Sabha’ and ‘Samiti’ played the part of controlling the decisions of the king. As per the Mahabharata, over and above the village, there were units of 10, 20, 100, and 1,000 village groups. ‘Gramik’ was the chief official of the village. ‘Dashap’ was the chief of ten villages. ‘Vinishya Adhipati,’ ‘Shat Gram Adhyaksha,’ and ‘Shat Gram Pati’ were the chiefs of 20, 100, and 1,000 villages, respectively. They used to collect the local taxes and were responsible for the protection / defense of their villages. The village heads also protected people against the cruelty of the king. The ‘Sabha Parva,’ of the Mahabharata mentions the Gram Panchayats but it is not clear whether the Panchas were elected by the people or nominated by the kings (Joshi and Narwani, 2011).
1.5.3 Ancient Period

There is a mention of village panchayats in Kautilya’s Arthashastra. He advised the king to constitute units of villages having 100-500 families. There would be centers of 10 villages, 200 villages, and 800 villages. These centers would be respectively known as ‘Sangrahan,’ ‘Karvatik,’ ‘Drona Mukh,’ and ‘Sthaneeya.’ The town was referred to as ‘Pur.’ Its chief was the ‘Nagarik.’ Local bodies were free from any interference from the king’s side (Joshi and Narwani, 2011).

During the Mauryan and Post-Mauryan periods too, the headman, assisted by the council of elders, continued to play a prominent role in the village life. The system continued through the Gupta period, though there were certain changes in the nomenclature, as the district official was known as the vishya pati and the village headman was referred to as the grampati. The village assembly consisted of all adult males. Sometimes the mahattras, i.e., the body of select elders, assisted the village headman. Thus, in ancient India, there existed a well established system of local government which was run on a set pattern of traditions and customs. The state functioned separately, never encroaching into the functioning of the village panchayats (Mookerji, 1958). The Neeti Shastra of Shukracharya also mentions village governance during this period. In South India, the ‘Satavahan’ kingdom existed in the 1st century B.C. There were local bodies for governance in the cities as well as the villages. The ‘Nadu Parishads’ were representative bodies which were solely responsible for the maintenance of the villages in northeastern India. They were small republics which were quite independent in internal matters. The village Panchayats were vested with sufficient administrative powers and the king’s interference was to the minimal (Joshi and Narwani, 2011). However, it is significant to note that there is no reference of women heading the panchayat or even participating as a member in the panchayat. Traditionally, Indian women confine themselves to only household activities and their participation in public affairs was not encouraged. One could not imagine women taking part in public affairs, especially in the village governance.

1.5.4 Medieval Period

During the Sultanate period, the Sultans of Delhi understood the fact that it was not possible to govern a vast country like India from the centre directly. Hence they divided their kingdom in to provinces called ‘Vilayat.’ For the governance of a village, there were three important officials - Mukkaddam for administration, Patwari
for collection of revenues, and Choudhrie for settling disputes with the help of the Panch. A village was the smallest unit where the management was looked after by the Lambardar, Patwari, and Chowkidar. The villages had sufficient powers as regards self governance in their territory. Panchayats were prevalent in villages in the medieval period. Agricultural produce from the villages was the main source of revenue for the state. The Marathas also constituted local self-government institutions in rural and urban areas during the rule of the Peshwas in Maharashtra area (Joshi and Narwani, 2011). Casteism and feudalistic system of governance under the Mughal rule in the medieval period slowly eroded the self-government in villages. A new class of feudal chiefs and revenue collectors (zamindars) emerged between the ruler and the people. And, so began the stagnation and decline of self government in villages (Srinivasrao, 2011). One of the biggest changes, which took place during the medieval period, was in the economic sphere, both at the urban and rural levels, under which organized economic activities began to take roots. This era is also marked by presence of both the rural and urban local governments (Khanna, 1979). It is again noteworthy to note that even in medieval period there is no mention of women participation in the local village administration.

1.5.5 British Period

Under the British regime, village panchayats lost their autonomy and became weak. Though, some researchers say that when the British came to India as the East India Company, the panchayats in most places were almost dead as units of administration (Maheshwari, 1963). Self governance was not the objective of the British government. The Panchayat, had never been the priority with the British rulers. It is only from the year 1870 that India saw the dawn of representative local institutions. The famous Mayo’s resolution of 1870 gave impetus to the development of local institutions by enlarging their powers and responsibilities. The year 1870, introduced the concept of elected representatives, in urban municipalities. The revolt of 1857 had put the imperial finances under considerable strain and it was found necessary to finance local service out of local taxation. Therefore it was out of fiscal compulsion that Lord Mayo’s resolution on decentralization came to be adopted (George, 2000). Viceroy Lord Mayo’s Resolution for decentralization of power to bring about administrative efficiency in meeting the people’s demands to augment the finances of the colonial regime gave the needed impetus to the development of local institutions. It was a landmark in the evolution of colonial policy towards local
government (Srinivasrao, 2011). Following the footsteps of Mayo, Lord Rippon in 1882 provided the much needed democratic framework to these institutions. All boards (then existing) were mandated to have a two-thirds majority of non-officials who had to be elected and the chairman of these bodies had to be from among the elected non-officials. This is considered to be the Magna Carta of local democracy in India (George, 2000).

Local self-government institutions received a boost with the appointment of the Royal Commission on centralisation in 1907 under the Chairmanship of C.E.H. Hobhouse. The commission recognized the importance of panchayats at the village level. The Royal Commission (1909) recommended that, “it is most desirable alike in the interest of decentralisation and in order to associate people with the local tasks of administration that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village panchayat for the administration of local villages” (Report of the Royal Commission on Decentralisation, 1907). It is in this backdrop, that the Montagu Chelmsford reforms were passed in the year 1919. This reform transferred the subject of local government to the domain of provinces. The reform also recommended that as far as possible there should be a complete control in local bodies and complete possible independence for them from external control. These panchayats covered only a limited number of villages with limited functions (Stephen, 2001) and due to organisational and fiscal constraints they did not become democratic and vibrant institutions of local self government at the village level. However, by 1925, eight provinces had passed the Panchayat Acts and by 1926, six native States had also passed panchayat laws. Local bodies were given more powers and functions to impose taxes were reduced. But, the position of the local self-government institutions remained unaffected. D.P. Mishra, the then minister for local self-government under the Government of India Act of 1935 in Central Provinces was of the view that “the working of our local bodies… in our province and perhaps in the whole country presents a tragic picture… ‘Inefficiency’ and ‘local body’ have become synonymous terms” (Ventakarangaiah, 1969).

1.5.6 Post –Independence Period

After the Constitution came into force, Article 40 made a mention of panchayats. “The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.” Article 246 empowers the state legislature to legislate
with respect to any subject relating to local self-government. However, this inclusion of panchayats into the Constitution was not unanimously agreed upon by the then decision-makers, with the major opposition having come from the framer of the Constitution himself, B.R. Ambedkar. He contended that, “the village communities were nothing but a den of ignorance, sink of localism, narrow mindedness and communalism.” He was glad that the draft Constitution had discarded the village and adopted the individual as the unit. Had it not been for Gandhi, the village panchayat would have been missing from the Indian system of governance. It was after much discussion among the supporters and opponents of the village panchayat that the panchayats finally got a place for themselves in the Constitution as Article 40 of the Directive Principles for State Policy. Since the Directive Principles are not binding principles, the result was the absence of a uniform structure of these bodies throughout the country (Singla, 2007).

After independence, as a development initiative, India had implemented the Community Development Programmes (CDP) on the eve of Gandhi Jayanti, the 2nd October, 1952 under the major influence of the Etawah Project undertaken by the American expert, Albert Mayer. It encompassed almost all activities of rural development which were to be implemented with the help of village panchayats along with the participation of people. In 1953, the National Extension Service was also introduced as a prologue to CDP. Community development is defined as “a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community, with the active participation and fullest possible reliance on community’s initiative” (U.N. Economic and Social Council, 1956). But the programme did not yield much result. There were various reasons for the failure of CDP like bureaucracy and excessive politics, lack of people participation, lack of trained and qualified staff, and lack of local bodies interest in implementing the CDP especially the village panchayats. People participation is crucial in the development of any society. It is crystal clear that development involves people participation, so development has been defined as the development of the people, by the people and for the people (Misra, 2000).

In 1957, the National Development Council constituted a committee headed by Balwant Rai Mehta, a Member of Parliament to look into the working of community development. It reported that the community development movement after its first
flush of momentum has lost its speed and was slowly tapering out. Further, it opined that, “the development cannot progress without responsibility and power.” The development of a community can take place only when the community understands its problems, realizes its responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers, through its close representatives and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration (Balwant Ray Mehta Committee Report, 1957). The team observed that the major reason for the failure of the CDP was the lack of people’s participation. In order to enhance participation, the team suggested that “a set of institutional arrangement” would have to be created to ensure people participation. The team felt that, “there should be a single representative and vigorous democratic institution to take charge of all aspects of development work in the rural areas… it must not be cramped by too much control by the government or government agencies…it must receive guidance which will help it to avoid mistakes. In the ultimate analysis, it must be an instrument of expression of the local people’s will in regard to local development.” The committee suggested a three-tier PRIs, namely, Grama Panchayats (GPs) at the village level, Panchayat Samiti (PSs) at the block level, and Zilla Parishad (ZPs) at the district level (Report of the Study Team for Community Project, NES, 1957).

The Union Government held meetings of state ministers and administrators to persuade the state governments to establish the three-tier system of panchayati raj. The Union Government agreed to guide and support the system. As a result, a net work of PRIs began to be built by the state governments. The lead in the establishment of panchayati raj system was taken by the states of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. The scheme of democratic decentralization was launched in Rajasthan on October 2, 1959. In Andhra Pradesh, the scheme was introduced on 1st November, 1959. The necessary legislation had also been passed and implemented in Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, and Punjab. In West Bengal the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1956 was already in force and legislation for setting up of bodies at the block and district level was undertaken. In Kerala, a new comprehensive panchayat act was passed in 1960 and was implemented. Legislation for the upper tier was also undertaken (Reddy, 1977).
The growth of PRIs during the post-independence period can be seen in three phases; first phase 1959 to 1966; second phase 1967 to 1976; and third phase 1977 to 1986 (Shivaiah, 1986). The first phase of the PRS in the post-Independence era between 1959 to 1964, plan periods was called as the “phase of ascendancy,” between 1965 to 1969 as the “phase of stagnation” and between 1969 to 1977 as the “phase of decline,” as commented by the Ashok Mehta Committee. The appointment of the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 did bring new thinking in the concepts and practice of the Panchayat Raj. The committee envisaged a role for the PR institutions, such that they would “under take democratic development management under conditions of rapid changes, continuous growth and sustained innovations in all spheres of rural life” (Government of India, 1978). With this purpose, the committee recommended a Panchayat Raj institutional structure consisting of Zilla Parishad, Taluk Samiti, and Mandal Panchayat. In order to use planning expertise and to secure administrative support, the district was suggested as the first point of decentralization below the state level. Based on its recommendation, some of the states like Karnataka incorporated them effectively. The Ashok Mehta committee recommended including the Panchayat Raj in the Constitution and genuine and effective devolution of powers to PRIs and that the primary unit in the Panchayat Raj system should be the Zilla Parishad and not the Panchayat Samiti. The committee favoured the participation of local parties in Panchayat elections with their symbols (Ashok Mehta Committee Report, 1978).

In order to revive and give a new lease of life to the panchayats, the Government of India had appointed various committees. The most important among them are the Hanumantha Rao Committee (1983), G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985), L.M.Singhvi Committee (1986) and the Sarkaria Commission on the Centre-State relations (1988), P.K. Thungan Committee (1989) and Harlal Singh Kharra Committee (1990). The G.V.K. Rao Committee(1985) recommended making the “district” as the basic unit of planning and also holding regular elections while the L.M.Singhvi committee recommended providing more financial resources to the panchayats to strengthen them. The Amendment phase began with the 64th Amendment Bill (1989) which was introduced by Rajiv Gandhi seeking to strengthen the PRIs. Rajiv Gandhi introduced various poverty eradication programmes like the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna (1989), the National Rural Employment Programme, and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme by integrating these with the
PRIs. The 64th Amendment Bill was the brain-child of the late Rajiv Gandhi, who strongly believed in strengthening panchayats by giving them Constitutional status. Unfortunately the Bill was not passed in the Rajya Sabha. The Constitution (74th Amendment) Bill (a combined bill for the PRIs and municipalities) was introduced on 7th September, 1990, but was never taken up for discussion (Singh and Mishra, 1993). It was during the Prime Ministership of P.V.Narasimha Rao that a comprehensive amendment was introduced in the form of the Constitution 72nd Amendment Bill in September 1991, which was subsequently referred to a joint Select Committee of the Parliament in December 1991 for a detailed examination.

Finally, after the necessary amendments, the Bill got the President’s assent on April 20, 1993 and the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act came into effect from April 24, 1993. The Act is considered as a landmark in the history of local self government. The Act provided a constitutional status to the village panchayats with major structural functional changes. The Act also made provisions for direct election, reservation for women, SCs and STs, formation of a State Finance Commission, a State Election Commission, regularity of the PRIs, conduct of Grama Sabha once in six months, and so on. One of the important features of the Amendment, relevant to this study, is the reservation of seats for women. This has been referred to by the scholars as the “political empowerment” of women. This has led to a sudden spurt in the number of women in the decision-making positions at the local level (Singla, 2007). From among the 15-20 lakh contesting in the polls, 7-8 lakh women elected and about 75,000 women as office bearers at all levels of Panchayats elections will provide opportunities to the younger generation to participate in the rural development process (Singh, 1993). However there are certain apprehensions with regard to certain provisions of the Act like one-third reservation to women. The question raised is will the illiterate and inexperienced women be able to participate in our country, which is male dominated. Another grey area is the lack of adequate funds in time. There is a need to enlarge the domain of panchayats to be able to raise their own funds. The interference of area MPs and MLAs in the functioning of panchayats is also likely to adversely affect their performance (Singla, 2007). However, the Amendment has been considered as a revolutionary step towards establishing grassroot democracy; it has ensured Constitutional status for people’s participation and self-governance.
1.6 Panchayati Raj in Karnataka

The State of Mysore (renamed as Karnataka in 1973) was formed in 1956 by bringing together the erstwhile princely state of Mysore districts of Bombay, three districts of Hyderabad, two districts of Madras, and the centrally administered territory of Coorg. The development of local governments in old Mysore state was not different from the development of local governments in India. The old Mysore state was ruled by many dynasties since the 6th century. History records that it was ruled by the Shatavahanas (121 B.C to 174 A.D), the Kadambas (360 A.D to 565 A.D), Gangas (350 A.D to 1050 A.D), Chalukyas of Badami (375 A.D 793 A.D), and the Rashtrakutas (9735 A.D to 973 A.D). Inscriptions dating back to 1005 AD provide considerable information on the subject. The tradition of village bodies was very strong. The local governments were called by different names like Grama, Agrahara, Nadu, and Vishaya. These kinds of local governments were powerful during the reign of the Cholas. There were autonomous local institutions called Grama and Agrahara. In Agrahara villages, the assembly of Mahajans (head of the families of learned Brahmins) served as the local body. At times, the village assembly was known by a numerical suffix as in the case of aivathu okkalu (50 families) or muvathu okkalu (30 families). The functions of the village assembly included maintaining temples, arranging festivals and running chaultries and aravattiges (centers to distribute water), collecting tolls, conferring gifts for meritorious services, installing statues of heroes who died while defending the village against raids by enemies and bandits, maintaining the families of such deceased heroes by grant of land, and settling disputes (Mathew, 1997).

Later, during the Wodeyar’s and Tippu’s rule not much notable changes occurred (Government of Mysore, Report on the Integration and Co-ordination Committee for Local Bodies 1969). In 1862, a ‘local fund’ was established in Karnataka for constructing roads and other subsidiary works. By 1874, local fund committees were established in each district. But these committees were dominated by official members who were unresponsive to the needs of the people. In 1902, the Mysore Local Boards Act established a three-tier system with a nominated Chairman at the Village Panchayat level, a Sub-divisional Officer as President of the Taluk Board, and a District Commissioner as President of the District Board. Local self-government had not yet arrived on the scene. It was only in 1918, with the passing of
the Mysore Local Boards and Village Panchayat Act, that elected members found a place in the system, allowing them some access to the decision-making process. This reform was motivated by the Mysore government inspired by the Madras Presidency where changes were taking place in response to the Montague Chelmsford reforms. Thus, for the first time, the Act provided that elected members should be vice-presidents of taluk and district boards. In 1926, the government enacted one more piece of legislation, namely the Mysore District and Mysore Village Panchayats Act, providing village and district panchayats with powers and resources to carry out basic civic amenities. By 1927, all the nine districts of the erstwhile Mysore State had elected members as board presidents (Chandrashekar, 2011).

With the removal of the Taluk Boards, the gap widened between the higher and lower tier. A direct link between these bodies was established with the dawn of independence in 1947. The Government of Mysore appointed a committee headed by Venkatappa (Integration and Co-ordination Committee) to study the local bodies. This committee recommended a two-tier system and the Mysore Government accepted the recommendation, i.e., to establish District Boards with indirectly elected members (Act of 1952).

But, there was considerable opposition to the establishment of the District Boards based on indirect election. Under such circumstances the Government appointed a ‘Local Boards Enquiry Committee’ to examine the question of using local bodies to implement important programmes, headed by Mr. D.H. Chandrashekarayya, which recommended a three-tier system with District Boards, Taluka Boards, and Village Panchayati with direct election as already recommended by the Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report. Later the Government of Mysore (Karnataka) adopted this system under the Act of 1959 and elections were conducted in 1960 (Naryanappa et al, 2010).

The Ashok Mehta Committee Report became an inspiration to the Janatha Dal government in the state to pass the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act in 1983. It set up elected bodies at the village and district level and an ex-officio body at the Taluk level. The Act provided for the reservation of seats for SCs, STs and women. Subsequent to the 73rd amendment, the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 was enacted. The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 bears a blue-print provided by the 73rd Constitutional
Amendment, which establishes a uniform three-tier system of Panchayat Raj. The 1993 Act which is a new Act, in terms of structure and content, hardly makes any direct reference to the previous, i.e., the 1959 or 1983 Acts. With the enactment of the 1993 Act, the three-tier system, with the Zilla Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Gram Panchayat, has been commissioned in the State for promoting economic development in rural areas and ensuring social justice to rural people, particularly the weaker sections. The Bill for constituting panchayats, which was introduced on April 1, 1993, came into force from May 18, 1993 (Chandrashekar, 2000).

1.7 Women in Panchayati Raj: A Historical Perspective

Women participation in Panchayati Raj institutions prior to the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was very low. The system of Panchayati Raj, which was initiated mainly for people’s participation in the political and economic processes somehow, has not been successful in ensuring women’s participation. The champions of the Panchayati Raj system desired that rural women should not only become the beneficiaries of development, but more importantly, the contributors to it. The Balwantrai Mehta Committee was particular that women should find representation in rural political institutions. Hence, it recommended that besides the 20 members of the Panchayat Samiti, there should be two women “who are interested to work among women and children” as co-opted members (Government of India Report, 1957). By 1970s in a majority of states, seats were reserved for women. In case no one was elected, they were co-opted (Ambedkar and Shailaja, 2005). Still the situation remained unchanged and the participation of women in politics was minimal. The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) set up in 1971 to look into the various aspects of women’s status, including their political participation, presented its report in 1974. The Committee noted the ineffectiveness of the women’s representation in panchayats and recommended a statutory separate “all women’s panchayats” at the village level to ensure greater participation of women in the political process and with adequate resources for management of their welfare and development programmes, especially for rural women. They would be directly elected by the women of the village and would also have strong links with the existing PRS as their representatives would be sent to PS and ZP. The recommendation was not implemented by any state as the provision was not considered appropriate as it would further segregate the women instead of integrating them into the society (Buch, 2001).
The Ashok Mehta Committee noted that the involvement of rural women in the development process has always been regarded as an integral part of the total development of the village community. The committee on the state of women in India has even suggested the establishment of statutory women’s panchayats at the village level. The proposal emanates from the postulate that their contribution to the rural economy has not been adequately appreciated and if appreciated has not been institutionalized; that their representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is mainly token and not effective in articulating their needs or for mobilizing their adequate participation (Ambedkar and Shailaja, 2005).

The Ashok Mehta Committee reviewed the PRS in 1978 and recommended that two women who get the highest number of votes in the elections be made members of ZP and Mandal Panchayats, respectively. In case no women came forward to contest the elections, two women should be co-opted at these levels. Karnataka, AP, and Bengal were the first states to introduce the policy of reservation for women on the recommendation of the Ashok Mehta Committee. They provided 25 per cent reservation for women at the ZP and mandal panchayat level (Singla, 2007).

The first step for the political empowerment of women has been initiated with 33 per cent of seats being reserved for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act for Panchayati Raj institutions. Already over a million women are now functioning as elected members in the councils of Panchayati Raj institutions and municipal bodies. One-third of these institutions are headed by women as Sarpanchs, Chairpersons, Mayors, etc. (Rao, 2010). Interestingly the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the policy and implementation of the 33 per cent reservation for women in Panchayats received strong support and impetus due to Rajiv Gandhi’s interest and advocacy in the matter (Kattimani, 2011).

1.8 Reservation for women in Panchayats

There is no doubt that women have benefited from reservations due to the competitive politics of various political parties. In 1983, Karnataka which had a Janata Dal government led by Ramakrishna Hegde and with Abdul Nazeer Sab as the minister in-charge witnessed the revival of panchayat institutions. It also introduced 25% reservations for women in panchayats (Buch, 2009).
The legislation providing reservation of one-third seats for women in local self-governing bodies was enacted in the last decade of the 90s. The Panchayat and Nagar Palika Bill, embodied in the 73rd and 74th (Articles 243D and 243T, respectively) Amendment Acts to the Constitution and providing for 33% reservation of seats for women in the panchayati raj institutions in rural areas and municipal bodies in towns and cities, was passed by Parliament without controversy in December 1992, during the Narasimha Rao government. The above mentioned Amendment Acts also enjoing that, from amongst the seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes, or, as the case may be, Scheduled Tribes. Moreover, it was stipulated that seats reserved for women may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies. In 1994, different states brought their panchayat acts in conformity with the Constitution’s 73rd and 74th Amendments Acts, and the system is now believed to be working with a reasonable degree of success in states like Karnataka, Kerala, and West Bengal among others. Hailed as a landmark in the field of decentralized decision-making and grassroots democracy, it has been widely acknowledged that the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts to the Constitution constitute, so far, the most effective legislative measures for women’s empowerment (Basu, 2004).

1.9 Political Participation of Women

Women’s participation in the political process is central to their struggle against oppression. All the different aspects of women’s liberation depend upon their ability to express their aspirations and demands politically. Women are not the weaker segment of the society or passive beneficiaries of the development process but are a source of unique strength for reaching the national goal (N.P.P, 1988-2000). Women’s equal participation in the decision-making process, policy making, planning and administration is extremely important to ensure their equality while participating in the developmental process. Equality of participation means involving the women of the community in decision-making and involving them in the same proportion in decision-making as they are proposed in the community at large (Prasad, 2007).

However, the position of women in politics has always been trivial. Although women constitute half the world’s population, their participation in political life has been negligible all along (Ravinder et al, 1996). Today, at the international level only 10 per cent of the parliamentary positions and six per cent of the Cabinet ministers’
posts are occupied by women (Usha, 1999). During the first general elections, 66 women contested the elections to Parliament and 19 were elected to the House of the People. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was quite appalled at the low representation of women in Parliament. Expressing his anguish and pondering over the issue he wrote thus on the matter in his letter to the Chief Ministers:

‘I have been meeting our new Members of Parliament. There are over 700 of them as between the two Houses. I have noticed with great regret how few women have been elected. I suppose this is so in the State Assemblies and Councils also. I think we are very much to be blamed. It is not a matter of showing favour to any one or even of injustice, but rather of doing something, which is not conducive to the future growth of our country. I am quite sure that our real and basic growth will only come when women have a full chance to play their part in public life. Wherever they have had this chance, they have, as a whole, done well, better if I may say so, then the average man, and so most of us naturally take a very lopsided view of the matter. We cannot be objective, because we have grown up in certain grooves of thought and action. But the future of India will probably depend ultimately more upon the women than the men’ (Quoted by Yogendra et al., 2007).

The second Lok Sabha (1962-67) had 24 women members consisting of 5 per cent of the total. Without having a cabinet berth only three women were appointed as Deputy Ministers. In the third Lok Sabha (1962-67), 37 women members were elected constituting 7.6% of which eight women became ministers. Mrs. Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister in 1966. The fourth Lok Sabha (1967-70) had only 31 women members. In the fifth Lok Sabha (1971-77) there were only 26 women making 4.2 per cent of the total strength. Only four women got ministerial berths including Mrs. Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister. In the sixth Lok Sabha (1977-79), the number of women candidates was 19 making 3.4% per cent. During this period, there was only one minister. In the seventh Lok Sabha (1980-84) there were 44 women members constituting 8.5 per cent of which 10
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women became ministers. In the ninth Lok Sabha (1989-91), the number of women members declined to 27 constituting only 5.3 per cent of the total strength of which there were only two women ministers. In the tenth Lok Sabha (1991-96), 39 women members were elected making it 7.17 per cent. Out of 39, five became members of the Council of Ministers. In the eleventh Lok Sabha (1996-97), there were 39 women members making 7.18 per cent. During these 13 days of the BJP Government there was one woman minister. In the twelfth Lok Sabha (1999-2004), 49 women candidates were elected, with an average percentage of 9.02 per cent. Of them 10 women were appointed as ministers. In the fourteenth Lok Sabha (2004), 44 women members were elected which constituted 8.1 per cent of the total seats and only 7 women members were given ministerial berth. From the above analysis, it is evident that though women participation in the political process has been increasing, their involvement in the decision-making process has been marginal. As far as the state legislatures are concerned, three states, i.e., Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram have no women representation (Mahakul, 2009).

When the Panchayat Raj system was introduced, very few women contested or got elected. The committees, which recommended the creation of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), did not say much about the role of women in these bodies. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended that in the constitution of Panchayats, provisions may be made for the co-option of two women members, “who are interested in work among women and children.” The Ashok Mehta Committee had mentioned that two women who secured the highest number of votes among the women candidates in the election could take the seats reserved for them, a method of co-option by election. Though the Panchayat Raj Institutions were established in almost all the states, women’s representation did not exceed beyond two or three. It was only in 1976, with the publication of the Report of the Committee on Status of Women that there was a demand for the representation of women in the Panchayat Raj through reservation. Karnataka became the pioneer state in the country by introducing the policy of reservation for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions by the Act of 1985 (Subha et al, 2006). It is believed that women find it easier to enter politics at the local level (following the Constitutional Amendments that allowed 33% reservation for women) than at the national level. Although women were elected in large numbers, their participation has been full of challenges and obstructions.
A study done in South India indicated that women were compelled by their male kin to contest the election. Women’s interest in politics did not matter and they were used as puppets by their husband, father, and brothers to carry out their mandates. There are many such instances in India (Jena, 2009). It is necessary to create positive and healthy socio-political conditions to enable women to participate actively and effectively in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Women’s reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions, as provided under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, is leading to their empowerment in the real sense (Mohanti, 1995). Utilizing the provision that not less than one-third seats need to be reserved for women, some states had given a slightly higher quota for women (as in Karnataka- 43.6%, and West Bengal-35%). One has to however, ask whether this was due to recognition of women’s power and contribution to the social development of rural India or merely the assumption that women would be easily elected and could later be manipulated by the men, party, and the community (Kaushik, 1999).

According to the document on Women’s Development (1985), women’s role in the political process has virtually remained unchanged since independence. Broad-based political participation of women has been severely limited due to various traditional factors such as caste, religion, feudal attitude, and family status. As a result, women have been left on the periphery of political life. Even though reservation provision for women was given under 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, it became difficult to mobilize enough women candidates due to the lack of awareness among the people. Many women’s organizations and government agencies set about mobilizing women, raising their awareness, giving them political education and encouraging them to come forward to stand as candidates when the elections were announced. In West Bengal and Bihar, the state government itself organized such awareness raising workshops. Various voluntary organizations conducted a number of workshops, discussions, and camps to create awareness. The government too strove to join in this effort. Attempts were made to change the content of the ‘Awareness Generation Programmes,’ a scheme of the Central Social Welfare Board, to include a module on the Panchayat Raj (Kaushik, 1999).
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