CHAPTER I

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1.1 Emergence and Objectives of Decentralisation

Decentralisation is defined as significant transfer of political, administrative and fiscal powers and responsibilities to the grassroots organisations to empower them to make decisions and exercise control over resources to bring about holistic development (Rondinelli 1981). It is a concept based on important mechanisms of representation, participation and decision-making. Decentralisation is, thus, nothing but delegation of powers shifted from higher levels to lower level (Rondinelli 1981; Aziz and Arnold 1996). It is a process that provides opportunities for involving every one in decision-making thereby protecting the interests of every segment of the population.

At the grassroots level, decentralisation is an important tool for ensuring people's participation as well as for improving the social, economic and political conditions of the people, and for bringing about responsive governance. As a result, decentralisation has accelerated the progress and ways of rural development programmes. And also, it is responsible for meeting the local needs and conditions (of people). In order to fulfill the above requirements of decentralisation, various agencies have been involved in its design and implementation (Cohen 1980; Conyers 1981; Rondinelli 1981). It not only plans the local needs effectively but also increases the quality of involvement of central officials and enables them to meet the challenges providing better information (Maddick 1963).

To achieve this end in the most democratic manner, it is necessary that there is greater participation of different classes of people, from different
regions, in the processes of planning, decision-making and implementation of development programmes. Only this approach is hailed as the way to ensure safeguarding national unity and bringing about political stability (Esman and Montegomery 1982).

1.1.1. Decentralisation and the Question of Equity and Visibility

Although there is no standard model of decentralisation, or a single route towards local government, the content, timing and sequencing of decentralisation are the result of political processes or strategies (Azfar, Kahkonen, Meagher and Rutherford 1999). The above account shows that a large number of factors have been responsible for the emergence of the system of decentralisation that is in vogue today across the developing nations. Of these, aspects relating to the question of unequal distribution of power among the people, ethnic diversity and basic democracy need to be discussed here. In recent years, in the developing countries, legitimacy of the government and efficiency of public service are entirely dependent on national, sub-national and local-self government. This is useful in order to choose political leaders under the system of decentralisation, to take political decisions, for selecting local authorities etc. It also empowers the voiceless (like the women and the poor) groups in a society. In any case, a fair and proper devolution of authority package is essential for advantages that might follow. On the one hand, the local bodies are captured by the elite sections of the community and on the other hand, they also seek the benefits of decentralisation, simultaneously, like accountability and access to local information. The local political and economic issues can also adversely affect them, and

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when the members of the community prefer other services in that set up. According to Professor D Andrew Kaiz, decentralisation means the degree to which implementation is controlled by the political institutions. As already stated, for obtaining a vibrant civil society along with participation, accountability is the keystone.

It is well established that decentralised governance is one that strives towards the development of people from different socio-economic and regional diversities. It also enables creation of political awareness and facilitates assertion of political rights by members of weaker sections who never had the opportunity to access power. Further, it also helps in the fulfilment of basic needs by local governments undertaking indigenous planning. Overall, it provides the right atmosphere for the decentralised bodies to achieve development on a democratic basis. Yet, for decentralisation to be effective and successful there is need for participation, accountability, transparency and financial autonomy. All these basic elements of decentralisation can be better achieved only under the climate of a vibrant civil society (Islam 2005).

In a nutshell, the process of decentralisation in development thinking and practice has become a popular theme in recent years. Apart from this, lack of effective centralisation of various schemes under rural development has resulted in the irrelevance of projects and policies, and also in the lack of adaptability, delays, inadequate maintenance etc. These glaring factors have made the process of decentralisation a more appropriate and potential weapon for the better utilisation of facilities, low costs per unit of service and improvised operation and maintenance.

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1.1.2. Decentralisation and Panchayat Raj Institutions in India

India provides an example for understanding the socio-political setting and compulsions under which the process of decentralisation can improve the overall performance and accountability of Local Self-Government (LSG) institutions. In 1993, the Constitutional Reforms, designed to democratise and empower the LSGs in a more systematic way, were initiated by the Government of India. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment recognised a three-tier form of government at the national, sub-state and state levels thereby providing legality for all the PRIs. With the inception of this amendment, the process of decentralisation took-up a deviation from the ambitious attempts (at the grassroots level) to fulfil the Gandhian Vision of 'Gram Swaraj'.

It was on the basis of this principle of decentralised governance that the Panchayat Raj Institutions, as grassroots political institutions, were established in India in the early fifties. There were many reasons for this shift from centralised to a decentralised system. But, the important one was the realisation of loopholes in the centralised system that was pyramid-based where power was concentric, which was believed to be obstructing the proliferation of power to the bottom levels. The rules framed and decisions taken in this regard by the Centre failed in addressing their needs properly. Besides these, the system was lacking in representation to the weaker sections and community development ideals and was characterised by regional imbalance. All this affected people's participation, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The very purpose of introducing the Panchayat Raj system was to bring about rapid rural development and remove regional imbalance, to say the least. The revival of the PRIs in India during the independence era, therefore, was a historical process. In fact, Panchayat Raj Institutions
(PRI) was one of the oldest political institutions established in the ancient times to achieve village autonomy and self-development.

There have been many committees and commissions appointed from time to time to strengthen the PRIs in India. In 1957, a committee under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta was appointed for looking into the working of PRIs. In 1983, another Committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Asoka Mehta, whose recommendations were given greater consideration. The recommendations of the Asoka Mehta Committee Report initiated the rise of the second generation of panchayats in India, with emphasis on regular elections on the basis of open competition, participation of political parties, devolution of powers and resources to PRIs. After the report and its experimentation in the states of Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, the activities started at central level to strengthen democratic organisations and to achieve the goals of real democratic decentralisation. Later, the central government appointed the Hunter Committee like CARD (1985) and also made unsuccessful attempts like 64th amendment bill to give a constitutional status to the PRIs.

In 1992, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments gave added powers to the PRIs and also re-established them on a more firm footing. They are important since they gave the PRIs a constitutional status, and made a mandatory provision for conducting elections to these bodies on a regular basis.

1.1.3. Panchayats in Karnataka

Karnataka is hailed as a premier state for instituting panchayat reforms in India. While village panchayats existed during the Princely Rule in Old Mysore, they were revived after independence by successive
governments (Mathew 1990). There was also, what were known as, 'caste
panchayats' operating at the village level for particular caste group for a
different purpose. Just as it happened at the national level, even in
Karnataka, the panchayats did not make much headway or they had a
checkered career.

It was during the rule of the Janatha party (1984) that the PRIs were
reintroduced in the state with a two-tier system of administration, one at
the district level known as the Zilla Parishad, and the other at the above-
village and below block level, known as the Mandal Panchayat. The
significance of this Act (72nd constitutional amendment) was that, for the
first time, 25 per cent of the seats were reserved for women in both the
tiers.

Subsequently, the 73rd constitutional amendment (1993) changed this
system by replacing it with a three-tier one. The Act that followed
declared that women would receive an enhanced reservation of seats in
the various tiers of the panchayats up to 33.3 per cent. Besides women,
other weaker sections like the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes
(STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) also received similar
reservation of seats in the PRIs. The two-tier system was changed to the
one where PRIs functioned at three tiers, viz., the village (the Gram
Panchayats or GPs), the block or taluk (Taluk Panchayats or TPs) and the
district (Zilla Panchayats or ZPs).

The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution that gave women 33.3 per cent
of seats has been hailed as a remarkable achievement. Because, till
then, societal constraints in the form of patriarchy, gender based
inequality influencing relations between men and women in the
household and outside it, rural-urban differences, etc., had continued to
discourage participation of women in development, by imposing their own leadership.

The seventy-third Constitutional Amendment Act 1993 on Panchayat Raj has reserved thirty-three per cent of its seats for women in Panchayats (grassroots level local government institutions) and Municipal bodies (urban local bodies). The purpose behind this move is to provide more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making and thereby to increase the possibilities of accruing more benefits of development to rural areas. Panchayat Raj, as a system of governance at the grassroots level in rural India, has been rightly conceived as the most viable and proper mechanism of realising goals of democracy and decentralisation. It is now fourteen years since Panchayat Raj in India was not only constitutionalised in the true sense of the term but also given a status, which instigated a debate on 'district government' and the creation of the third government.

1.2 Gender and Decentralised Governance

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort by some countries to make local government reforms to be context-specific, and to be associated with a particular menu of components, like improved service delivery, devolution of power and resources etc. There has also been a greater interest shown towards attaining transparency and accountability besides better revenue-gathering mechanisms (Subha and Bhargava 2000).

This has led to the cross-cutting issue that woman's participation in the public domain or local governance has remained low and limited. Decentralisation is expected to enable women's participation in decision-
making with gender equity as the explicit objective. Otherwise, gender imbalance would be replicated in the present set up too (DFID 2002)³.

But, owing to socio-structural constraints, women, everywhere, and particularly in a caste-ridden society like India, continue to be under represented in positions of political authority and community decision-making. There is no need to stress that, women workers have always played important social, economic and reproductive roles in the household and the community. It is well known that the latter roles are constrained by patriarchal norms and the women just follow the traditional order without any resistance.

Nowadays, it is generally believed that women can represent gender concerns far more effectively because of their experiences and interests. They have the potential to become better leaders, despite inequalities and inequities that marginalise them.

The Indian government's decision reflects the challenges in achieving gender equity. According to Mahbub Ul Haq (1996)⁴, equity and empowerment are essential components of human resource development. Equity in access to opportunities demands a fundamental restructuring of power in many societies. It includes equalisation of political opportunities through voting rights reform and other actions aimed at limiting the excessive political power of a feudal minority. The human development paradigm envisages full empowerment of all people such that they are in a position to exercise choices of their own free will. It implies a political democracy in which people can influence decision about their lives. It means decentralisation of power so that real governance is brought to the doorstep of every person. It means that all

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members of civil society participate fully in making and implementing decisions" (WDR 2001). Women’s empowerment would permit them to compete on an equal footing with men.

An understanding of the concept of 'Gender' here is useful for examining gender differences that exist between women and men. Gender is defined as that relating to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of men and women. It also refers to the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviour of both men and women, termed as femininity and masculinity. These, of course, vary between groups, communities, nations and ethnic groups. It has been proved that women’s participation in policymaking at the national and state levels is significant, considering that their representation was almost nil in decision-making bodies, till the provision was made under decentralised governance. In spite of a large electorate comprising of women, they, have however, not been sufficiently represented in leadership and have almost no say in the policy matters of the country. Despite more than a dozen Lok Sabha elections, hardly 50 women have been elected to the seats across the country. Till recently, elected women leaders constituted only four per cent of in the assembly constituencies.

1.2.1 Women’s Participation in Decentralisation

Women’s equal political participation plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Improving female political participation is not possible without affirmative action measures. This is especially true of a caste-ridden and gender biased society like India, where, despite playing important social, economic and reproductive roles in maintaining stability in the household and the community, women

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5 cited at www.empowerpoor.com
suffer from many handicaps in their public participation, like in the
Panchayats. Examining gender relations in local government is not
simply an intellectual exercise, but has widespread implications for the
effectiveness of local government reform and social and economic
programme outcomes.

Having been elected to positions of power, women, particularly rural
women, need to be able to participate meaningfully in the decisions that
affect their constituency. Decentralisation reforms in recent years,
through affirmative action, have brought about a revolutionary change in
women's (and men's) lives in rural and urban India. A critical mass of
women has entered the structures of government. They have the
responsibility of bringing about wholesome development that would affect
the community as a totality, and not just themselves and their homes.
They are also vested with the responsibility of changing the traditional
structures that tend to affect both women and men. Thus, in course of
time, decentralisation would enable women's empowerment, both as
leaders and the led. Concerns of women would become a close reflection
of the type of leadership - of both women and men. Gone would be the
days when a handful of women used to be selected and elected who
could be easily isolated and forced to compromise.

Increased participation and representation by women highlight the
intersection of gender interests, social class and race. The quest for
equity would be a farce without the wider representation of all groups
especially those currently denied access to power and to present all
points of view in the process of decision-making. Affirmative action in the
political realm is a temporary measure required for long-term goals of
gender justice. The general minimum target of 33.3 per cent is barely a
critical mass. It is being argued that this provision must move beyond
the voter's list to meaningful representation in the village councils, community councils, municipalities and legislatures.

This suggests that numbers are no doubt important, but not a sufficient condition for women's full, equal and quality-filled participation in fiscal, administrative, political and social decision-making in the panchayats. In other words, the effectiveness of women in local governance arises not out of their numerous representations, but from their possessing the requisite skills and knowledge in effectively fulfilling these roles as leaders.

1.2.2. Capacity-Building and Women's Leadership

In this context, the ‘empowerment’ of women elected to positions of power, particularly in a rural set up becomes important. ‘Training’ or ‘capacity building’ exercises have a significant role to play here. It is at least a decade since such training programmes commenced working for improving women's participation in decentralised bodies at both rural and urban areas. Such training has been offered through formal and informal sources, both government and people's bodies (Vijayalakshmi and Chandrashekar 2000).

The revival of decentralisation system in India and outside came about in the mid-eighties, whether coincided with the appearance of voluntary organisations\(^6\) working for the poor and vulnerable. These organisations have been playing an important role in buttressing women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other such indigenous communities who have taken-up leadership, that too for the first time.

\(^6\) Also addressed as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Development Support Organisations (DSOs).
There is another dimension to the problem. Increased efforts at women's empowerment have challenged traditional notions of male authority and supremacy. Thus, it has become necessary to enable men to come to terms with the increasing number of women acquiring leadership positions in local governments. Often women are also beaten or cases are not lacking, where women contestants face the wrath of unable competitors, as reported in papers/journals.

Keeping in mind the need for training leaders, especially from weaker sections, a number of efforts were made to impart capacity-building exercises to them. Institutions like the National Institute for Rural Development (NIRD located at Hyderabad), state level institutions called State Institutes for Rural Development (SIRD) were established to train rural functionaries and strengthen the leaders. The SIRD in Karnataka, called as Abdul Nazir Sab State Institute for Rural Development (ANSSIRD) has been conducting training programmes in all the 174 taluks in the state. There are also other institutes, like the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi, with a southern regional branch at Bangalore, the Institute of Social Sciences Trust (ISST), SEARCH and the Singamma Srinivasan Foundation - all at Bangalore, offering training to elected women representatives and conducting periodical studies and research on their performance.

Capacity-building is important for women, as present or future candidates. The training can help women organise and mobilise themselves, and to function as well. Women can gain experience through participation in committees in their neighbourhood, or by organising themselves around income-generating activities. Development organisations can strengthen these capacities by providing training and advice and by organising training courses in gender and leadership.
learn to speak in public, analyse, argue and defend their interests and to build a support network). This can serve as a springboard for a political career. The organisations do arrange training courses for women interested in politics, dealing with the necessary skills and knowledge for campaigning, presentation, negotiation, and handling with the media, as well as gender-awareness and self-esteem. It offers possibilities to practise these capacities in the form of work placements, paying attention to follow-up programmes for women who have already been trained.

The current local government arena is extremely discouraging for women councilors. The local government presents a hostile, alienating, male dominated environment. Women feel continuously marginalised, stereotyped, taken for granted and experience little understanding or support (Donk 1997). To attain engendered governance men have to give space for women and to work together with them. Training and orientation of men play important roles in the engendering of governance.

1.2.3 Women and Gender Sensitive Budgeting

It is being increasingly recognised by the International Development Assistance agencies, like the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), that the absence of gender sensitive budgeting is a significant lacuna in the measures undertaken to alleviate poverty and to evolve strategies to meet the needs of women at the grassroots level. Women's role in designing measures to bring down poverty is held to be the indicator of their increasing marginalisation (refer to box 1.1). Elected male representatives to gram or village level offices of panchayat and higher bodies are largely unaware and

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7 Cited at www.empowerpoor.com
insensitive, not only to the needs of the household but also to the needs of the poor, and about the ways of bringing about the socio-economic development of the community. There is need for the government budgets to be gender-sensitive and to allocate more resources for women's welfare. In a decentralised environment, the elected representatives have the responsibility of planning and executing such gender-sensitive economic and social programmes.

The support that elected women representatives need goes beyond mere technical training and extends to building solidarity amongst women by strengthening links between women's organisations and elected bodies. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and amongst them, women's NGOs have been exactly doing the same in recent years (Jain 1994).

However, it is being pointed out that the experiment with Panchayat Raj in the last few years has not facilitated building a link between woman and woman. Local feminist groups need to build feminist consciousness and strengthen women's sense of common identity. This is possible, according to Jain (1994), by building the capacity and quality of women leadership. Seeking knowledge, planning for facilitating supply or fulfillment of basic needs of the family and community, consulting, and so on are the qualities that are needed in such leaders. They are considered integral to good governance. This is important when decentralisation aims to shift power structures from civil service to the citizens.
Box 1.1 Importance of Equal Rights to Women

Women have the right to equal access to the services of local governments, as well as the right to be treated equally in these services and to be able to influence the initiation, development, management and monitoring of services. The provision of services such as education, welfare and other social services by local governments, should aim to see women and men as equally responsible for matters relating both to family and to public life, and avoid perpetuation of stereotypes of single women and men.

Women have equal right for environmentally sound living conditions, housing, water distribution and sanitation facilities, as well as to affordable public transportation. Women's needs and living conditions must be made visible and taken into account at all times in planning.

Women have the right for equal access to the territory and geographical space of local governments, ranging from the right to own land to the right to move freely and without fear in public spaces and on public transport.

Local government has a role to play in ensuring the reproductive rights of women and the rights to freedom from domestic violence and other forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence and abuse.

Source: IULA worldwide declaration on women in local government.

The above discussion focusing on gender discrimination identifies it as one of the pervasive forms of institutionalised deprivation. Panchayat Raj assumes particular importance as a means of producing democratic functioning and decision-making through decentralised governmental power, thereby restructuring political institutions. The 73rd constitutional amendment prescribes a structured form of decentralised
governance and decision-making by emphasising statutory participation of women at grassroots level organisations. This is important to the present study that aims to reflect upon women's role in India's local self-government system (Panchayat Raj). It focuses on the emerging gender perspectives in development thought, by highlighting that decentralisation and devolution of power to women has begun a long process of change in the status of women in India, brought about by their political participation.

1.2.4. Role of Training in Women's Political Empowerment

It is here that attention is drawn towards the concept of training to these women political leaders. Training is an important tool that enables better participation with significant strides in empowerment. It is useful and necessary for both men and women.

While training women in various skills of leadership is of utmost importance, organising joint training sessions (with males) would further create awareness about how subjugated women are due to traditional constraints upon their public participation. It would help in bringing to the forefront, the importance of gender issues relating to parity and non-discriminatory working relationships in both the household and the society. Male politicians would become more aware of women's problems and gender issues in the household and outside it. This also would help women to address their own areas of interest and to network with male colleagues. Introduction of training for women and men politicians simultaneously encourages the sharing of experiences and lessons learned by them.
1.2.5 Non-Governmental Organisations and Women Leaders

1.2.5.1 Emergence of NGOs or Voluntary Organisations

A NGO or a voluntary organisation consists of a group of committed persons, inspired by internal and external motivation for the people’s cause and welfare in a self-reliant manner. The late eighties and nineties witnessed a boom of NGOs, both in India and abroad. It needs no explanation that NGO intervention, in the form of movements, has led to a number of changes in the conservative society, leading to changes in people’s participation and self-reliance. The voluntary sector, based on theories of voluntarism and self-help approach, has, thus, emerged as a testing zone for new ideas and methodologies of the government in its poverty alleviation and other experiments.

In India, the development perspective of NGOs has shifted from the ideology of charity and service delivery in the early 1970s, to integrated development and empowerment. Subsequently, a range of NGOs came up with several ideologies and perspectives (Rajasekhar 1999).

1.2.5.2. NGOs and Gender Issues

NGOs working for the cause of women have progressed fast in the last two to three decades. Their increasing role in women’s empowerment and development has come about due to a policy shift in the implementation of such programmes by the government which started utilising NGOs for motivating people at the grassroots level. NGOs are known to be fighting for various rights of women in the fields of gender violence, gender discrimination, gender and human rights and gender and empowerment. Large amounts of funds are being diverted to the NGOs through the
government or even directly by the funding organisations to make them engage in fighting for their rights (Sooryamorthy 1998; Rajasekhar 2000).

1.2.5.3 NGOs, Women and Political Empowerment

Since the last decade, economic and political empowerment of women is on the agenda of most NGOs in Karnataka and elsewhere. The most important contribution of NGOs here is the formation of self-help groups of women for micro-finance activities, to begin with, but to be followed by various empowerment programmes. These include: access to credit, resources, decision-making, knowledge, communication, Human Resource Development (HRD) in terms of better health and quality of life with nutrition, mother and child health, insurance against old age, widowhood, separation etc., access to amenities like drinking water, fuel, better housing, livestock etc., creation of assets like land, site etc.

Liberation of women from constraints and debt bondage through skill formation, transfer of technology, etc., is a significant contribution of NGOs in the recent past. The advantage that they have is their knowledge of the local situation and issues.

It should, however, be mentioned here that, given the increasing complexity of women's empowerment efforts in a fast changing society, influenced by trends of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation, it is necessary to ponder over the difficulties or limitations that NGOs would be encountering in enabling better-qualified leadership from women. The obstacles are many and diverse. The steps to be taken to meet the growing needs of women representatives in Panchayat bodies are firstly elimination or tackling the hurdles that the NGOs face in their operational area. It is necessary to review whether the kind of training that the NGOs have been imparting to the women representatives is
relevant and sufficient, or not. This calls for research and academic studies on the interface between PRIs, women leaders and NGOs.

The main objective of the NGOs working in the field of decentralised governance has been to educate the PRI functionaries and enhance their confidence. Above all, they pick up problems faced by women representatives at grassroots level and enable them to build cordial relations with their electorate and to provide a platform for sharing their experiences with other members. They also motivate women to contest for elections. In fact, the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act has made a provision for interface between PRIs and NGOs.

1.2.5.4 Studies on NGOs and PRIs

Despite a wide range of activities by NGOs towards improving the status of women, there have been very little academic studies on this theme. Whatever studies, which exist have confined only to evaluation and monitoring. Moreover, the studies on the interface between PRIs and NGOs, in the context of women's leadership, are few, and often, they are the ones taken up by NGOs themselves. This necessitates the need to document, scientifically and objectively, the role of NGOs in this area, which are actually partners in development, along with the government, and are no longer competing with the government. There are many studies discussing such an interface (Desai 1961; Sahaya 1998; Rajasekhar 1999) but there is now need to address larger issues like role of the household and women's perceptions of their own role.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has provided opportunity for NGOs to play a constructive role in all the three-tier set up of Local self-government (LSG). Fiszbein (1997) has stated that the LSGs do not attempt to do everything by themselves. For a successful implementation
in LSG, the role of the private sector must be valued. Apart from that, flexibility component found among the NGOs also helps in development programmes and is highly beneficial for disabled groups. Therefore, interface between NGOs and LSG is felt necessary.

On the whole, the available literature argues that, decentralisation, in order to alleviate poverty and work towards the needs of weaker sections, has to be properly monitored in its work. Due to the need for decentralised governance to associate in alleviating poverty and to work for the needs of the weaker sections, the involvement of NGOs in development work would significantly aid the process. NGOs help in training the elected representatives regarding their function in the gram panchayat and become instrumental in enabling political empowerment. This has been substantiated in many case studies where there was NGO intervention. Sensitising the elected representatives about their own rights and responsibilities is very much needed. It is in this context, that training has assumed much importance, especially in the context of the weaker sections.

**1.2.5.5 Training of Elected Representatives and NGOs**

There are many reasons to substantiate that training aids weaker sections in their participation in PRIs. Significantly, 33.3 per cent reservation in the decentralised bodies has resulted in increasing representation for women members in LSGs. Till then, Indian women were suffering from ignorance, poverty, discrimination – all originating from a patriarchal system.

For all the above said reasons, training in political rights (awareness), capacity building, skill information and inner personality development are needed. Therefore, the government training institutions and NGOs
have come forward with various training programmes particularly at government training centers focusing upon grass-root level leaders. For these reasons, the NGO involvement has become quite significant in women's political empowerment among other spheres.

1.3 Review of Literature

Several studies in the disciplines of political science, economics and sociology have emphasised the significance of different aspects of decentralisation. A brief review of some of these studies, highlighting their contribution to the theme of present research is made in the following paragraphs:

As one of the earliest of such studies, Rao (1968) in his "Rural Leadership and Conflict, A Study of an Andhra Village", has put forth the argument of traditional leadership undergoing structural changes as a result of change in the composition of leadership. In his investigation into the question of rural leadership, in terms of what he calls formal (positional) and informal (hereditary or reputation), or traditional and modern institutions, he has argued that traditional leadership is gradually losing its hold on local power structure. It has retained only partial control over sources of power in the study area of Andhra Pradesh state, (where it was undertaken) due to the changing composition of leadership.

Kittur (1992) continues this line of thinking in another recent study, in his work "Emerging Pattern of Leadership": A Study of PRIs in Dharwad District". It attempts to analyze the emergence of rural leadership on the basis of the leaders' socio-economic background and concludes that the leadership profile in the panchayats was relatively younger in age. The study confirms the fact that, in the process of rural development and
modernisation, those who hailed from the locally dominant castes alone acquired political power, in the traditional power structure. The weaker sections of the society were not able to penetrate into this fort. It is the transformation brought about by the recent reforms that enabled them to gain access to Panchayat leadership, because of reserved seats in their favour.

There is no dearth of studies on the representation and participation of one such change of group of leaders, viz., women in the decentralised bodies. Taking the Bangalore Municipal Corporation, since its inception in 1949, Subha (1994), in her study of “Women in Local Governance”, has made an attempt to explore its working. Her study tries to evaluate the role of women councilors in policy-making and administration. It has sought to know the extent to which such roles have succeeded in meeting the requirements of women satisfactorily. This study also attempted to highlight the potentialities and attributes of women who were at the helm of affairs in this urban body. The author offers few practical suggestions for enhancing the participation of women at the grassroots level and their effective participation in political Mobilisation.

Panda (1996) makes similar effort in her study of emerging patterns of women’s leadership in a backward area of a backward district of a backward state (Chatrapur block of Ganjam district of Orissa). Her study, “Emerging Pattern of Leadership among Rural Women in Orissa” reaches the following conclusions: traditional social structure and cultural milieu has little influence on the perception of rural people in choosing women for representation in the panchayats. Personal merit contributed significantly to the choice of women representative. Age, relative freedom from family responsibilities and effective communication skills were the major determinants of their selection. Women inherited
the traits of leadership and the capability to arrive at firm decisions by choosing them among several alternatives. They received guidance from their male colleagues, while the family members and villagers helped them in developing their participatory skills. Above all, their non-party background, responsibilities, which they shared as agents of change and the class from which they came, indicated positive directions of change in rural leadership.

That reservation ensures opportunities for all social groups to participate in governance through the panchayats, thereby promotes grassroots level leadership is proved by Jayalakshmi (1997) in her case study entitled “Empowerment of Women in Panchayat: Experiences of Andhra Pradesh”. The author in this work set out to analyse the role of women as decision-makers in the local institutions and identified their priorities in bringing about development in Jamasthan Palli, an all-women panchayat. This importance of reservation of seats for women to contest leadership roles is proved by another study undertaken by Panda (2002). This study entitled “Political Empowerment of Women: A Case Study of Orissa”, attempted to explore the rural socio-political situation and the performance of women representatives of PRI in Orissa with the mandatory one-third reservation for women provided by the new Panchayat Raj Act, 1994. The author concludes that women enter politics due to the mandatory provision of one-third reservation; most of the women are non-political and enter politics due to persuasion from their family members or pressure from the village community or from a political party; and out of personal interest also. The study indicates that there is a positive change in the socio-political dynamics of the rural society.
The role of external factors like caste and political party in making a leader is brought out by several studies. Basker (1997), for example, in his work “Women Panchayat Members in Kerala - A Profile”, observes that the political leadership of women in grassroots democracy in Kerala has been influenced by caste and community representation, in tune with the body politic of the state. The study also finds that variables like age, occupation and income determine entry into politics. The influence of political parties is strong during elections, while it plays an insignificant role in motivating women to get into politics.

Social structural constraints in the way of political participation by women is explored by Devi (1986), who expresses, that, the political participation of women is affected and determined by the general attitude of society towards them. Her work argues that factors like lack of proper education, economic imbalances, social taboos and immobility explain why women have remained politically dormant for so long.

One way of avoiding poor performance in political roles could be by obtaining good acquaintance with one’s own duties as a leader. Susheela (1998) in her work discusses the various developments in terms of rules and procedures regarding electoral behaviour of women. This includes actual functioning and the role of the elected chairpersons and representatives, needed for women’s empowerment. Her study stresses upon education, awareness and active participation on women’s part, as important for achieving their empowerment.

The significance of education in making better leaders is stressed by other studies too. D’Lama (1983) found that women’s participation is significantly related to education. Even though women come from an economically well off group, their participation would not be active until and unless, she is herself educated. Further, she points out that
statutory representations for women is not an end in itself, but it is expected to be a step in promoting women's participation in national life. Her study also reveals that women from the upper castes, particularly from the households of big landowners and politically influential persons, tend to predominate in the positions reserved for local bodies. She has raised pertinent questions and makes useful suggestions for enabling women representatives to gain better awareness of their social salvation and the role they can play, in their capacity as members in decision-making bodies in rural areas.

Meena (2000) also brings out the significance of education as an empowering tool. She finds that due to lack of education and awareness, the women representatives in Panchayats are not being able to overcome the narrow and conservative ideas on social customs and traditions that have an adverse effect on their participation in political sphere at local levels. Therefore, educational facilities must be made wider, through special training and refresher courses to women representatives for better participation. An earlier study by Gupta (1998) also falls in line by expressing that more educational facilities need to be provided to rural women, so that their participation may be sought in rural development programmes, through Panchayat Raj Institutions.

Continuing the argument that various socio-economic evils affect women's empowerment particularly in a rural society, Jaysawal (1998), in his study, "Women and Panchayat Raj: Critical Evaluation", mentions poverty, unemployment, socio-economic inequality etc. as some such factors. The study recommends that efforts should be made to eliminate these evils to make way for women to participate in Panchayat Raj institutions.
The deprived status of women in India that has made them to remain dormant, inactive and uninterested in public and political life of the country is emphasised in the work of Ahuja (1992). The study points to some exceptions also. Take for example, Rajasthan women, whose degree of freedom has increased in post 1947 period. The author studied the voting behaviour of women and has collected the opinions of 733 male respondents, among whom 75 have expressed that politics is too rough and dirty for women. 24 per cent have said that women being illiterate are incapable of participation in decision-making processes. 23 per cent have said that women have no knowledge of politics. In the final analysis, the author says that women should have any say in political matters and they should take part in public activities as complementary to male dominated politics.

Mazumdar (1986) highlights the role of political affiliation in influencing women's political participation. Basing on research on women's political participation, he reaches the conclusion that women's political activity is always influenced by political affiliation. Their self-sense of inferiority has hindered them to work for the betterment of women.

Srivasthava (1992) discusses the level of women's awareness and participation and finds that these are very low. In order to remove these problems, he suggests the idea of establishing women's organizations at national, state and local levels, for the purpose of creating and promoting political awareness. This view is also found in yet another study. Prabhavati (1991) finds, after studying the legislators of Andhra Pradesh during the period of 1956-1983, that party considerations were one of the factors, which guided the women legislators in their political behaviour. She suggests that women legislators have to be impartial after being elected in order to prove themselves as ideal representatives.
There are a couple of studies on participation of women in these elected bodies. Bahaduria (1997) argues that the social status of women is closely linked with their participation in decision-making processes. The extent of their participation is a measure of their empowerment. The fact still remains that women’s participation in decision-making at all levels, whether local or national, has been low. When this is the case of ordinary leaders what about the women who are heading the panchayats? Tripathy (1996) highlights the role of women sarpanchas in village development and finds it not very effective and complete. According to him, Constitutional Amendment is not the only solution. The author, therefore, recommends that women should be imparted training to perform their political roles better. They should be given right to information at least about their own rights and duties. This lacuna in women’s role as leaders is further found expression in the work of Sangliana (1996), who found that the level of awareness and participation of women representatives in Panchayats are very disappointing and they have a long way to go for an active participation. They may also need special training and more information for active participation.

The importance of training is also stressed by Kondareddy (2000) in his study. In his view, women have failed to fully exploit the opportunity of reservation in a meaningful way. According to him, there is need for a sensitisation programme for raising the level of women’s awareness. He also states that the society’s conservative and fundamentalistic attitude helps in the empowerment of women. If they sit idle when public decisions are being taken, then no positive benefit will emerge.

The fact that women can be better leaders than men because they have experienced poverty in a far greater depth is substantiated by
several studies, directly and indirectly. Jha (1998), for example, has stated that reservation of seats for women is important landmark in this direction. This would result in a revolutionary change since women would actively involve themselves in the implementation of the social sector programmes such as health care, education, childcare, sanitation, environment and drinking water supply. That women are best suited to implement poverty eradication programmes is seen when we read Singh's work (1998). It is argued by her that the participation of women must be greater in the development programmes related to rural areas, and that implementation of reservation for women should be done at all levels.

Now we have few studies concentrating on the theoretical aspects of decentralisation. Smith (1985) has not only made in-depth studies leading to decentralisation theories, but also the relationships, real or posed, between cause and effect. Further, he has also included certain debating points, which have been examined in great detail. The study stresses upon the 'status' situation affecting the specific roles of women in panchayats and participation in local affairs. Also, it focuses upon social emergence of women across the country where socio-political events flow. Meenakshi Sundaram (1994) makes a case for the importance of decentralisation in developing countries like India, China and Nigeria. Jha (1999) in her book "Decentralisation and Local Politics" has reviewed functioning and working of decentralisation in the developing countries and the changes, which have happened in the realm of PRIs. The study makes a comparative analysis of PRIs in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It has also discussed the political abilities of presidents of Zilla Panchayats.
There are few books, like the one by Mazumdar and Banwarsing (1997), which have brought out succinctly the Historical and Conceptual Development of Panchyati Raj. They have made a critical analysis of the origin of Panchayat Raj Institutions, their growth and role in community development, besides offering few recommendations.

It is not enough that there are constitutional provisions that lead to representation of weaker sections like women in the panchayats. There is also the need for sufficient powers on hand to function effectively. Palanithurai (2001) has pointed out this lacuna in the context of devolution of power at the grassroots level. He has studied the performance of the PRIs in terms of powers assigned to them. The study has also focused upon transformation in the rural sector as a result of decentralised governance. It tries to explain the mindset of people, their roles and responsibilities and socio-economic activities, which have been initiated by this system. The study has demonstrated that the concept of government has been taken to the backseat by these bodies.

In continuation of looking at the processual part of PRI functioning, Prasad (1981), in his study, has focused attention upon the operative mechanisms, on the one hand, and the organisation of these mechanisms and processes, on the other. The study, while explaining the nature of rural development, argues that it is being achieved through certain decentralised operational dynamics. It seeks to explain the inter-relationship between various aspects that are involved in such dynamics, like the environmental, structural and behavioural aspects. The author is critical about functioning of the PRIs over the past few decades.
There are the other studies like by Shah (1990) which argues that in the Indian set-up, two major components of decentralisation, like the role of leadership, and financial viability of implementing programmes in PRIs are important. Giri (1998) states that women's participation in decision-making process is an important step for their empowerment. She concludes that there is a need to further examine how far government provisions will help women to achieve empowerment. Manikyamba (1998) in her study enlightens about the greater concern for evaluating the participatory roles of women in the political set up of the nation. An extraordinary attempt has been made that reveals micro-level investigation as well as macro-level assessment made regarding the state of present prospects of LSG. Also, it explains the achievement of PRI patterns since 1957, besides reviewing women's policies and programmes. As if to conclude the critical review of the prospects of rural local self-government initiatives through PRIs, Khanna (1994), in his book, has opined that its reorganisation as Panchayat Raj, in the closing years of the fifties and in the beginning of the next decade as well as in its subsequent expansion, it has been having a checkered history. The study explains the initiatives that have been taken by the Union Government and under its guidance by the state governments to renovate and revitalise the system of Panchayat Raj. It discusses the structural deficiencies, financial inadequacies, inadequate elected leadership, inappropriate attitude and weak support by the government as the causes for the failure of PR system in the early decades.

The above studies show that considering the socio-economic conditions, awareness level and problems of women in general and in the political arena, reservation of seats in the PRIs in women's favour is necessary. They have upheld the need for empowerment of such
weaker sections in the context of decentralised governance, gender and leadership. But studies about the constraints faced by women, due to lack of political empowerment, have not been sufficiently studied. Finally, there are not many studies to show how training has impacted on political empowerment. They have also not bothered to study the performance of grassroots leadership in the light of socio-economic background of members.

Although it is nearly one and half decade after the constitution provided representation to women in PRIs, there has been no systematic study of decentralised governance and leadership of women in the context of the NGOs. Decentralisation has enabled participation and decision-making as qualities of leadership by the weaker sections. The role of NGOs in providing training to such members has to be documented systematically to understand how the civil society contributes to local development. Suvarchala (1999) has made one such study about the impact of interface between NGOs and PRIs, in relation to the participation of members at the grassroots level.

It is understood that there are quite an amount literature on decentralisation governance, gender, leadership and NGOs but most of them on empowerment of poor and development which have stressed considerably upon the constraints for NGOs in bringing about rural development with their pro-poor policies. They have highlighted the efforts of NGOs in achieving political empowerment of women. Secondly, the studies have captured the impact of the interface between LSG and the society. But the problems faced by the elected members have not been mentioned in these studies; thereby only physical constraints to participation have been given priority. Finally, most studies have accepted the NGOs' role, but the impact of such
efforts like capacity building, in particular, the results or impact of such training on the women leaders have not been duly considered as a priority issue for study. No attempts have been made in the studies to answer the question how far political empowerment has occurred as per the need.

Keeping the above factors in view, it may be mentioned that there are a number of comprehensive studies of women in panchayats. The impact of political empowerment, NGOs' involvement in training the new leaders etc., have been examined. Besides these, there are no studies on how decentralisation has led to higher stakes in participation, effective leadership, decision-making etc., as a result of such training by the NGOs. It has also not been documented through systematic and scientific research as to how far the effective changes brought forth by such affirmative action or reservation seats for women (and other such weaker sections in the panchayats) has resulted in effective leadership by these new leaders. It is necessary to see how effectively these neo-leaders have encountered and challenged or countered the hurdles in the path of their participation.

As is well known, NGOs have concentrated their activities more in the various sectors of social service, like health and education. Some of them have undertaken work in the area of total rural development (Driver and Driver 1982; Lalitha 1975; Chowdhry 1967; Seth 2001). They have brought out the role of women in PRIs, as the first generation political aspirants, facing a number of operational problems in their new roles. There are also studies which argue that the NGOs have given greater importance to action than the impact of their action.
1.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework for this study has been evolved out of a critical review of existing literature on decentralisation and development, in the context of the role of civil society organisations in development. It has focused specifically upon the role of women in the context of decentralisation, as a means of political empowerment and access to leadership.

As is well known, issues of gender, NGOs, Leadership and so on have become major areas of interest in studies on development. There is now recognition that there is a growing nexus between NGOs and the government on the one hand, and the NGOs and the decentralised bodies on the other. There is also an old and third type of alignment, viz., that between the government and the NGOs. The collaborative effort between these different bodies has been more in the matter of selection of beneficiaries for various development programmes. But, after the 1993 Act, that conferred reservation of seats to members of weaker sections in the various tiers of the decentralised bodies, called as the Panchayat Raj Institutions, participation by such representatives is not guaranteed and visible. This is because, even after the amendments, traditionally stronger groups have been considered as a major constraint for such lack of participation. This is posing a threat to the pro-poor service delivery function of the decentralised bodies. Unless the situation of constraint to participate by the members of the marginalised groups improves, any amount of constitutional amendments and transfer of power to the marginalised sections remains only on paper and a dream, and does not exist in reality.
There is no dearth of studies to prove the above point. Many scholars have pointed out that a number of constraints and limitations exist for the representatives from the poor and weaker groups. Others have been documenting the impact of training and capacity building exercises on the members of Panchayats. These include training in understanding one's political and civic rights in the context of decentralisation, role of elites, cultural dominance, institutional set up and so on.

Studies are also not lacking regarding the interface between the government and the NGOs. These studies have tried to answer the question of marginal involvement of people in such governance processes, because the process of empowerment is not progressing well.

Another interesting feature is that the NGOs, which are responsible for organising the poor people to prepare the members for enacting leadership roles, are often entangled in problems of funding and patronage with the state and the donors. As a result, the NGOs have been performing only the role of service delivery. Sometimes, they involve themselves in taking decisions at the local level as an additional role. Scholars have often expressed doubt as to who constitute the representatives of the poor at the grassroots level.

However, studies have documented the increasing role of NGOs in building the capacity of the poor and the illiterate to participate in local development. Especially, the members of the Gram Panchayats generally lack in literacy, economic resources, and the required skill to participate in local government. It is here that the NGOs have been playing a significant role.
Several other studies speak of the role of NGOs in empowering women in politics or local governance. They emphasise upon training component, which enables women representatives to perform their leadership roles effectively. The studies go on to explain that the change brought about by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment has provided opportunity for the hitherto non-represented sections of society like women, among others, to contest elections and gain access to leadership. Scholars, to understand the presence of gender bias in grassroots democracy, have extensively studied this aspect.

Studies by gender experts have pointed out the fact that women's status in the traditional society depended upon her socio-economic and literacy levels. Many authors have emphasised upon the issue of literacy as a key to assertion of their roles by the leaders. They have concentrated their attention upon the socio-cultural domain, which facilitates participation in the public sphere. They have argued that the NGOs have the capacity to bring about transformation among women through political empowerment. This is achieved by way of certain changes in the socio-cultural milieu that characterise a society.

1.5 Research Gaps

As is clear from the above, considerable amount of literature has been written on women today with a general focus on their position and role in rural areas. These studies which have enabled us to discover that rural women have broken the tradition-bound passive attitudes, backwardness, etc., to have a view of their own. The segment of social change or the dynamism of social change is important here. Rural women are proving to be second to none in making a positive response to the emerging challenges, with due credit to the rural cultural context. Earlier, there was a long-cherished perception that only men
could play an effective role in bringing about planned development, as a result of which women were looked down upon with a poor image. They were even afraid to venture into the innovative moves, which resulted in the wrath of the local community towards them. The studies have emphasised such 'social emergence' of women across the country where socio-political events have taken place.

Keeping all these issues in view, the present study aims to understand the nexus between decentralised governance, gender, leadership and NGO's role in Karnataka. The study attempts to locate women's political empowerment in the effective and good leadership that they have been able to offer in their roles. It tries to look into the issues that have enabled women to play the triple roles of productive, reproductive and community development along with their new role of being leaders as good and equal to the men. It is concerned with the study of devolution of power at the grassroots level and aims at looking at the performance of these institutions in terms of powers assigned. It also focuses upon the transformation in the rural sector after the introduction of the grassroots level democracy through 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

Following from the critical review of literature and research gaps identified, the objectives of the study are as under:

1. Understanding the socio-economic background of women elected representatives in the Gram Panchayats of the study area.

2. Looking into the factors that have motivated these women to contest elections, and to get elected.
3. Identifying the constraints for their effective political participation

4. Understanding the role of the NGOs in empowering women elected representatives and

5. Critically reflecting upon the interface of NGOs and decentralised governance in the context of sustainability of women's political empowerment.

1.7 Methodology of the Study

1.7.1. Hypotheses, Indicators and Variables

Measuring empowerment is a qualitative process. In the context of decentralisation, it is based on certain indices like participation, representation, decision-making, etc. The following hypotheses are relevant in this context:

1. The women who have been trained by the NGOs, or whose capacities have been built by them, tend to offer better leadership and performance than those elected representatives who are not trained.

2. Such 'trained women elected members' tend to play their leadership roles equally well and on par with that of their male counterparts.

3. The elected women representatives tend to actively participate in planning and implementing development programmes as they have an equally good knowledge of grassroots realities and problems as the male leaders.

4. Women, who have exposed to training, tend to play a very active role in community development works than the non-trained
women members, since they are aware of the links and procedure of doing so.

5. But even here, women leaders belonging to the dominant classes and castes of the village community have an advantage over the others in accessing training offered by the NGOs.

Table 1.1: Variables and Indicators of Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Frequent interaction in GP meetings, taking initiatives in community development, giving suggestions at the ward level, raising questions and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability for Political</td>
<td>Have the capacity to support any political party, support any political candidate, contest any election, and aim for higher positions like the President or Vice-President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>To participate in decision-making in community development programmes - like Health, Water and Sanitation, Infrastructure, to consider People's Opinion and trying to act according to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development</td>
<td>Influencing others to participate in governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7.2 Design of the Study

Given its nature of assessing the illusive abstract issue of participation, the study is both qualitative as well quantitative in its methodology. Considering that participation is something that cannot be measured or quantifiable, there was emphasis upon qualitative data.

Primary data were collected by canvassing a set of questionnaires, administered at the (a) village level, (b) household level, (c) level of the women elected representatives, and (d) at the level of officials, representatives of NGOs and community leaders. Besides these,
focused group discussions were held with a cross section of women leaders and other stakeholders. Select cases were picked up for developing case studies, and to highlight issues that would have either facilitated good leadership or resulted in failures.

Respondents were identified based on a cross-section of factors or indices. These included their socio-economic status, and past and present membership in panchayat Raj Institutions, particularly in Gram panchayats. Random sampling technique was used to select the respondents of a certain number.

The study area consisted of one with a blend of private and government organizations. Among the voluntary organizations or NGOs few were reputed ones, having been started from the year 1985 onwards. Few were found struggling hard to fulfil their objectives, and were still working hard against odds. It was discovered that these NGOs had undertaken training and capacity building exercises to GP women members only since 1998 onwards. A couple of other NGOs were also working in the study area, but for Self Help Groups formed under watershed development programmes. There were few exclusively women user groups also. Amongst them were those formed by leading NGOs like MYRADA, SEARCH, BAIF, NEEDS, and Guru Krupa Foundation, all working to reach the rural needy and poor households.

The above NGOs have conducted training programmes in all the study villages, that too not only once, but about 3 to 5 times. The basis for selecting the concerned district for this study was this phenomenon. Above all, the backward position that the district occupies and which is proved even in the recommendations of Dr. D M Nanjundappa Committee, have played an important role in its selection.
1.7.3 Sample Selection

Sample for the empirical study at the gram panchayat HQ village comprised of 200 households. From these households, 200 respondents were selected, representing 16 Gram panchayats (see table 1.2). Further, from each GP, 10-15 women elected members of GPs were selected. However, this number was not constant but it varied from GP to GP. The officials of the GP were also selected for focused discussions with them on a range of issues relating to the objectives of the study. These included the role of NGO or VO in empowering women members by conducting training courses and by various other methods.

32 such GP officials were selected. From the NGOs, we selected 18 resource persons who were their representatives working both at the grassroots level and in the block and district offices of the NGOs.

Ten households were selected purposively from each gram panchayat to understand the role of women leaders in the task of community development. However, this study’s main objective was to understand the performance of women leaders in the GPs and to analyse the role of NGOs in empowering these elected women representatives. Also, it has attempted to understand their ability in participation and decision-making.
Table 1.2: Distribution of Respondents in the selected Gram Panchayats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the GP</th>
<th>Elected Women Representatives</th>
<th>Officials</th>
<th>Other Resource Persons</th>
<th>Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guttal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havanuru</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negalur</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itagi</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asundi</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandapur</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konanakunte</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosuru</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiluru-Badni</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karadagi</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hattimatturu</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauanshi</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanumapura</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aremallapura</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundashi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ichchangi</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>160</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* They were taken in an overall manner. Therefore, their proportion is not given here.

1.7.4 Stages of the Study

In order to collect the required data from the sample households and individuals selected for the study, fieldwork was undertaken in sixteen GPs in four blocks of Haveri District. It was carried out in two stages, viz., pilot study and main study.
a) **Pilot Study**

In order to understand the appropriateness of the sample, and of the tools, and to get an initial feedback on the problems that led to the study, a pilot study was felt necessary to be undertaken. Based on the outcome of the pilot study, changes were made and the research tools were finalised.

b) **Main Study**

The main fieldwork was carried out during the year 2004-05, after making necessary corrections in the questionnaire and checklist used for the purpose.

### 1.7.5 Analysis and Presentation

Data were analysed using simple frequency method to explain the variations in the extent of participation. In some cases, socio-economic matrix was developed to assess this outcome.

Table 1.3 highlights the selection of trained and un-trained women elected members. These figures represent different relationships. In this, the 'B' group has been given the first priority and 'A', the second priority. Sometimes, they may not get any priority, as it was based on a selection criterion.
Table 1.3: Socio-Economic Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choosers</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7.6 Universe of the Study

The present study was carried out in the state of Karnataka, the premier state for Panchayat Raj System and reforms in India. The area of study chosen was gram panchayats rather than the urban local bodies, since women’s general socio-economic position was far more backward in the former, rather than in the latter (urban areas).

Gram Panchayats from the four blocks in Haveri district were selected for the study. The district as such is very backward. Besides this, it is also located quite away from the capital city of Bangalore.

A number of preliminary visits were made to the district to hold discussions with a cross-section of important people representing the panchayats, NGOs, government and the community. It was realised that NGOs were quite well represented in only one block of the district. It was glaringly absent in the other. Therefore, the block where NGOs had worked in the past in training women elected representatives in delivering their leadership roles well, was chosen for the present study, for comparative purposes. A further sampling of GPs in the block was made only after obtaining the basic details about
their presence and working in the various GPs from the concerned authorities. The block where NGO presence was absent was also chosen for comparative purposes.

It was proposed to select that village for investigation, which was the GP headquarters, so that a good representation of all communities could be obtained. A few GPs where women were the presidents were also selected for the study. All the women members of the selected GPs were our respondents. Besides them, a cross-section of male members, voters, village level officials and representatives of NGOs also became our respondents, based on a further sampling procedure.

1.7.7 Tools for Data Collection

The method adopted for selection of respondents from each village was random sampling method. On an average, about 10 to 15 members were selected from each village selected for the study. This was based on their women members' numerical strength and number of such seats. For the in-depth study, trained members, un-trained members, officials of the GPs and resource persons of NGOs were selected. Thus, the total sample for the current study was 200 respondents selected from 16 GPs, which were part of 4 blocks of Haveri district in the state of Karnataka.

Care had been taken to cover all age groups, social categories, castes and economic background of the family of the selected members/respondents. In addition to the questionnaire method for collection of data from the respondents, quasi-participant observation method and informal discussions were also held to get qualitative data. The researcher also took a few (sample) un-trained women members for objective assessment of the impact of the NGOs’ training
on their GP's functions, decision-making, participation and so on. Discussions were held with local people and community leaders to ascertain the benefit from the community development programmes implemented by the GP, like water and sanitation, street lights etc.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. A detailed questionnaire was canvassed at the household level for the members (both past and present). Focussed Group Discussions were held with members of village level organisations like women's and men's self-help groups, watershed committees, forest committees etc., with ex-members of panchayats, household men, officials, and representatives of NGOs, and so on. Case studies of successful women leaders, who had successfully achieved implementation of development programmes of their choice, were conducted, as also of those who could not accomplish similarly.

Besides all the above, efforts were made to study the course content, delivery mechanisms and other such details of capacity building by NGOs.

Data were processed with the help of computer for the preparation of statistical tables. Frequency and cross tabulation methods were also used.

Questionnaire was administered in an informal atmosphere, at the residences of the women GP members. The respondents were explained about the objectives and the need for the present study and were requested to give free and frank opinion about different aspects. The respondents were informed specially, that their views and opinions would be used only for research purposes and were taken into confidence.
The researcher visited the Deputy Commissioner's office, offices of the Executive Officer at the block level, and also the office of the Coordinator of NGOs in the district, for selecting villages, and collection of data. Visits to these offices were made many times for selecting the area, sample, for background information, secondary data and so on.

Before finalising the tools for data collection like the questionnaire, pre-testing of questionnaire was done in a pilot study, by choosing 20 respondents from two gram panchayats on whom it was tested. The pilot study helped the researcher to fine-tune the questionnaire with additional open-ended and closed-ended questions, by deleting and adding few more of them. It also helped in avoiding ambiguity, duplication and repetition of some of the items or issues in the questionnaire; care was taken to ask only one aspect in a question.

Apart from the primary data collected from the field, necessary secondary data were also collected from different sources. These included books, important research articles published in various professional journals, reports of the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Government of Karnataka, Report of the Task Force on Women, the Karnataka State Women Development Corporation and various non-governmental organisations. Besides these, seminar and workshop proceedings from ISEC, ISS, ISST, NIRD and other such research institutions were also referred to.

1.7.8 Limitations of the Study

It is necessary to state certain obvious limitations of the study here. First of all, the study concentrated on 16 Gram Panchayats at 4 blocks in Haveri district. This may appear to be a small sample compared to the 5,000 and odd gram panchayats that we have in the
state or hundreds that are present in the district. One may even strongly feel that this number may not be sufficient to even make any generalisation about the findings of the study. However, this limitation should not distort the findings in any way. This is because, the GPs have been selected in such a manner, that it was possible to capture the role and performance of their (GPs') women members, their sustainable political empowerment etc., due to training and awareness provided by the Non-Governmental Organisations.

Secondly, the present study has dealt only with a few important aspects of women members' social and economic background, that too in the context of their leadership, participation and empowerment in Gram Panchayats. But many other important issues, such as financial autonomy etc., were not the focus of the study.

Thirdly, no baseline information about the socio-economic background of the Gram Panchayat members and the Panchayats themselves, records and documents of Gram Panchayats, information regarding the attached villages and development in them were accessible to the researcher. This obviously hindered the analysis to some extent.

The respondents' (officials and resource persons of NGO's) view bore little relation to their lives, and matters outside their lives. Although, in many cases, the GP women members refrained from disclosing some of the issues relating to the working of the GP, due to fear of being punished by other members or officials or their husbands for the leakage. These related to, often, administrative loopholes, which created problems in administration and distribution of benefits or selection of beneficiaries. Women members were afraid of being further victimised, because, in their view, such technical and
complicated matters have to be dealt with by men, preferably. They felt that a lone lady could not sort out these matters well or efficiently. They also felt bad that researchers were coming from the capital city (Bangalore) to identify such mistakes by women members.

In summary, the present study has aimed at understanding the role and impact of voluntary organisations in empowering GP women members. The field study was conducted in different GPs of Haveri district in central Karnataka. The major reason for its selection was that many NGOs were present in it, where patriarchal society is still dominant. On the other hand, the district is underdeveloped as declared by the state government appointed High Power Committee’s Report.

1.7 Outline of the Study

The findings of the study have been presented in eight chapters. The first chapter is devoted to a detailed discussion on the background of the study, the selection of the research problem and its rationale, followed by a detailed review of literature. The conceptual framework for the study evolved after identifying the research gaps, has also been explained here. The chapter concludes by stating the objectives of the study and its methodology and scheme of presentation.

In chapter two, the theoretical framework for the study and conceptualisation are presented.

The third chapter attempts to trace the historical development of decentralised governance in India, in general, and in Karnataka, in particular.
The fourth chapter deals with the issue of Women's Political Participation and Leadership in the PRIs and the growth and emergence of NGOs and their interface with local self-government in capacity building has also been highlighted in the same chapter.

Chapter five presents the profile of the study area as well as of the socio-economic background of the Respondents.

In the sixth chapter, the findings of the study relating to the participation by women GP members are discussed.

The seventh chapter attempts to make a comparative assessment of those members who have undergone training in political participation vis-à-vis those who did not do so. It addresses the research questions relating to the participation of women in effective leadership and the constraints they have encountered in that context, both with training or in its absence.

The last chapter provides a summary of the findings along with policy perspectives to improve women’s role in decentralised governance in the light of the effectiveness and efficacy of training programmes offered by the NGOs.