CHAPTER III

CASE ANALYSIS

Case 1

R.Kavanur Village Panchayat

Ramanathapuram Union-Ramanathapuram District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. Saathy is the President of R.Kavanur Village Panchayat. She belongs to the SC community. She is an aged woman, 65 years old. She is illiterate, but has learned to affix her signature. She lives in a small tiled house with her husband. Her two sons are abroad. Ten years back she sent her sons abroad. Her daughters-in-law are living in nearby houses. They help her and her husband. Earlier she was an agricultural labourer. She used to lead and oversee a group of women engaged in farm activities. She knew folk songs and sang folk songs during the work so that her co-workers could relieve their tiredness. Further she used to give instructions to the workers to carry out the work sincerely so that the yield would be more, which benefited both the farmer and the farm labourers. This good work of Saathy brought her a good name. Hence she and her gang of women workers were always in demand. Along with these activities for her livelihood Saathy cleverly utilized new opportunities to improve her standard of life. When the Government, during the 1980s, auctioned the running of toddy shops, she was the only woman who took part in the auction and got a licence to run a toddy shop. With the help of her husband she ran the shop honestly, tackling the police department also. From the income of the toddy business she donated liberally during the celebration of temple festivals. When the Government stopped the toddy sale later and declared Tamil Nadu a dry state she was not ready to continue the sale illegally but discontinued the business.

But she continued her life as a farm labourer. She showed interest in participating in the local temple festivals. She knows the art of proper germination of different grains, known as “muiaipari”, and gives the proper facet to these germinations. So most of the women come to her and she and her women’s group get recognition during the festival times. Along with her village life Saathy showed interest in politics. The Congress Party leaders contacted her and encouraged her involvement in Congress Party activities. She
mobilized women volunteers for party rallies during the election periods. Later she became a party member in the AIADMK and when the AIADMK and the Congress Party had an alliance for the assembly elections, she served as the local convener for election activities. She established an office for the election work and actively engaged in the campaigning. When the World Tamil Conference was organised in Tanjore she participated in it. She took poor women to Trichy for attending the women's rally of the AIADMK where the AIADMK Chief Selvi Jeyalalitha presided and helped poor women's marriage.

**Recruitment Process**

Against this background Saathy contested in the Panchayat election when the position of Village Panchayat President was reserved for SC women. Even though she belonged to the AIADMK she did not like to project herself as an AIADMK candidate, She openly declared herself an independent candidate. There were three contenders. One was the wife of a businessman, the second was the wife of a Government servant and the third was the wife of a school teacher. All were economically sound. But she was confident of winning as the common people realized that the other candidates would become proxies: their husbands would interfere, but, in the case of Saathy it would not be so. She always acted independently. As all the candidates belonged to the SC, the SC voters did not come forward to openly support anybody. Only the close relatives of each candidate accompanied her and canvassed for her.

Saathy did not like to involve her husband as she herself could manage everything. She was confident of her leadership. She took with her only her daughters-in-law and two or three women volunteers. Going from door to door she assured the voters that she would serve the people and never permit her family to unnecessarily interfere in Panchayat affairs. This explanation impressed the people. Further she met the community leaders of the other castes and sought their support. Her age and independence, her openness, her involvement in religious festival celebrations and her close association with a large number of women cutting across caste and politics were the major factors which contributed to her success. No public address system was used during the election. All the contestants avoided microphone announcements. Wall writings, handbills and personal visits were the strategies adopted by all. Saathy spent not more than Rs. 10,000/- towards the election campaign. She won by a difference of 150 votes.
Village Setup

R. Kavanur is a multi caste village. The Scheduled Caste is the dominant caste and the next largest is the Vellalar community. The Nadar caste is the third major community. Other castes like Dhobi, Barber, Carpenter and Pandaram also reside in the village. The details of the population were not available but the Panchayat clerk said that there are 1580 voters in the village. There are three Wards and six Members in the Panchayat. Out of them four belong to the SC and the remaining two belong to caste Hindu communities.

Caste Associations

All the dominant castes, namely, Vellalars, SCs and Nadars have their caste associations, namely, VOC Peravai, Dr. Ambedkar Mandram and Emanuel Peravai and Nadar Peravai. Among the SCs there is a separate sect, namely, Arunthathiyar, functioning independently. Except Arunthathiyars all the castes, namely, Vellalars, SCs (Pallar) and Nadars have their own office building to run the association. They meet once a month and collect subscription. They do welfare activities for their caste members. The Arunthathiyar Sangam youth run a reading centre in the name of Nethaji. The youth organize sports and cultural activities. They help during the celebration of marriages of their caste members. Cutting across castes they join in public activities also. The village festivals, "eruthu kattu" and "manchuvirattu" are celebrated by all. The expenses are met from family wise contribution.

Village Committee

A traditional Village Committee consisting of members from the SC community, Nadars, Vellalars and Arunthathiyars is serving as a forum for discussing village problems and celebrating village festivals. Earlier it was headed by the Vellalars. Now the chairperson belongs to the SC. The Secretary is a Vellalar and the Treasurer is a Nadar. There is no untouchability. All communities mingle with each other freely. Harmonious relationship is maintained among the communities.

Political Parties

The DMK and the AIADMK are the dominant parties. The Puthiya Tamizhagam, the TMC, the Communist Party and the Congress Party are the other parties functioning in Kavanur Village. Saathy personally meets the local political party leaders. A few of them visit the Panchayat office. At the time of meetings the activities of the Panchayat are discussed with them. There is no misunderstanding between the political parties and the Panchayat. This mutual
understanding is possible as she frequently meets them and shares ideas with them.

Common Property Resources

There is one oorani but, due to severe drought, there is no storage of rain water. There are 10 tamarind trees and a few neem trees on the bund of the oorani for which 20 patta is issued to individuals. A poramboke site is encroached upon by both SC and BC families and so a proposal to construct a threshing floor is yet to be accomplished.

Self Help Groups

There are 9 SHGs of which 7 are sponsored by a Non Governmental Organization named Kalanchiyam and two are promoted by the Panchayat Union administration. The Kalanchiyam groups were formed recently. Most of the families have got IRDP loan and so the group members have not yet got group loan. The SHG women show interest in educating their children including girl children and so the number of school dropouts among the girls has been reduced. All the girls attend school at least up to the eighth standard. After that only those families who are able to meet the educational expenses send their girl children to high school.

Village Economy

Under kanmoi irrigation crops like paddy, groundnut and cotton are grown. There are about 170 farmers and 200 landless agricultural families belonging to all castes. Four SC farmers own Jeevandara wells. The farmers’ association controls the trees grown inside the oorani. From the income from fishing the association meets the expenses for purchasing furniture for the school and for maintenance work in the school building. The farmers’ association makes use of the Panchayat for representing their grievances to the District Collector. Further the farmers’ association and the Village Committee are very active in ensuring the redressal of farmers’ grievances. Hence the Panchayat President need not take any further effort in this regard. About 100 families are very poor. They need Government support. Both men and women are engaged in cutting karuvel trees for charcoal preparation and are also employed in brick kiln work.

Perception on Panchayati Raj

Saathy does not know the Act, rules and procedures in respect of Panchayati Raj. But she understands the importance of reservation of seats for women and Dalits in the Panchayat. After she became the President she
helped to get Government assistance for widows and the poor. She managed to get 40 ration cards for the ultra poor and house site pattas for 10 poor families. According to Saathy, since a number of schemes and programmes are routed through the Panchayat, the poor will get such benefits if the Panchayat Presidents are honest.

On Development

Development will not come through the Panchayat alone. Associations of farmers, women and youth are very important in bringing about development. Power is needed to the Panchayat only to bring the Government Departments closer to the people. Availability of drinking water is an essential basic amenity for development. The Government must come forward to establish tiny industries in rural areas by which employment opportunities will be created for the youth and women.

On Polity

If the cadres of each political party work hard the village can be developed very easily. One can ensure quick development by involving the people. But the political parties are active only during the election and afterwards they are not concerned about the developmental issues.

On Social Justice

The SC community is the dominant caste in this village and hence there is no suppression. If SCs are land holders there will be more mutual understanding between the SC community and the caste Hindus. The present youngsters are very active in challenging any suppression. Any misunderstanding between the SCs and the BCs is immediately attended to by the villagers and they try to settle it amicably. Because of this trend now-a-days caste problems do not crop up. If the President of the Village Panchayat maintains a good relationship with the community leaders any injustice to women and SCs can be tackled successfully.

Performance

Even though Saathy is uneducated she has gained knowledge of running the Panchayat. The OHT operator, an educated youth, is her close relative. He is very much helpful to her. She understands the contents of communications by asking this young man to read and explain them. Further the Panchayat clerk is an old man who always comes forward to explain in detail anything with regard to Panchayat administration. Based on such information she meets the officials and explains the village problems and tries
to avail of the schemes. She is very conscious of her limitations. The works are carried out by local contractors who execute the works promptly. Otherwise the local people will obstruct the work. So there is no serious problem with regard to contract work. The Vice-President belongs to the BC community and he is cooperative. There are some issues between them but she manages to settle them amicably. The Panchayat Council meeting is properly conducted and the Members participate without fail. The women Members demand facilities and schemes for their Wards.

The Gram Sabha meetings are also properly conducted after informing the public. All caste people attend. Around one hundred members attend. Issues with regard to drinking water, roads, group houses and street lights are discussed in the Gram Sabha meeting. The income and expenditure details are read out. When the motor pump repair was delayed due to non-availability of a good mechanic the participants of the Gram Sabha commented seriously. When the road work was done by a highways contractor the pipeline was damaged which called for major time consuming repairs. The villagers demanded quick repair work. People do not understand the problems in administration but expect immediate redressal of grievances. Good relationship and frequent meetings with officials are a necessary pre-condition for achieving things in the Panchayat administration. Saathy influenced the Union Councillor and got a new OHT. As there is a local person who works in the highways she sought his help and requested him to provide a BT road. When the Minister came to Ramanathapuram she met him and informed him of the feelings of the people and requested him to advise the officials to allocate funds to provide a BT road. It was provided.

Successful completion of group houses is really a tough task. So far 26 group houses and 17 katcha houses have been provided. She explained to the officials the details of the plight of the SC community and got additional sanction in this regard and she succeeded in getting 4 houses for BCs out of the total allocation. To keep her promises Saathy first made arrangements for the clearing of garbage which had been lying about for more than five years along the streets and roads. Then the streets were sprinkled with sand and so environmental sanitation improved. Then repairing of street lights was undertaken and now there are 5 street lights available in the village and three more are going to be provided soon. When the Drought Relief Fund was allocated in the year 1997-98, a borewell was dug in the riverbed and drinking water supply was improved. Maintenance of oorani bund was taken up under the JVVT in the year 1998-99. In the same year under the group houses
scheme 26 houses were constructed. A bathing ghat at a cost of Rs.40,000/- was constructed under the JVVT. The Panchayat is taking seriously the protection and maintenance of the oorani and so a considerable amount is spent for that. Repairing breaches, construction of retaining wall, desilting, maintenance of inlet channel etc. are the major works done by the Panchayat. The farmers' association and the community leaders used to give suggestions in this regard and the Panchayat duly considered these suggestions.

Water supply is still an issue as the ground water in many areas is salty. Hence the Panchayat is making efforts to maintain the existing drinking water wells in the village. There are five open wells and seven tube wells. All are properly maintained. The Panchayat Union helped the Gram Panchayat in desilting the wells. The TWAD Board provided a well, a jet pump with a room and an OHT also. Union officials are helping as she meets them every day and seeks their help to improve her village. A new building was constructed for the Panchayat office from the allocation of the District Council Fund. The District Councillor is a woman and Saathy meets her and requests her to consider the demands of the villagers. The Village Committee is very cooperative. Under the NNT maintenance of inlet channel was carried out for which Rs.25,000/- was given by the Committee. The Village Committee used money from the auctioning of trees on the banks of the ponds and ooranis. Out of this generated fund village welfare activities were carried out by the Village Committee. The mutual understanding and the coordination between the Panchayat and the Village Committee are very much effective in Kavanur as Saathy realizes their importance.

Panchayat Income

Apart from the regular income like house tax and stamp duty the house tax matching grant and the share of mines royalty are an additional income to Kavanur Panchayat. Rs. 1,21,750/- was received from the state government as share for the years 1996-97 and 1997-98.

The house tax slabs were rescheduled in the year 1998 but the additional income was only limited as most of the houses are huts and tiled ones, for which high rates of tax can not be fixed. The SFC grant is the main source of income. From the Panchayat accounts it is noticed that the major sources of income are SFC grant, stamp duty and professional tax. For example, in the year 1999-2000, Rs.1,65,576/- was credited under SFC, Rs.47,111/- under stamp duty and Rs.14,550/- under professional tax, while Rs. 10,017/- was received as house tax matching grant. From the expenses
side apart from the establishment charges, for EB bills Rs.11,622/- for wells maintenance Rs.30,710/- for ponds and tanks maintenance Rs.18,110/- for road and culvert maintenance Rs.31,540/- and for street light maintenance Rs.7528/- were spent.

During the year 2000-2001 the Panchayat provided cement concrete road and that was the major expense. Around 1000 meters of CC road at a cost of 1,64,000/-. Rs.40,000/- was spent on drinking water well repair and construction of platform etc. Construction of retaining wall along the oorani bund was taken up and Rs.1.07 lakhs was spent for that work. For extension of pipelines Rs. 15,000/- was spent. From the records it is noticed that additional expenses were incurred under the following heads: salary to staff, well maintenance, OHT maintenance, Village Panchayat building maintenance and public sanitation. When Saathy was asked to give her opinion on this she said that if the works are essential the Panchayat has to undertake them since otherwise the people will suffer. The amount additionally spent is not a wasteful expenditure.

In the service sector it is said that the Panchayat took efforts to get transport facility. Saathy personally met the Managing Director of the government transport corporation and explained the sufferings of the school students. Taps were provided in the school toilet from the Panchayat fund. Under MLA Area Development Fund two additional buildings were provided to the school. The Parent Teachers Association was strengthened and she used to attend their meetings regularly. The PDS is functioning in a private building. Efforts have been made to build a permanent own building. Her serious efforts to avail of money from the MP Area Development Fund for construction of a marriage hall has not yet fructified. Health activities are well supervised as a PHC is available in the village itself. Saathy meets the doctor and the doctor gives advice on the cleaning of water tanks and the maintenance of environmental sanitation.

The VHN visits the balwadi regularly and the immunization programme is properly organized. She advises the pregnant women to meet the doctor and have delivery at the PHC. As a result the number of deliveries performed in the institution has gone up.

Accounting and Audit

There is no objection from the audit. The clerk properly takes care of everything. Saathy just enquires about everything periodically. There is a room hired in Ramanathapuram to have easy access to the Panchayat Union
as well as the District Collector’s office. The clerk and the President go
everyday to Ramanathapuram. So they have a local office in
Ramanathapuram. She used to take issues to various government offices for
speedy redressal. Only because of this frequent meetings and close follow up
things are achieved.

**Her Future Vision**

She plans to contest again as she is determined to do several tasks
which include proper drainage system, proper facilities at the burial ground,
further maintenance of irrigation system as a whole, additional street lights and
a new building for the PDS. She is independent though she is living with her
husband. Her sons are abroad. She does not want money as she can manage
with the money sent by her sons. So she feels that she can give a clean
administration and that she can be available at any time to serve the villagers.

**Summary and Observation**

Even though she is illiterate she shows interest to learn things and is
ready to pick up any new knowledge concerning the Panchayat. She has
indomitable energy and enthusiasm to work for the people. She feels that she
derives pleasure from fulfilling the demands of the people. She has also set an
example to other women, as age and other social factors lead the way to
emerge as a leader. Though there is political backup, Saathy has never
projected herself as a member of a political party. This proves that party
politics has nothing to do at the grassroots. An understanding of the
environment, adaptability to the community and sharing responsibility by means
of extending care and support mostly on a moral basis will actually lead to
positive results. Respect and recognition are other factors that pave the way
for success. She has never projected herself as a dependent, but she works
with a group of people, especially the women, including her like minded
daughters-in-law also.
Case 2
VeppankuSam Panchayat

Kalla! Union—Sivagangai District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. Kalaiarasi belongs to the SC community and has studied up to the tenth standard. Her age is 33. She does not know her parents. She became a destitute in her childhood days. She was under the protection of a caste Hindu of the Kallar community. All her expenses were met by this family. After her school final in Pattamangalanoor, an NGO named Gramiya lyakkam identified her and gave her leadership training and, after the training, she was made the convenor of a women's organization. She worked in a cotton mill and also learnt the skill of tailoring.

After she got married she came to live in Veppankulam. She got employment in the balwadi. In her husband's village also she continues her social services. Her husband is a drunkard and he does not do any work. So she is the bread winner in her family. She has two children, one male and the other female and both of them are school going children. Her family has 3 acres of land, which are in the possession of her in-laws. Her in-laws are living separately.

Village Setup

Veppankulam is a big Panchayat and has got seven hamlets. The population of the Panchayat, according to the 1991 census, is 2603, of which 1147 are men and 1456 are women. There are three Wards with 9 Members and of them 6 are men and 3 are woman. Out of the 9 Members 3 belong to the SC (two men and one woman). The President's position is reserved for an SC woman.

Communities

The dominant castes are Kallars and Scheduled Castes, who are equal in strength. The next major caste is that of Muthirayars. Velars, Konars, and Asaris are in the minority in population. There are 625 houses, of which 203 are huts and the rest are tiled and pucca houses. Kalaiarasi said that when she made arrangements for establishing a common graveyard the majority communities did not approve of it. Each community preferred to maintain the area already existing as graveyard on the bank of the river Manimuthar. There are no major differences of opinion among the communities. But when a scheme is implemented there is a demand from all the communities that they
must also be benefited. As an example Kalaiarasi said that when 10 group houses were allotted to Veppankulam Village Panchayat, 10 SC beneficiaries were selected. The two sub-groups in the SC, i.e., Pallar and Parayar, claimed that their own group must be given more number of houses. When the village elders and the Ward Members decided to allot 4 houses to Pallars and 5 houses to Parayars, the Parayars did not accept the decision as their population is more than that of the Pallars. They demanded that 7 houses should be allotted to them. As the matter could not be settled peacefully the Parayar group went to the police station and filed a complaint that there was a local problem and they sought the intervention of the police. The police officials came and inspected the details and verified the decision of the Panchayat Council. Then the police advised the Parayar group that they could not ask for more houses. The women’s group leaders of both the groups discussed the issue and there was a compromise at 5:4 as decided by the Panchayat. The dispute was settled only by the women leaders.

Moreover the Government’s instruction was to construct group houses, whereas the beneficiaries preferred to construct houses where they now live where the site was not sufficient as per the specifications of the Government. Making them realize the problem and getting their permission was really a tough process. Without their consent work could not be started as the work order for group houses must be in the name of the beneficiaries. The BPL list is not accurate. The households who are really poor are not on the list. This issue was brought up by the villagers during the Gram Sabha meeting and so the Panchayat wrote to the Union authorities in this regard. The staff from the Union are now verifying the list in response to the complaint.

The Village Temples

The village has a rich tradition with regard to temples and their celebrations. There are two Ayyanar temples and 6 acres of land are endowed on this temple. The poojaris belong to the Velar community and they enjoy the land. All communities come and worship in these temples. The Kali temple poojari belongs to the SC Paryar community. It is a famous temple as people of other villages also visit the temple. Marriages are conducted here. Malai Meenakshi is the temple managed by the Muthirayar community. In general other communities do not visit this temple. There are two temples for Lord Ganesa. People from the Pandaram community are the poojaris in these two temples. All communities worship here. In Vadamalai Kali temple the poojari belongs to the Pallar community. As the residential area of the Servai community is located near this temple they also worship this deity. The Tamil
month of Chittirai is the most auspicious month during which the villagers organize celebrations in these temples.

The Muthiryars manage the Ayyanar temple and the land endowed on the temple belongs to their community. The matter was taken to court. When the verdict of the court went against the Muthirayar community they appealed in the High Court. For the past 15 years the case is pending in the court. The issue is not yet settled. Due to this the renovation work at the Ayyanar temple can not be undertaken. During the celebration of the temple festivals the Panchayat makes elaborate arrangements for the provision of drinking water and the supply of electricity from the Panchayat office at night. The President does not get any recognition during these festivals whereas the VAO is properly informed and suitably respected during the function arranged for bull-fight or drama by the Vaniyars or Kallars. But when the Parayar group organizes Pongal celebration they give due respect to the President and the Vice-President (who belongs to the Kallar community) and invite them for participation in the celebration.

Caste Association

The Mukkulathor Peravai is a strong and active caste association run by the youth belonging to that community. It is a registered body. For the past two to three years the Peravai is active in temple celebration.

There was a problem between the Kallars and the SCs during the year 1980 with regard to bull-fight (manchu virattu) and so the SC youth decided to organize manchu virattu on their own. Usually the Ayyanar temple celebration is a common one and donations are collected from all the communities. After meeting the expenses the balance amount is given for the provision of furniture to the school. The youth actively arrange the prize distribution through lottery method for which they sell tickets to all community members. But due to the difference of opinion there is a possibility of separate celebration of manchu virattu by the SC youth. In the meantime the youth of the other castes have also formed separate committees and mobilized themselves. The elders feel sorry for this as it will create tension among the communities.

The Dr.Ambedkar Peravai and the Women's Sangam are organized by the SC community. Kalaiarasi is the leader of the Women's Sangam. The members actively participate in the Sagam meetings and show interest in public activities. At the Union level the Veppankulam SC Women's Sangam was selected as the best one. A sewing machine was given as a compliment.
These women members’ marriage celebration is assisted by the other members.

**Self Help Group**

There are three old SHGs and three new ones. Five groups are engaged in running a revolving fund. Women attend the meetings and properly respond to the public meetings, medical camps etc. Under TANWA an SHG has been formed. Five days’ training is organized for TANWA members. The SC women function independently. They do not share their profit with the Women’s Sangam. The SC youth collected donations for the Gujarat Earthquake Relief Fund. They were not ready to join other women’s groups in this regard. When necessity arises all SC men, women and youth respond and common meetings are arranged near the temple site. Youth wing members prefer sports, particularly cricket. They helped to prepare a ground in the Panchayat poramboke. The Panchayat is trying to provide funds for establishing a sports / recreation centre.

**Parent Teachers Association**

The PTA has been recently activated. The Headmaster is a local man. Toilet, drinking water facility and maintenance work are undertaken by the Panchayat. The youth of the Kaliar community spent their money for painting the wall of the school.

**Village Economy**

Agriculture is the main occupation in Veppankualm Village. About 100 farmers live in the village. The majority of them are small farmers. About 18 pumpsets are available for irrigation. The SC farmers are very small in number, Paddy, sugarcane, banana and groundnut are the major crops produced here. There is a Farmers’ Association which looks after 4 community borewells meant for irrigation. Due to lack of proper maintenance three of them have become defunct. The motors are of high power, namely, 15 HP, 10 HP and 7.5 HP. There is no mechanic to attend to repair work on these motor pumps. The members’ use of the community wells was raised in the Gram Sabha meeting. The participants demanded that the right to oversee the community well should be vested with the Panchayat. But the Farmers’ Committee did not come forward to hand over the wells or to undertake necessary repair work. The farmer who is in charge of one of the community wells stated that the rent is not properly paid by those farmers who avail themselves of the water from the community wells and so repairs can not be
undertaken when the motor fails. The motor was damaged heavily due to lightning.

Kalaiarasi said that the community wells are in a drought prone area. The development schemes are not properly handed over to the Panchayat. Nor are the rights and responsibilities of the Panchayat spelled out clearly. The Farmers’ Association is not really serious about in organizing the farmers. So the investment in community irrigation wells is lost. If the wells are handed over to the Panchayat the Panchayat could collect user charges and maintain them properly from the funds collected. The Union officials have been contacted and acquainted with the demands of the villagers in this regard but they have not responded properly.

Common Property Resources

There are eight ponds in the Panchayat area. The extent of the largest pond is 30 hectares and there is a small pond of an extent of 1.60 hectares. Due to the failure of rains water has not filled up in the ponds. After the new Panchayati Raj system was introduced only once auction was conducted for fishing, from which Rs.4000/- was received by Panchayat. Under the Social Forestry Scheme for the past two years karuvel trees have been planted. The Panchayat protected the same for one year. But most of the poor people cut down the fuel trees and sold them or took them for personal use. Once the trees were auctioned and Rs.5000/- was earned.

The Social Forestry authorities sold the grown up trees and informed that Rs.28,000/- was the share of Veppankulam. They issued a cheque but later came and asked the Panchayat to return the same for some reason. So far the cheque has been not reissued. This is the problem in an other eight Village Panchayats also. Kalaiarasi complained that there is no transparency in the dealings of the Forestry Department and the Union administration. There is a pond meant for drinking water. As a few trees had to be cleared for safeguarding the drinking water in the pond the Panchayat sought permission to cut the trees. The officials expected a bribe for sanctioning the cutting order. There is a Reserved Forest maintained by the Forest Department. Eucalyptus trees are grown there and the Panchayat does not have any right over the same. As there is strict control over these forests the villagers depend on the trees grown in the Panchayat ponds for fuel. She tried to restrain the people from cutting the trees by engaging the youth. But the youth did not come forward. They are of the perception that it is the duty of the Panchayat and the Government to safeguard the trees.
Gram Sabha

Usually the Gram Sabha meetings are organized at the primary school. Around 50 to 60 persons, mostly women, participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Most of the participants have a lot of expectations. They demand works which are very expensive. Since there are seven hamlets the demands for basic facilities are large in number.

Recruitment

There were two candidates in the fray in the election. Her husband is the secretary of the local DMK unit. Her father-in-law and mother-in-law did not favour her candidature. The Village Committee of elders belonging to the SC community suggested her name and there was no opposition in Veppankulam. But with the support of caste Hindus of the main hamlet another SC woman opposed her. Her husband’s party affiliation, the support of all the communities in the main village, her educational background and her service as balwadi teacher for the past five years made the people favour her in the election. Moreover she served as the convenor of the Women’s Sangam sponsored by the IFPA for unorganized rural workers. She has undergone training in IFPA, Gandhigram. The Gramya lyakkam encouraged her in her public activities in her native village. After getting married she came to Veppankulam. Here also she continued her social service and she got employment in the balwadi and organized the Women’s Sangam among the SC women in this village. Due to this she won the election by a difference of 660 votes. Many people contributed to her campaign.

Perception and Performance

She did not know anything about Panchayati Raj. She was under the impression that a number of officials would come and help in Panchayat administration. After becoming the President she came to know that there are no permanent officials in the Panchayat for assistance. Then she made up her mind seriously to learn the details like meeting procedure, tender procedure, account maintenance procedure and relevant systems in Panchayat administration. The clerk is an experienced person. He properly explained the details of Panchayat administration and she slowly picked up the leadership.

On Gender

Women, after orientation in SHGs, come to understand the outside world. But still they do not give their time and mind to learn about themselves. Only one women Ward Member is very serious and actively participates in the
meetings. The other two women Members just visit and affix their signature. In rural areas women are still considered second rate citizens. Most of the activities are managed by men in public meetings, celebrations and other common gatherings. They do not consider the women’s leadership. But, due to orientation in SHGs, she has a grip over women’s voices and concerns with regard to public distribution system, drinking water supply and children’s education.

Kalaiarasi explained the strength of SHGs in other areas, particularly in running the PDS shop through a group belonging to a SC sub sect, namely, the Cobbler community. She was asked to organize the milk vending business so as to be administered by a women’s group. Two women got employment in this business. The milch animals are purchased under the IRDP. The loan amount is repaid promptly. The record loan is also availed of by the members of the milk vending group. Implementation of the improved chula scheme and the bio gas scheme was a success in her Panchayat. She personally involved herself in providing chula to poor women. She explains the importance of optimum utilization of firewood. So far 60 chulas and 4 biogas plants have been provided to the villagers. The biogas plant is not functioning properly. The repair was attended to but still there are problems. The officials should look into it. Otherwise the scheme will be implemented for name’s sake only but to no real benefit. Moreover it is found that the cattle population is now reduced and the labour is not available to do this job.

Under CRSP 20 toilets were provided and the beneficiaries were advised to construct the toilets. Availing of group houses is a problem as the concerned officials expect money to allot more number of group houses. She discussed with the beneficiaries and each of them gave Rs.500/ for sanctioning the order in their name irrespective of the approval by the Gram Sabha. So far 19 group houses have been constructed in the Panchayat.

**Her Capacity Building Experience**

After she became the President she underwent one month’s training in modern agriculture in Trichy Agriculture Centre. Under Vayalveli Palli (School) she attended another one-month course as she is an active woman farmer. The TANWA provided paddy seeds at subsidized cost and fertilizer. She has a demonstration plot for seedlings of paddy in her farm as she owns 3 acres of land and irrigation under the Jeevanthara well / pumpset scheme.

The political parties, except the Congress Party, do not show interest in meeting / sharing ideas with the Panchayat leader. The DMK, the AIADMK and
the CPM are the other parties. The Vice-President belongs to the DMK Party. He is cooperative. His active cooperation is a support to Kalaivarasi.

Panchayat Meeting

There are three Ward Members residing outside the village. They are usually irregular in attending the Panchayat Council meetings. They rarely visit but criticize the Panchayat. They first voice the feelings of the people belonging to their Ward. They demand the immediate attention of the President to the problems of their Wards. Beyond that they have no interest in other things in the Panchayat administration. The works are executed by local contractors. Kalaivarasi does not take up any work as she does not have money to meet the preliminary expenses. The bill settlement will be delayed and so she has not shown interest in such contract work. Some Ward Members execute a few works. But the majority of the works are undertaken by a local contractor who belongs to the AIADMK Party. Being a mason by profession, he can manage the workers and so he is able to maintain quality and earn a profit.

Educational Sector

The Panchayat wants upgradation of the Secondary School to a High School. Kalaivarasi was able to persuade a local philanthropist to donate the site. But Rs.1 lakh has to be deposited before getting the sanction order. The villagers have not yet come forward to donate this amount. The high school is yet to come to the village. She is trying with individuals who are employed abroad. To provide a minihealth centre, 0.16 cent of land has been identified and earmarked. But the order is not yet passed.

Panchayat finance

In the year 1996/97 under the JVVT scheme desilting work in two ooranis meant for drinking water was undertaken and a road was laid at a cost of Rs.1.28 lakhs. In the year 98/99 a culvert to the SC colony and three retaining walls to protect agricultural lands by arresting erosion by the river were constructed at a cost of Rs.1.04 lakhs. Two more retaining walls were also constructed at a cost of Rs.0.64 lakh. In the year 1999-2000, a kanmoi bund and a bridge were constructed at a cost of Rs.1.60 lakhs. A ground level reservoir was constructed at a cost of Rs.11,000/ from the 10th Finance Commission allocation in the year 1999-2000. Four public taps and a BT road were also provided at a cost of Rs.27,000/. The SFC grant received in the year 97-98 was Rs.88789; in 98-99 it was Rs.38992/; in 99-2000 it was Rs.57549/; and, in the year 2000/2001 it was Rs.1,30,688. These allocations were spent
for paying electricity bills, repair of motor pumps and other establishment expenses. Hand pump repair was also undertaken from this fund. The availability of an eligible mechanic to attend to the repairs of motor pumps is a problem. Due to unexpected delays and improper repairs, the motors are becoming defective and deficient. After more than 26 resolutions were passed the Panchayat Council decided to purchase two new motors at a cost of Rs.48,000/-. The money was spent from the SFC allocation. The mechanic is an approved mechanic but he is not an efficient and skilled person.

Linkages

With the assistance of the Union Councillor a lot of works were carried out as the village elders helped Kalaiarasi to influence the Union Councillor. A bridge was constructed and a retaining wall was provided in the kanmoi. Altogether from the Union Council Fund Rs.8.50 lakhs worth of works were carried out. The District Councillor got sanction for a BT road at a cost of Rs.4.75 lakhs. In this regard Kalaiarasi frequently met the District President/Union Chairman and got the sanction. From the MLA Fund a bridge was constructed at a cost of Rs.35,000/ and desilting of oorani was done at a cost of Rs.71,000/-. The quality was not good as she was not able to supervise the works. From the MP Fund one bus shelter was provided. The estimate is not known to her.

Under the NNT desilting of oorani and construction of retaining wall and a bathing ghat were undertaken in the hamlet of Kalkulam. It was possible as the people of this hamlet were well organized. In the presence of the BDO Kalaiarasi organized a public meeting in Kalkulam to discuss the NNT and with the contribution of the people Rs.1.5 lakhs worth of work was carried out by the Panchayat. Health camp, AIDS awareness campaign and veterinary camps are organized. The concerned department approaches the Panchayat. But there is no permission to meet the organizational expenses from the Panchayat. Yet Kalaiarasi met the expenses though it was difficult. A Public Grievance Day is organized in this Panchayat. The Panchayat resorts to propaganda for this though the organizational expenses are not permitted to be met from Panchayat funds. Kalaiarasi faces difficulty in meeting the expenses as the public do not come forward to meet the expenses. They think that it is the duty of the President or the Panchayat, whereas the auditor objects to meeting this kind of expenditure. People do not understand the reality.
Audit/Account/Corruption

The officials expect personal favours. This is dealt with by the clerk but she used to openly argue with the officials that she does not do the contract work and so has no earning from the Panchayat. A clear message is given to the officials that she won’t give money.

Scope

Kalaiarasi is very much approachable to all and she freely moves with the village elders, discusses the village problems and seeks their help and guidance. This approach is liked by all. When any difference of opinion between the communities is reported she voluntarily meets the elders of those concerned communities and tries to settle the problem amicably. Her attitude, behaviour and skills have changed and she has cultivated the good habit of listening to others. She gained the confidence and won the support of the people which prompted her to contest in the next election also. Black topping of all link roads, extension of street lights, improvement in water supply, houses to poor people, employment opportunities for women, construction of mini health centre and veterinary sub centre are the pending works on her agenda. She was confident that she would win with the help of the villagers. She could bring more facilities to the village. As she is easily approachable anything can be tackled, the village elders felt. They realize the importance of the Panchayat President in maintaining communal harmony among the various castes. Her brothers-in-law and her father-in-law help her in public activities. The NGO Grama iyakkam also helps her.

Summary and Observation

The success of Kalaiarasi, depends upon very many factors. Starting from her childhood, though she belongs to the SC, she was brought up by a caste Hindu. Education and association with an NGO and formation of SHGs has opened a new chapter in her life. It is vital to note that, in an area where the caste Hindus are dominant, it is not easy for an individual from a minority section to lead the whole village. But her association from her childhood with all the other sections of the community has helped to achieve solidarity in the village. Willingness to learn and practice, support base from the different segments and stakeholders have enabled the performance of Kalaiarasi. It also proves that an integrated effort will always result in effective performance.
Case 3
Rasingapuram Village Panchayat
Bodi Panchayat Union-Theni District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. Rajammal (42), who has studied up to SSLC, is the President of Rasingapuram Gram Panchayat. She belongs to the Hindu religion and the Gounder caste. She is doing agriculture in the village and lives in a tiled house with electric light and toilet facilities, but without house tap connection. She is in a joint family, living with her husband, father and two male children. One son is employed in Goa and the second son is studying B.E. Ill year. Her husband works in a bank. She has an estate and garden lands. Her father is also looking after the agricultural activities.

Rajammal’s father was the earlier Panchayat President for 15 years. He carried out many welfare activities in the village and helped the poor people. This helped her to win in the Panchayat election. This Panchayat was reserved for women. The villagers commonly decided upon the candidate. The traditional Village Committee consists of Devanga Chettiars, Nacikers, Okkalika Gounders, Kurumila Gounders, Thevars, and SCs. Her family had served the people for about 20 years. Hence the people supported her in the Panchayat election.

Socio-Political Environment the Village

The village is situated south of Bodi Town at a distance of 15 kms. There are 5664 people. Out of them 2850 are males and 2814 are females. The total SC population is 449, and of them 228 are males and 221 are females. There are four hamlets, namely, Kariya Goundenpatti, Kodi Pomminaickanpatti, Veer Jakkammalpuram and Samathuvapuram. There are four Wards and nine Ward Members. Among the nine Ward Members, five are males and four females and among the females one is from the SC. The remaining 8 members are from BC communities.

There are several communities living in the Village Panchayat. The Gounder caste is the dominant one and the Chettiars come next. The other castes are Thevars, Dhobis, Asaris, Pilfais, Barbers, Parayars and Rajus.

Gounder and Chettiar castes have their caste associations. These associations help the Panchayat to mobilize the people for the Gram Sabha meeting and at the time of removing encroachments in the Panchayat lands.
There are political parties like the AIADMK, the DMK, the TMC, the MDMK, the CPI and the Congress in the Panchayat. They are active during the election time only. After the election there is no serious political activity. The youth have Cine Fans’ Associations for Rajinikanth, Vijayakanth, Vijay, Ajith, Sathyaraj and Prasanth. They celebrate their actors’ birthday only. During the Pongal festival they conduct sports and give away prizes to the winners. There are five SHGs in the Panchayat. They are motivated for small savings and do some small business in the villages. They lend money at low interest rates among themselves and they attend the Gram Sabha meetings regularly and demand their needs. About 75% of the families are engaged in agriculture. The lands get well water and tank water for irrigation. Cotton, sugarcane, paddy, chillies and groundnut are the major crops cultivated in the garden land. Maize, kambu, cholam and millets are cultivated in the wet lands. Theni and Bodi are the nearby towns at a distance of 25 kms and 15 kms respectively. Nearly 50-100 people go there everyday for employment in mills, building construction, painting and small businesses like fruits and vegetables. Agriculture and allied work are done by most of the villagers. Cotton, chillies and groundnut cultivation is profitable in this area. Nearly 5 to 10% of the income is drawn from animal rearing, in Kariyappa Goundanpatti and Kodi Bomminaickenpatti people rear goats and sheep and get income from the animals. About 25 to 50 families go to Kerala for seasonal agricultural work. They earn money and return to the villages after the season is over. Some families have shifted to Coimbatore and Thiruppur to earn their livelihood. After 5 to 10 years they return to the village with money. Nearly 90% of the lands get well irrigation only and people depend on agriculture by which they improve their standard of living.

Development/Democracy

Rajammal carried out many works every year. In the year 1996-97, under the JVVT scheme, a retaining wall was constructed at a cost of Rs.85,000/-. Small bridges in three different places in Rasingapuram at a cost of Rs.90,000/- have been constructed and under the CRSP scheme 25 household latrines have been constructed at a cost of Rs.62,500/-. In the year 1997-98 under the JVVT scheme 24 colony houses were constructed at a cost of Rs.6,66,000/-, street development works were carried out at a cost of Rs.27,000/- and one small bridge was constructed at a cost of Rs.20,000/-. Retaining walls were constructed in five places at a cost of
Rs.2,06,000/-. An additional school building was constructed under Mavatta Paravalakka Thittam at a cost of Rs.2,27,500/-. In Kariyappagoundenpatti a small bridge was constructed at a cost of Rs.30,000/-. From the District Council fund a number of works were carried out. In Bomminaickenpatti a new road formation work was carried out at a cost of Rs.75,000/- and a GLR was constructed at a cost of Rs.50,000/- in Rasingapuram and Kariyappanpatti two small bridges were constructed at a cost of Rs.48,000/- and Rs.24,000/- respectively. Under the Drought Relief Scheme the Panchayat erected a hand pump at a cost of Rs.30,000/- in the hamlet of Kariyappagoundenpatti and well was deepened and wall tap installed there at a cost of Rs.60,000/-. In the year 1998-99, under the JVVT scheme small bridges were constructed in three streets in Rasingapuram at a cost of Rs.5,54,000/-. Construction of drainage in three streets in Rasingapuram and one street drainage in Kodi Bomminaickenpatti at a cost of Rs.7,78,580/- were carried out. From the MLA Fund a drainage was constructed in Mallingapuram at a cost of Rs.1,20,000/-. From the District Councillor’s fund the Panchayat constructed a motor room at a cost of Rs.1,00,000/-. From the Panchayat Union general fund the Panchayat constructed a small bridge at a cost of Rs.10,000/-. Drinking water pipeline was extended to Rasingapuram West street side at a cost of Rs.2,00,000/-. Erection of hand pump in Samathuvapuram at a cost of Rs.60,000 was carried out. In the year 1999-2000 under the JGSY scheme construction of small bridges in two streets in Rasingapuram at a cost of Rs.38,200/- and drainage in four places in Rasingapuram streets at a cost of Rs.95,000/- were carried out. From the District Councillor’s fund the Panchayat has constructed one small bridge and a drainage at a cost of Rs.85,000/-. In Rasingapuram it has constructed a retaining wall and a small bridge at a cost of Rs.1,00,000/. From the MLA Fund black top roads were formed in three streets at a cost of Rs.2,00,000/- and cement roads were formed in two streets at a cost of Rs.1,00,000/-. From TWAD an OHT and a motor room were constructed in Kariyappagoundenpatti at a cost of Rs.6,80,000/- and another OHT was constructed in Rasingapuram at a cost of Rs.6,00,000/-. In the year 2000-2001 under the JGSY scheme a cement road at a cost of Rs.86,000/ was laid. From the District Councillor’s fund a drainage was constructed at a cost of Rs.53,000/- and a women’s public latrine at a cost of Rs.1,50,000/-. Apart from the development activities the Panchayat has a Samathuvapuram work carried out in the year 1998-99. The works carried out are
1. House Construction 100 Nos.  Rs. 35,000.00
2. Land Value 13.50 Ags  Rs. 39,100.00
3. Street facilities 1.80 Kms.  Rs. 6,00,000.00
4. Community hall construction 1 no.  Rs. 4,50,000.00
5. Construction of primary school 1 no.  Rs. 2,50,000.00
6. Ration shop construct 1 no.  Rs. 1,30,000.00
7. Noon Meal centre 1 no.  Rs. 1,20,000.00
8. House latrine construction 100  Rs. 2,05,000.00
9. Gober gas construction 33 Nos.  Rs. 82,500.00
10. Drinking water facilities (OHT 1)  Rs. 6,00,000.00
11. Public TV Room 1 no.  Rs. 29,000.00
12. Waste water tank formation 1 no.  Rs. 1,00,000.00
13. Water harvesting canal in the street side 3.6 Kms.  Rs. 1,20,000.00
14. Public stage construction  Rs. 36,000.00

Total  Rs. 71,14,000.00

Perception on Panchayat

Rajammal had some understanding of the Panchayati Raj System because her father was the President of the Panchayat in the previous era. This Panchayat was reserved for women. The Village Committee decided to make her contest in the Panchayat election. She won the election. After undergoing training at Gandhigram Rural Institute she developed a proper perception about the Panchayati Raj System, Gram Sabha, funds to the Panchayat and the role of the President and the Vice-President in the Panchayat administration. Slowly she has come out from the shell by moving with officials. Now she meets all officials, asks about funds and schemes and explains the village problems. She has attended many training programmes conducted by government agencies and NGOs like SIRD, VIDIYAL and GRI. She got the best Panchayat President's award in the Panchayat Union (Bodi) for the year 1998-99.
Regarding the village development work Rajammal said that she approached the MLA, the MP, the District Councillor and the Union Councillor and got funds from them. The Village Panchayat mostly concentrated on agriculture and on related facilities like construction of check dam and so on. Her primary aim is to find water for agriculture. If it is done she feels that people will get employment opportunities. She made two claims that she has provided all basic facilities to the people and has demonstrated her administration to be transparent. Transparency will bring support to the Panchayats according to her.

Gram Sabha Meeting

The Gram Sabha meeting is announced through tom tom to the main village as well as the hamlets. Hand bills are printed and distributed to the Ward Members and pasted in important places of the villages (hotel, temple, grocery shop and tea stall). She informs the Members if there is any problem. The people and the Ward Members attend the Gram Sabha meeting and express their feelings. Every issue is discussed in the Gram Sabha thoroughly and people notice the importance of the Gram Sabha. Nearly 200 to 350 members participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Mostly all the Panchayat Members (including females) attend the Gram Sabha meetings. Females, particularly SC women, attend the Gram Sabha meetings, including 10 to 15 SC women from SHGs. Rajammal specially invites the Village Committee members, the VAO, the ANM, and EB officers to attend the Gram Sabha meeting. If people ask questions on electricity, the EB officials can answer the questions. She invites the MLA, the MP, the District Councillor and the Union Councillor to attend the Gram Sabha meeting. Sometimes the district officials like PO, AD Panchayat and Union Chairman attend the Gram Sabha meeting. SHGs have been formed with the help of the NGO VIDIYAL. After the formation of SHGs women indulging in gossip has declined drastically and they are doing some business or purchasing milch animals. The SHG members attend the Gram Sabha meetings and demand their requirements.

Monthly Meeting

Monthly meetings are organized for which an agenda is prepared and sent through the Panchayat clerk and signatures are got from the Members. Every month between the 5th and the 15th the monthly meetings are conducted. The President informs the Members of the schemes and the works to be carried out in the Panchayat. Sometimes the needs of the people are so urgent
in a Ward that the work is done first there and then in the other Wards. Works are carried out on the basis of priority. All the Members including women Members participate and highlight the needs of the people. There is no difference of opinion among the Members. One serious issue is discussed in all the meetings and based on the discussions letters have been sent to the Chief Minister’s Special Cell about the exploitation of the natural resources by external agencies. There is no reply from the Government. Another issue is encroachment of the common properties by influential individuals in the rural areas. In all the monthly meetings Members discuss the steps to be taken to improve the standard of living in the villages. There is no rivalry among the Panchayat Ward Members. Since a cordial atmosphere prevails they have healthy discussions.

Socialization Process

Originally her family was brought up in the Congress Party. Her father was a Panchayat President for 15 years. When this Panchayat was reserved for women the village elders and caste leaders suggested that Rajammal contest in the Panchayat election. At the time of the President’s election she contested as an independent candidate. After the election she joined the TMC Party because her family in interested to join the Congress Party. As she joined the TMC Party she was able to get funds from the MLA, the Union Councillor and the District Councillor. So the party has helped her in all the five years.

NGO link

There is an NGO named VIDIYAL involved in forming women’s groups. It has given guidelines on small savings, health, self-employment and conducting AIDS vigilance camps. Nearly six groups were formed. They got bank loan for doing small business. The NGO supported the Panchayat to organize women’s groups and to attend the Gram Sabha meeting. There is a clinic in the village. The NGO, with the heip of the staff of the health department, has oriented the people on environmental sanitation, ANC, PNC and family welfare.

Committee Formation

Rajammal has formed Parent Teachers Association, Social Justice Committee, Vigilance Committee, Peace Committee and Health Committee. In all the committees the President has placed Ward Members, experts, teachers, parents, SHG members and retired government officials as members. She has
given importance to all the committees, particularly the Vigilance Committee, which supervises the ration shop.

**Common Property Resources**

Two tanks, five mayanams, roadside poramboke and karadu poramboke are available in the Panchayat. Nearly 350 acres of karadu poramboke land is available and already black babul trees have been planted in that area. The rest is rocky area. Stone-breaking work is going on there. Tank maintenance work is not yet done. In the tank black babul trees were planted by the Forest Department. There is no income for the Panchayat from the tank resources.

**Recruitment**

The Panchayat election was announced and the seat was reserved for women. There is a Village Committee consisting of all caste people and they suggested the present President’s name to contest in the Panchayat election. The villagers give much respect to her family because her father was the Village Panchayat President for 15 years and he has done so many welfare activities and social service to the villagers. Only one candidate contested in the election and she did not have a strong background. Hence Rajammal won the Panchayat election by a difference of 1900 votes. She adopted several devices including distributing hand bills and door to door canvassing in the Panchayat election. She assured that she would serve the villagers well. A small group of women accompanied her and no public address system was used. The Village Committee asked all caste people to vote for the ex-President’s daughter. So the majority of the people supported her. The election was smooth and she won in the election. After the election she and her rival move well with each other for the welfare of the people.

**Village Development**

She felt that providing basic amenities and facilities to the people to lead a decent human life is development initiative. But the existing conditions are not sufficient to lead a human life. In this village there is no discrimination on the basis of caste. After the emergence of SHGs women got needed awareness and they are safeguarding the rights of the women. She told that the women have to suffer a lot due to alcoholism. When the works were carried out in the village she had to face many problems. When she constructed a drainage in the village the encroachers refused to vacate. She approached the Taluk Office to get the village poramboke land map. A survey was carried out in the streets. Then with the help of the people and the Ward
Members the encroachers were made to vacate the encroachments and the drainage was constructed. It is a big task to get the village map from the Taluk Office. Surveying the land is also another challenging task.

Struggle

Rajammal said that she faced many problems while carrying out rural development activities in the village. The first problem was at the time of construction of a public latrine. Twice she got the amount for construction of the latrine but the Ward people objected to the construction of the latrine and hence she returned the money. Then she discussed with the Ward Members and the Village Committee members and officials. People from two Wards objected to the construction of the public latrine in their streets. In the year 2000-2001 she conducted a survey and discussed with the people and finally constructed the public latrine (for females) in the village. Some of the licensed agents quarry stones from the Panchayat area for granite making and this was informed to the Mines Department. But there is no response and there is no action at all.

Summary and Observation

Rajammal has displayed certain characteristics which can be considered added values to the process empowerment and performance of the elected women representatives. The reputation of the family and the recognition for past good work will always get reflected in the future. In her case, her father’s previous work and recognition and the respect that the family has in the village have made her move about as a successful leader. It can not be taken for granted: there are certain other criteria like NGO support, orientation and periodical training and sensitization programmes; support from the MLA, the MP and elected representatives of the higher tier has helped her to reach the position as a successful leader.
Case 4

Vettamangalam Village Panchayat

Karur Panchayat Union-Karur District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. G. Rajeshwari, aged 30, is the Gram Panchayat President of Vettamangalam. She is a B.A. graduate belonging to a Hindu, Vellala Gounder family. She has six and a half acres of land fully irrigated by well water. Her husband is doing contract work in the village (building work). She lives in a pucca rented house with electricity, toilet and other modern facilities.

Recruitment

Her husband is a contractor and he has taken up many works in the Panchayat area. People of this area know him very well. Whatever work he takes up in the village he carries out properly with quality. He has got this reputation among the people. Apart from doing this contract work he does some social service also. He helps the villagers to get new ration cards, marriage assistance loan from the BPL scheme and the handicapped scheme and so on.

When the Panchayat was reserved for women (General) the villagers asked Rajeshwari to contest in the Panchayat election instead of her husband. Her own caste and the SCs supported her in the election. In the first election only one candidate, that too her own relative, contested but she did not have a strong service background. By a difference of 900 votes Rajeshwari won the election. Her family background and the support of the majority of the castes were the main reasons for her success apart from her husband’s social service activities.

In the second election only one person contested against her but she did not have a strong social background. Rajeshwari won the election by a difference of 2700 votes. In both the elections (two elections) she resorted to door to door canvassing and distributing hand bills. These were the main strategies adopted by her. At the time of the election a few accompanied her for canvassing. The election was smooth and there was no friction after the election and there is no rivalry.

Rajeshwari said that she projected herself as an independent candidate even though her husband is a party member of the DMK. But after the election
she joined the DMK Party as it was the ruling party and because of pressure from her husband.

Village Setting

The village is situated north of Karur Town at a distance of 15 kms. The total population of the Panchayat is 4996. Of them 2445 are males and 2551 are females. There are 36 hamlets in this Panchayat. There are five Wards with nine Members. Among the nine Members six are males and three are females. Among the three SC Members two are males and one is a female. There are several communities living in this Panchayat. There are Gounders, Vanniar, Sakkiliyars, Parayars, Asaris, Barbers, Pandarams, Ayyanars, Dhibis, Naickers, Chettiars, Nadars, STs and Bombaikarans (Marradiyar) living in the Village Panchayat.

A Kongu Vellala Gounder youth organization is working with the Village Panchayat during the time of carrying out drainage construction, road and pipeline laying and removal of encroachments. The youth have Cine Fans' Associations for Rajini, Sathiyaaraj, Ajit and Vijay, and they also attend the Gram Sabha meetings. Whenever the Panchayat seeks their help they extend their cooperation. There are 27 SHGs organized by an NGO named SICO. This NGO, SICO, organizes SHGs and encourages small savings and small trades. The members attend the Gram Sabha meetings and demand facilities for their areas.

Village Economy

The majority of the agriculturists are from the Gounder community. The lands get well water irrigation. They cultivate sugarcane, paddy, turmeric, coconut and tobacco. In dry lands sorghum, samai and millet are produced. There are more than 700 families engaged in agriculture. Karur is a nearby town where around 80 families from this Panchayat are engaged in construction work as masons, helpers and painters. A few families are engaged in small trades like vegetable selling, fruit selling and flower selling. But the majority of the families are engaged in agriculture and allied activities.

Common Property Resources

A roadside poramboke and a mayana poramboke are available in the Panchayat. A tank poramboke is also available. The President takes efforts for tree planting on the banks of the tank.
Village Temples

There are two religious groups, namely, Hindus and Christians living together. Hindu temples, namely, Mariamman and Kaliamman temples are under the control of the caste Hindus. Harijans are not allowed into these two temples. But there is no animosity among the caste groups.

Political Parties

All the major political parties are having their units in the Panchayat area. Of them the AIADMK is the dominant group. There is no intense political activity and all activities are confined to the time of election. There is no rivalry among the parties.

Schemes Implemented in the Village

Rajeshwari carried out many development schemes in the Village Panchayat. The following works were carried out in the Panchayat.

In the year 1996-97

1. Construction of TV room in Selva Nagar at a cost of Rs.96,000
2. Construction of school building in Kunthani puram at a cost of Rs.2,50,000
3. a) Indira memorial housing scheme (16 numbers) at a cost of Rs.4,32,000.
b) BC colony houses for the poor at a cost of Rs.1,35,000.
4. Block top road at a cost of Rs.8 lakh
5. Hand pump erection at a cost of Rs.35 thousand
6. Extension of drinking water pipeline at a cost of Rs.2 lakhs.
7. Extension of street lights at a cost of Rs.11,000.
8. Individual loan to 50 persons at a cost of Rs.7.50 lakhs
9. 12 self help groups getting loan for Rs.15 lakhs
10. Special financial assistance to 10 self help groups of Rs.2.50 lakhs.
11. Playground formation at a cost of Rs.0.25 lakh

In the year 1997-98

1. Threshing floor at a cost of Rs.0.50 lakhs
2. TV room at a cost of Rs.064 lakh
3. Bus shelter at a cost of Rs.0.60 lakh
4. 20 Colony houses at a cost of Rs.5.40 lakhs
5. Block top road at a cost of Rs.19.30 lakhs
6. Ration shop construction at a cost of Rs.1.35 lakhs
7. Animal husbandry hospital construction at a cost of Rs.1.25 lakhs
8. Construction of latrine at a cost of Rs.0.25 lakh
9. Erection of borewell at a cost of Rs.0.80 lakh
10. Construction of two additional school buildings at a cost of Rs.8.35 lakhs
11. Pipeline extension work carried out at a cost of Rs.1.29 lakhs
12. Extension street light carried out at a cost of Rs.0.24 lakh
13. Odai desilting work at a cost of Rs.0.60 lakh
14. Extension of drinking water pipeline at a cost of Rs.3.10 lakh

In the year 1998-99

1. Construction of drainage work at a cost of Rs. 1.40 lakh
2. Retaining wall construction at a cost of Rs.0.87 lakh
3. Construction of the threshing floor at a cost of Rs.0.66 lakh
4. Construction of small bridges at a cost of Rs.0.30 lakh
5. Construction of drainage at a cost of Rs.0.62 lakh
6. Construction of bus shelter at a cost of Rs.0.60 lakh
7. Block road formations work at a cost of Rs.3.75 lakh
8. Namakkal Naame Thittam at a cost of Rs.0.60 lakh
9. Erection of hand pump at a cost of Rs.7,500
11. Colony house construction at a cost of Rs.3.20 lakh
12. Construction of drainage at a cost of Rs.1.03 lakh

In the year 1999-2000

1. Construction of small bridges at a cost of Rs.0.70 lakh
2. Construction of colony house at a cost of Rs.3.20 lakh
3. Extension of street light at a cost of Rs.0.49 lakh
4. Construction of ration shop at a cost of Rs.1.45 lakhs
5. Construction of public latrine at a cost of Rs.1.20 lakhs
6. Construction of retaining wall at a cost of Rs.200 lakhs
7. Construction of small bridge at a cost of Rs.0.30 lakh

In the year 2000-2001
1. Extension of street light No. 12 at a cost of Rs.072 lakh
2. Colony house construction at a cost of Rs.1.60 lakh
3. Erection of hand pump at a cost of Rs.0.30 lakh
4. Construction of additional school building at a cost of Rs.1.20 lakh
5. Construction of new pipe line at a cost of Rs.0.50 lakh

AMT work on 2000-2001
1. Block top road work at a cost of Rs.14 lakhs
2. School building work at a cost of Rs.3 lakhs
3. Balwadi Kitchen construction work at a cost of Rs.0.50 lakh
4. Ration shop construction at a cost of Rs.1.50 lakhs
5. Cement road work at a cost of Rs.11.85 lakhs
6. Construction of small bridge at a cost of Rs.0.35 lakh
7. Road development work at a cost of Rs.0.85 lakh
8. New street light formation at a cost of Rs.3.00 lakhs
9. Cement thrashing floor construction work at a cost of Rs.8.60 lakhs

Drinking water programme carried out in the village
1. Electric facility for OHT in three places and purchase of electric motors at a cost of Rs.9.99 lakhs
2. Construction of OHT at a cost of Rs.4.52 lakhs
3. Construction of OHT motor room at a cost of Rs.2.14 lakhs

Scheme Experience
Implementing welfare schemes or providing facilities to Dalit areas is very difficult as the non-Dalits put up stiff resistance as their conditions are also the same. Though the President explains that the Dalits have entitlements and
the Government has schemes for them, the non-Dalits demand the same facilities. She manages with the help of the MP and his Local Area Development Fund.

The Anna Marumalarchi Thittam was extended by the MLA to the Panchayat through a contractor. The people of the Panchayat demanded certain basic facilities which were not conceded by the MLA in his AMT scheme. Money was being spent through the contractor and the felt the needs of the people were not met.

Perception on Panchayati Raj

Reservation for women and Dalits is very useful for the development of the weaker sections through the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Gram Sabha is another important institution created for wider contact with the people and for understanding the feelings of the people and the Panchayat can fulfill the people’s needs. The SHGs can be equipped and provided loan facilities and small trade training. The MLA or MP Fund works must be carried out only through the Village Panchayat.

Panchayat President’s Opinion about Village Development

Every hamlet or village or group of villages should have basic facilities like drinking water supply, sanitation, drainage, school and health services, along with employment opportunity for the skills of the people. The facilities and services available in the rural areas should be used properly by the people.

Human Rights

There is no discrimination in practice in the Panchayat area based on caste. There is no harassment of women by men in the village. All disputes are amicably settled.

Committee Formation

Rajeshwari constituted a committee for the eradication of liquor and formed a Parent Teachers Association. In the committees caste leaders, educated individuals, retired government staff and village elders are the members. There is no problem in forming the committees. The members are vigilant in their activities.

Summary and Observation

She carried out many activities in the Panchayat by which basic facilities were provided to the people. At the same time she created awareness among
the people about the quality of all these facilities. She maintained peace and
harmony in the Panchayat by which she was able to get so much of funds for
development activities. It was not easy for her to carry out the development
activities. The scenario in the Panchayat area reveals that the conditions of all
the communities are the same and extension of support to one community
based on their socio-economic background was not acceptable one to others.
But she convinced and gained confidence with support mobilized from other
sources. It reveals that a strong educational background will always enable the
decision making process and help to have an multifaceted outlook.
Case 5

Samuthiram Village Panchayat
Manaparai Panchayat Union-Trichy District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. R. Saraswathi, aged 35, is the President of Samuthiram Village Panchayat. She has studied up to the fifth standard, belongs to the Hindu religion and the Sakkiliyar caste and is doing agricultural work in the village. She has three sons and one daughter. Her eldest son has studied up to B.A. and is unemployed. The second son has studied +2 and he is also unemployed. The third son also has studied +2. The daughter is aged 3 years. She lives in a Government colony house without electricity, toilet and individual tap connection facilities. She has 2 acres of land with a well. She does agricultural work as family occupation. She lives in a nuclear family.

Recruitment

Saraswathi's husband was involved in political activities (AIADMK Party) and did some social service to the people. He helped the people in getting ration card, colony house, marriage loan and government loans. So he is well known to the villagers for the last 20 years.

When this Panchayat was reserved for SC women, the villagers held a Village Committee meeting to determine the candidates to contest the election. The Village Committee consists of:

1. Mr. Lakkayan SC (Parayar), retired teacher,
2. Mr. Muthusamy, SC (Parayar),
3. Mr. Sethuraman, BC (Udayar),
4. Mr. Saminathan, BC (Urali Gounder),
5. Mr. Ramasamy, BC (Chettiar), and,
6. Mr. Raman, BC (Muthuraja).

This Committee selected her to contest in the Panchayat election. But there were another five candidates who contested in the election. She won by a margin of 7 votes. She won in the Panchayat election because of her husband’s social work. In the second election only one candidate contested against her. Again she won the election, but with a difference of 75 votes.
In both the elections Saraswathi used bit notice and went on door to door canvassing. In the second election the AIADMK Party people supported her to win in the election. For canvassing on the last date she used a van and a public address system. She did not give any assurance to the people. She simply said she will do the work sincerely as needed by the public. There was no election rivalry in the village.

Village Setting

Samuthiram Village Panchayat is situated north-east of Manaparai Panchayat Union at a distance of 11 kms. There are 3120 people. Out of them 1566 are males and 1554 are females. There are 10 hamlets, namely, Chinna Samuthira, Kathikaranpatti, Vittal nagar, Thanthanaickenpatti, Maruvanaickenpatti, Chithukudipatti, Gandhi Nagar, Kamaraj Nagar, J.P.Nagar and Pallapatti. There are four Wards and 9 Members. Among them 6 are males and 3 are females. Among the males 2 are from the SC. Among the females one is from the SC.

This Panchayat consists of several communities. The Schedule Caste (107 families) community is the majority in number. The Udayars (100 families) come next. The third place goes to Thottiyanickers (60 families). The other castes are Muthurajas (25 families), Asaris, Dhobis (3 families each), Urali Gounders (20 families), Barbers (2 families), Brahmins (2 families), Muslims (5 families) and Christians (3 families). The Udayars and the Thottiyanickers have their caste associations. These associations helped Saraswathi at the time of the Panchayat election.

The youth have Cine Fans’ Associations for Rajini, Vijay, Vijayakanth, and Ajith. They celebrate their stars’ birthday and give sweets to the school children. There are 11 SHGs in the villages. The members of the SHGs attend the Gram Sabha meetings.

Village Economy

More than 60% of the people are involved in agricultural activities. They cultivate paddy, cotton and black gram in the garden lands. Gingelly, cholam and pulses are cultivated in the dry lands. The lands are irrigated by three wells and a tank. Nearly twenty-five families have gone to Trichy for building work (as mason, chittal, painter and centring worker); 50 to 75 families have gone to Thanjavur, Nallur Kattapatti, Manikandam, Subramaniyarkoil and Malaiyarkoil Village for paddy cultivation. SHG members have small savings in groups. The Panchayat President plans to give small business training through
the BDO’s office or the District Collector’s office. In the Muslim area two families have gone to other countries to earn money. The remaining three families are doing some small trades or work in cloth shops in Trichy. Animal rearing gives income to the people. Milch animal rearing helps the people to improve their standard of living.

Performance: Gram Sabha Meeting

The Ward Members participate in the Gram Sabha meeting. The Gram Sabha meeting is arranged through the Panchayat clerk and the Panchayat workers. The Gram Sabha meeting intimation is sent through a bit notice. The President personally invites the caste leaders, village VIPs, department officials and SHG members. Nearly 200 to 250 members attend the Gram Sabha meeting and they ask for their basic needs.

Saraswathi feels that though in the Gram Sabha meeting many resolutions are passed, only a few resolutions are executed while 80% of the resolutions are not executed. In the next Gram Sabha meeting people ask why she has not executed the work which was already revolved upon in the previous Gram Sabha meeting and why she should conduct the Gram Sabha meeting at all. At the time of selection of beneficiaries for the programmes people show their feelings and suggest the poor families.

Monthly Meetings

Every month the President conducts the Panchayat meeting. All the nine Ward Members participate in all the meetings. The three female Members including one SC Member ask about income, expenditure, programme, work carried out in the Panchayat, beneficiary list etc. The Members determine the priority of work to be done in the village.

The President sends the monthly meeting information through the Panchayat clerk and gets signatures from the Panchayat Ward Members. The one SC female Ward Member asks for SHG members’ loan from the area bank with the support of the Panchayat. Another Panchayat Ward Member stresses the need for the construction of a TV room in his Ward. In the monthly meeting the Ward Members ask many questions and get their needs from the Panchayat. The Members voice their demands and give preference to urgent activities. In these Panchayat meetings there is no hard discussion and no problem arises in the monthly meetings.

Political Parties

In this Panchayat the AIADMK, DMK, CPI, TMC, MDMK, BJP and Congress I parties are present. Among the parties the AIADMK is dominant,
followed by the DMK. The parties help the Panchayat by giving more activities to the Panchayat, for example getting AMT and Samathuvapuram etc. In the last period (First period 1996-2001) Saraswathi got very limited programmes for the Panchayat. She was not able to get MLA or MP Funds for this Village Panchayat. The political party members engage in party work only at the time of election. There is no rivalry among the political parties.

Schemes implemented in the villages

Many schemes are implemented in the villages. In the year 1997-98 construction of a small bridge at a cost of Rs.21,000 and five TV rooms at a cost of Rs.80,000, was undertaken under the JVVT programme. Jeevandhara well digging work was carried out at a cost of Rs.5,13,000. Road work was carried out at a cost of Rs.14,000. Hand pump platform construction was done at a cost of Rs.1,700. Roadside vaari was forwarded at a cost of Rs.5,000. The railway gate to Gandhi Nagar was repaired at a cost of Rs.1,700. Street repairing expenses were Rs.5,000. Canal formation work was carried out at a cost of Rs.5,000. Street gravelling work was carried out at a cost of Rs.13,000.

In the year 1998-99 a small bridge construction work was carried out at a cost of Rs.4,50,000 under the JVVT programme and a TV room was constructed at a cost of Rs.19,000. New pipeline pipes and an electric motor were purchased at cost of Rs.73,764. In the year 1999-2000 under the JVVT programme construction of a TV room at a cost of Rs.19,000, five household latrines construction at a cost of Rs.12,500, Jeevandhara well construction work at a cost of Rs.96,800 and construction of oorani revetment at a cost of Rs.26,600 were carried out. Road work was carried out at a cost of Rs.2000 and new pipeline (extension) work was carried out at a cost of Rs.20,000.

In the year 2000-2001 under the JVVT programme construction of noon meal kitchen at a cost of Rs.45,000 and forming a cement road at a cost of Rs.1,17,000 were undertaken. Extension of street lights (38 in number) at a cost of Rs.41,600, construction of a bus shelter at a cost of Rs.28,000, construction of hand pump platform at a cost of Rs.3,000, construction of small bridges at a cost of Rs.91,227, installation of new street lights at a cost of Rs.1,53,150, extension of new drinking water pipeline at a cost of Rs.22,384, formation of new burial ground salai at a cost of Rs.8,500 were also carried out. From Panchayat funds salai maramathu work was carried out at a cost of Rs.19,000, and maramathu work was carried out in the mayanam in Kamaraj Nagar at a cost of Rs.21,000.
Scheme Experience

When these works were carried out in the villages Saraswathi met many problems while evicting the encroachers. At the time of evicting the encroachers she had to approach the caste leaders, Ward Members, SHG members and Government officials, get their support to evict the encroachers and do the Panchayat activities. She faced great problems with the burial ground encroachers because the encroachers had enjoyed the same for twenty years and more. She gave proper advertisement and followed the rules and regulations. The contractors did their work without any problems. This is some sort of experience that she got.

Perception on Panchayati Raj

When she entered the Panchayat the first time she did not know the work or how to maintain the accounts etc. She got 3 days training at Pattukottai and understood the Panchayat activities, the special features and 30% of accounts. She knows about the reservation for women and Dalits, the importance of the Grama Sabha and how to conduct the monthly meetings, how to conduct the Gram Sabha, who are all the persons to be invited personally etc. In the Gram Sabha meetings she got experience as to who are the persons who attend the meetings, that they are asking about their basic needs like drinking water, street lights, cement roads and loan facilities and how she should answer the public. She did not know anything about the earlier Panchayati Raj system but that now the President has money for basic needs and activities. The new Panchayati Raj system is useful to improve or to provide the basic facilities.

Women's Development

In this Village Panchayat after she became the President she encouraged people to form SHGs. Through these groups she encouraged the women to do some business or get milch animal loan to develop their economic position. She encouraged the girl children to go to school and study at least upto the tenth standard. Then only they will realize the world at least. She has concentrated on women's pregnancy through the ANM, giving proper guidelines about food and medicines.

On Village Economy

This Village Panchayat mainly depends upon agriculture and allied work. Most of the land cultivated is garden land and cotton and paddy are cultivated with well irrigation. In the dry land they cultivate gingerly and chalam. Nearly 50-60 families are involved in building work as masons, chittals, carpenters and painters. Some families have gone to Nallur, Kuttapatti, Manikandam, Subramaniyarkoil and Malaiapatti Villages for paddy harvesting. They have
stayed for one month there doing the harvesting and returned to the villages. Some Muslim families have gone to Trichy for cloth shop work. But most of the people are engaged in agricultural activities.

Public Finance

Saraswathi did not increase the house tax in the first five years. She collected the old rates of Rs.1.50 for tiled houses Rs.11.50 for pucca houses and Rs.28 for big houses. In the second term she changed the house tax, to Rs.6/- for a tiled houses Rs.15/- for pucca houses and Rs.36 for big houses. All the house tax has been collected up to 2001. There is no balance of house tax and professional tax. She does not know how to write the accounts. At the time of the audit she answers the higher officials’ questions. The audit has been completed up to 2001.

NGO Linkages

Two NGOs are functioning in this Panchayat. They are getting revolving fund for the SHGs. Gramodhaya is an NGO forming SHGs, motivating the groups in small savings and money distribution among the members. This NGO encourages women’s education. Another NGO called Vinmathi is in Manapparai. It motivates the women to form SHGs, develop small savings habit and to start small businesses among the group members. These two NGOs advise the women group members to attend the Gram Sabha meeting and get the basic facilities for their Ward people.

Innovations

Since Saraswathi belongs to a minority group she won in the Panchayat election because of her husband’s social services, good family background and all the caste people supporting her. She has adjusted with the Panchayat Ward Members and the Vice-President of the Panchayat. She is entirely different from other Presidents in properly conducting the auction. All the works are given to the contractor with the consent of the Panchayat Ward Members and the Vice-President. Her ambition is to get AMT for the Village Panchayat. This year she will get the AMT programme for the Village Panchayat.

Summary and Observation

For both terms she contested in the Panchayat election as an independent candidate and won. She is interested in providing cement roads and colony houses for the villagers and burial ground road facilities etc. She has adjusted with the people, the BDO officials and the District Collector’s office officials. Her good nature helps her to get some programmes for the villagers. She is an example for those who aspire to contest in the elections.
The factors for her success in the second elections are her image and the quantum of work done by her, the way she handled situations, her association with the council members and the members of the higher tiers and the officials. Her transparent way of functioning and accountable nature have enabled her to reach this level of success.
Case 6
Subbiah Goundan Pudur Village Panchayat
Annamalai Panchayat Union-Coimbatore District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. S.R. Eswari, aged 35, is the President of Subbiah Goundan Pudur Village Panchayat. She belongs to the SC community (Paliar) and the Hindu religion. She has studied +2. She lives with her father and mother. Her father, aged 55 years, is doing agricultural work. Her mother, 52 years old, is doing household work. She has 1 acre of land irrigated through kavai irrigation. She has a pucca house, electrified, with toilet facilities though there is no individual tap connection. Her father earns Rs. 25,000 per year from the land.

Recruitment

The Tamil Nadu Government announced the Panchayat elections. This Panchayat was reserved for SC women. Her family is known to the villagers because her father is an AIADMK Party man and does social work like getting new ration card, marriage assistance, children's education assistance, SC colony houses and OAP. Some elders from the Gounder caste, Pallar caste and Chettiar (24 manai) caste approached her father and persuaded his daughter to contest in the Panchayat election. In the first election (1996) 4 persons contested against her. The opponents were her relatives but there was no strong background for them.

Eswari said that she did not give any promises in the election campaign. She assured that she would serve the villagers well. Door to door contact and bit notice distribution were the main canvassing methods. A few persons from the Gounder and the Pallar caste groups accompanied her during the campaign. By a difference of 69 votes she won the election. Her family background, the support of all caste groups and the fact that she was an educated woman were the main reasons for her success in the Panchayat election. In the second period (2001 to 2006) four persons contested in the Panchayat election against her. Three of the persons were her relatives but they did not have a strong social service background. Eswari gave an assurance to develop drinking water facilities, get more number of colony houses, cement road and street lights to the new colony area. She projected
herself as an independent candidate even though her father was an AIADMK Party man. After the election she joined the Puthiya Tamilagam Party.

Village Setting

The village is situated south-west of Pollachi Town, west of Annamalai Panchayat Union. There are a total of 4204 people, 2087 males and 2117 females. There are two hamlets in this Panchayat, namely Sangam and AD Colony (Railway Colony). There are four Wards and nine Members. Among the nine six are males and three females, two SC males and one SC female.

There are 204 pucca houses, 1050 tiled houses and 200 huts in the Panchayat. There are several communities living in the Panchayat. SCs (Pallar and Sakkiliyar) are the majority community living in this Village Panchayat. The second largest are the Gounder caste (600 families) and the other communities are 24 Manai Chettiar (25 families), Nadars (10 families), Barbers (10 families), Dhobis (25 families), Eravalar STs (50 families), Muslims (100 families), Devanga Chettiars (25 families), and Thevars (50 families). Dheventhira Kula Vellalar and Kongu Vellala Gounders have caste associations. The caste associations help the Panchayat by supporting the village works and attending the Gram Sabha meetings. The youth have Cine Fans’ Associations for Rajini, Prasanth, Sathiyaaraj, Vijay and Ajith. They celebrate their heroes’ birth day. They support the Panchayat by attending the Gram Sabha meetings. There is an NYK in the village. The youth support Eswari by attending the Gram Sabha and helping in the village work. There are two SHGs in the Panchayat. The Gandhi Ashram helps to organise SHGs. The SHG members attend the Gram Sabha meeting and demand drinking water, street light and loan facilities.

Village Economy

Most of the agricultural land is in the hands of the Gounder caste. The lands gets a Aliyar dam and well water irrigation. Paddy, coconut and sugarcane are the agricultural products in the garden land. In the dry land coconut, cotton, sorghum and millet are produced. Nearly 400 to 500 families are engaged in agriculture.

Pollachi is a nearby town. 100 men and women go over to Pollachi for employment in building construction work as masons, helpers and painters. Nearly 10 to 20 families are engaged in making chapplas for the Premier Company. 50 to 60 people are employed in the Annamalai Mineral Water Company on daily wages. 10 to 15 families are engaged in small trades like
anana, vegetables, and readymade shirts and as shop workers in Pollachi Town.

Common Property Resources

This Panchayat has cart path poramboke, mayana poramboke and Aaliyar water canalway poramboke. From the tamarind trees (200 numbers) ps.29,000/-, from the mutton stalls Rs.61,000 and from sand quarries Rs.10 lakhs are earned by the Panchayat. In future the President plans to plant trees in the canal area. She says that the sand auction amount must be increased.

Village Temples

In this village two religious groups live together. There are one mosque and thirteen Hindu temples in the Panchayat. Mariamman and Kaliyamman temples are common to all caste groups. Maakaliamman, Madurai Veeran, Kamatchiamman, Muniyappasamy, Karupparayar temples are patronized by individual caste groups. They won't allow the SC people inside the temple. The Vinyakar temple is common to all caste groups. The Amman koil festivals are celebrated by all caste people. In this temple SCs are allowed in. It is reported that there is no caste rivalry in the Panchayat. The President, though she belongs to the Pallar community, gives donation to all communities. At temple festival time the President gets respect in the festivals.

Political Parties

Many people in the village are in the AIADMK and the DMK Parties. The other parties like MDMK, TMC, Puthiya Tamilagam, CPI, CPM and Congress I also have some followers. The parties play a pivotal role during the election time to support their party to win the election. After the election there is no serious political activity.

Perception on Panchayati Raj

Eswari is a young lady. After her correspondence course, she was searching for a job. At that time the Panchayat election was announced. Her father was a social worker. This Panchayat was reserved for SC women. The villagers asked her to contest in the election. She did not know anything about the Panchayati Raj system at the time of the election. After she went to the BDO’s office and the Collector’s meeting and visited Gandhi Ashram she learnt about the Panchayat and its activities. She now knows about reservation for Sc women, the Gram Sabha, the President’s cehque power and that basic amenities are provided by the President with the consent of the people and that
reservation for women and Dalits is very useful for developing these sectors through the Panchayat. For wider contact and for understanding the feelings of the people the Gram Sabha is a very good instrument and also to get their support for doing the work.

The SHG members attend the Gram Sabha meeting and voice their grievances like loan for the group from the bank through the Panchayat to develop their standard of life. The SHGs can be equipped well and give training in various trades to the people.

**Schemes Implemented**

Many development activities were carried out in the Village Panchayat. In 1998-20001 the following works were carried out in the Panchayat under different schemes:

In The year 1997-98

1. Drainage construction (JVVT) Rs.2,00,000
2. Retaining wall construction (JVVT) Rs.2,00,000
3. Road formation (Panchayat Fund) Rs.70,000
4. Drinking water pipeline extension (Panchayat Fund) Rs.1,50,000

In the year 1998-99

1. Cement road (JVVT) Rs.2,00,000
2. Pipeline extension (Panchayat Fund) Rs.1,50,000
3. Street light extension (Panchayat Fund) Rs.1,50,000
4. TV rooms construction (JVVT) Rs.50,000
5. Black top road laying (MLA Fund) Rs.2,00,000
6. Colony Houses (19 Nos) (Indira Memory) Rs6,00,000

1999-2000

1. Construction of GLR (Union Councellor Fund) Rs.1,25,000
2. Concrete road laying (JVVT) Rs.3,00,000
3. Pipeline extension (Panchayat fund) Rs.1,50,000
4. Road formation (Panchayat fund) Rs.1,50,000
5. Replacement of pipeline (Panchayat fund) Rs.60,000
6. Street light extension (Panchayat fund) Rs.1,99,000
2000-2001

1. Cement road laying (JVVT) Rs.2,25,000
2. Extension of pipeline (Panchayat fund) Rs.1,50,000
3. Street light extension (Panchayat fund) Rs.80,000
4. Ration shop construction (EAS) Rs.1,70,000

These are the works carried out in the Panchayat under different schemes. Yet they are not able to satisfy the people’s needs.

Scheme Experience

When the drainage construction work was carried out in the year 1997-98 in the SC street the street area had been encroached upon by the people. She did not know how to evict the encroachers. She consulted the Ward Members. They advised her to just tell them and assured that they will vacate the place. She requested the encroachers to vacate the place to construct the drainage. They did not vacate the place. Then she asked the ABDO how to evict the encroachers. The office asked her to send a notice to the encroachers and told her that if even then they did not vacate even then a case could be filed in court.

She followed the advice of the ABDO. She sent a caution notice to the encroachers. In between she approached the caste leaders, street VIPs and SHG members to discuss the construction of the drainage. These leaders and the SHG members persuaded the encroachers to vacate the place and the drainage construction work was carried out. This is a good experience to learn how to move with the people who support the village work.

Panchayat President’s Opinion About Village Development

If in a village drinking water facilities, street light, public tap, cement road, transport facility, school facility, health, employment to all men and women are available, that village is called a developed village, according to Eswari.

Human Rights

Since the Panchayat President is a woman in public places like ration shop, temples, tea stalls and school women’s rights are safeguarded. In the working place women’s rights are safeguarded, particularly in the building construction work.
Innovations

a. Eswari courageously printed a bit notice and distributed it to all households. The notice stated that the people must remit the house tax, professional tax and water tax and get the receipt.

b. If they remit the Panchayat taxes, the Panchayat will remit the electricity charges and maintain the street lights and drinking water will be properly given to the people.

c. If they pay the house tax fully the Panchayat will get three times the amount from the Government. From that amount they can carry out many development activities in the Panchayat.

d. If they do not remit the house tax, professional tax and water tax before 15.03.2001, the Panchayat will take necessary action against those who have not paid the taxes.


f. The Varumun Kappom scheme was conducted in the year 1999-2000.

g. A veterinary camp was conducted in the village in the year 2000-2001.

h. She is the leader of the Rajiv Gandhi Water Mission with five committee members.

Summary and Observation

Eswari is an example for hard work and independent nature though her family has strong political affiliation. She has emerged as an independent candidate. Even then the elections were fought closely and she came out successfully both the times. An understanding of the basic needs and the ways to achieve them followed by a uniform procedural practice for all the occasions, convincing the village people in an amicable manner, sensitizing the community to understand and realize their role and responsibility in making the Panchayat successful recorded the success. Free, frank and fearlessness can be quoted as the magic words operating on her to make her as a successful Panchayat leader.
Socio-Economic Background

Ms. P. Nirmala is the President of Mudichur Village Panchayat, St. Thomas Union, Kancheepuram District. She belongs to the Reddiar community. She has studied up to the tenth standard. She is aged 33 and her occupation is agriculture. She possesses 4 acres of land. The income from the land is Rs. 30,000 per year and there is no other income for her. She lives in a joint family. She has association with the Mahalir Sangam and she is a member of the high level District Committee on Dowry and of the State Finance Commission. So local problems can be easily solved by her, for instance, marriage problems, dowry problems and other women’s problems.

Village Profile

This Panchayat has no hamlet but it covers 22 nagar areas. The total population of this Panchayat is 7000. The Wards are four and the Ward Members are six, of whom 4 are male and 2 female. The major caste groups are Yadavar, SC, Brahmin, Reddiar and others. The houses are 1400, of which 500 are huts, 70 tiled and the others pucca. For drinking water there are 5 OHTs, 214 public taps, 7 individual tap connections, 14 hand pumps and 2 open wells.

For health and sanitation a public toilet is available for both men and women. 750 persons have household latrines. No health centre is available in this Panchayat but one is available at Chromepet 5 km away. The Panchayat has roads for around 15 km (3 km metal, 13 km black topped, 3 km cement). The following educational facilities are available in this Panchayat: 2 balwadis, 1 noon meal centre and 1 primary school. A higher secondary school is available in Tambaram.

Five bus shelters and one ration shop are available. The other facilities are absent such as market, cinema theatre and post office. The Panchayat has a Siva Vishnu temple, 3 churches, and one mosque. This Panchayat has no cooperative society. The farmers are not many but only 35 families are engaged in agricultural activities and they have own lands. The others are engaged in coolie work near the Tambaram Town area. The major irrigation...
sources are well and the crop is paddy only. All the political parties are functioning in the village but the AIADMK is the dominant party.

Village Setting

The AIADMK is the dominant party in this Panchayat but its main activity is celebrating their leader’s birthday. The BJP members are associated with a Trust and conduct medical campaign in different places, for instance, eye camp. The BJP members associated with the Trust are involved in social service activities. The Rotary Club members have an association with the Panchayat and they conducted a veterinary campaign. This Panchayat has no veterinary centre but more than 800 people have milch animals. Hence Nirmala stressed that a veterinary centre is essential for this Panchayat. A Thiruvalluvar Library is available in this Panchayat. This Panchayat youth visit the library regularly. In the SC colony there is an Ambedkar statue. There is a popular Siva Vishnu temple in this Panchayat which is 500 years old. The special feature of this temple is the marriages there are urban and so many people come to this temple. For the past 40 years, there is a common graveyard for all sections of the people. This Panchayat has youth associations and the members are both SC and BC people. The members are 23 only and their behaviour is friendly.

Recruitment Process

Nirmala’s cousin is involved in social work activities for the past 25 years. This is the first reason for her entry into social work. For this reason she contested in the Panchayat election. Two people contested against her. One was Mrs. Visalatchi, aged 43, belonging to the DMK Party. The second person was Mrs. Sulotchana, aged 30, belonging to the TMC Party. Nirmala canvassed five times along with village elders, friends and family members. She projected water facility, street lights for all places and road facility to the nagar areas. Nirmala did not belong to any party but the other 2 contestants were party members. For the election Nirmala spent Rs.15,000 to print notices and for refreshment items for those who participated in the canvassing. She was elected Village Panchayat President for the period 1996 to 2001. The major reason was that she was young, had a good family background, was moderately rich and was a disciplined girl.

Perception

Nirmala has awareness about the Tamil Nadu Panchayati Raj Act in terms of Gram Sabha meetings, Panchayat meetings and training programme
to the Panchayat Presidents. As for major issues she said that the Government officials support the new Panchayati Raj system. She has planned the following: 1. school enrollment (Chennai is very near to this Panchayat and children will go to work in the urban areas); 2. women's empowerment (nowadays women’s empowerment is not adequate in the town area). Pension should be increased for the women. Nirmala feels that two Gram Sabha meetings are enough per year because the Gram Sabha resolutions are not executed properly. Before 1996 there was no basic facility in the village area and after 1996 the basic facilities have improved. 50% of the Panchayat development works were completed under the new Panchayati Raj system, especially light and water facilities.

Development

Every family or individual is ready to work for its/his/her own development but they are not ready to work for community development. This is a critical situation while considering development. With regard to the role of the Government in development all the development schemes should be administered properly, for instance, pension scheme, ration shops, etc.

As for improving the village economy, Nirmala stated the following:

1. Labour problem is very acute in this area.
2. Nowadays agricultural production is very poor and farmers are affected.
3. A large number of farmers are uneducated.
4. For agricultural development machinery is not used but human labour is utilized excessively.
5. There is no regular wage fixation for the agricultural labourers.
   Sometimes moderate wages are given to the farmers.

For the above said reasons, improvement of the village economy is in a critical situation.

With regard to social problems Nirmala pointed out as follows:

1. There are no employment sources for village youth.
2. The number of illiterates has increased in the rural areas.
3. Sometimes people do not go to work regularly and they sit in tea stalls and gossip unnecessarily. This is a critical situation in this area.
Gender Issues

In this area women are not treated on par with men. So Nirmala highlighted the following:

1. Whenever women go to jobs, they face a number of problems. Sometimes in the male dominant society the men refuse to permit their wives to go to work. This is a critical situation in this area.

2. Dowry system still continues.

3. Women are not empowered due to their financial position. Besides the salary of the head of the house is poor.

4. There is no cordial relationship at the family level due to the poor incomes of the husband and the wife.

5. All educated women are empowered economically but others are not due to their family background.

The SHGs could be empowered as follows:

1. Whenever they are able they should sell their own products.

2. They do not know the modern technology. They should know the current technology for increasing their production and its quality.

3. Loan facility is needed whenever they are ready to start any enterprise.

4. Adequate education and awareness of day to day activities is needed for political empowerment.

Common Property Resources

Nirmala said that the Panchayat building and the local lake are considered common property resources. Rs.1,200 is got from the lake through the auction of fishing rights. From the community hall Rs.250 is got per day. In future a park should be set up in this Panchayat. A park is essential in every Panchayat of Tamil Nadu.

Social Justice

Nirmala said that social justice means equality for all sections of the people. Adequate empowerment is needed in this regard.

Socialization

At the family level Nirmala was encouraged in her leadership qualities by her parents. After marriage her husband gave her orientation with regard to
social service activities. After being elected Panchayat President Nirmala herself developed leadership qualities in the following ways:

1. Panchayati Raj training programmes at the SIRD, the Collectorate, at block level and other places.

2. Whenever she conducted Gram Sabha meetings the elders gave ideas and suggested solutions to problems.

Performance

The Ward Members attend the Panchayat meetings regularly. Very often the members discuss the lack of funds. With regard to Panchayat works which are important or urgent the works are implemented in this Panchayat with the help of the Ward Members. Nirmala’s future plan is as follows: 1. primary health centre is needed and it has to be constructed very soon; 2. a college is needed because all the students are going outside for their higher studies; 3. a police station is urgent to prevent local problems and because this Panchayat is situated near the town area; and, 4. a bank is essential for giving loans to the SHGs.

Gram Sabha meetings are not needed 4 times per year but 2 times are enough and the quorum for the Gram Sabha meetings of one-tenth should not be compulsory. The expenditure on the Gram Sabha meeting is around Rs.2000/- and the amount allowed, Rs.500, is not enough. In the Gram Sabha meetings the major demands are: 1. group houses; 2. light facilities; 3. road facilities; and, 4. ration cards. In the past five years the following major works have been carried out. In 1996-97 basic facilities and culvert works were provided. In 1997-98 maintenance of roads/road works were done. In 1998-99 public latrines were constructed under the JGSY. In 1999-2001 cement road and link road were laid in this Panchayat. Under the Namakku Naame Thittam TV room, nutrition shed, and cement road works were done. The 25% people’s contribution was in the form of bricks, labour and other needed materials.

The following hurdles were faced, according to Nirmala:

1. During road formation encroachment was removed in front of the houses.

2. For laying pipelines in the ground people did not cooperate and objected to the places chosen.

3. During distribution of free saris/dhotis for the Pongat festival there was rivalry and jealousy.
Panchayat Finance

In 1997-98 the house tax was revised. For huts the tax was not revised, but the old tax was retained i.e., Rs.11/- only. For tiled and pucca houses the new tax was based on the square feet as per the rules laid down by the Collectorate. People delayed the house tax payment. Nirmala says that tax should be collected regularly like the EB bill. The details of the Government grants are as follows: SFC Rs.24,000, JVVT Rs.68,000 and earmarked fund Rs.12,000/19,000. The problem is delay.

In the following ways the Panchayat income has to be increased:

1. Increasing cable TV connection fee.
2. House plan approval fee to be raised.

Social Development

For environmental activities Nirmala has conducted 2 meetings. As a result 2 trees have been planted in every house. The tree may be of the fruit variety/shade variety. Nirmala has spent her own funds for school development. She has provided tables, chairs and other items. For sanitation a public toilet is available for both men and women. In addition CRSP toilets have been constructed in 88 households. Child labour is available in the Chennai area, but not in this Panchayat. Nirmala says that the salary has to be raised for child labourers in Tamil Nadu.

Maintenance of Panchayat Office

The office premises are clean and neat. Coconut trees surround the Panchayat office. The office facilities are as follows: 3 tables, 2 chairs, 10 fibre chairs, one bureau, 4 fans and one bicycle. Nirmala’s house is very near the Panchayat office. Hence she is available in both the Panchayat office and her residence.

Reasons for the Success of the Panchayat President

1. From 1997 to 1999 all the scheme works have been successfully completed.
2. In 1997-98 twelve meetings were conducted and 160 resolutions were passed and many executed.
3. In 1998-99 ten meetings were conducted and 84 resolutions were passed.
4. In 1997-98 house tax collection was 100%.
5. In 1998-99 house tax collection was 75%.
6. There is no complaint from the Ward Members/public.
7. The funds were spent based on the prescription of schemes/accounts.
8. On 26.01.1999 the Gram Sabha meeting was conducted effectively, based on the transparency of accounts and opinions from the public.
9. Meetings were conducted regularly without fail and resolutions were executed.
10. All the basic facilities are available at adequate level.

Summary and Observation

In 1999 Nirmala got the National Award from the National Commission for Women, Government of India, New Delhi, on the 8th International Women's Day. Besides, she was felicitated at the Uma Utsava, the festival conducted by the Institute of Social Studies Trust at Bangalore. From this ISST she got the Uma Award in the same year. Recognition the past work has raised the level of Nirmala. It is also due to her age and energy and her reputation for fights for the cause of women. Her family reputation and her Ms.Clean image, free and frank movement with the community, cordial relations with all the sections of the community etc., have helped her. The priority given by her to the developmental process was accepted. She also could mobilize all round support for development activities in the village environment. It is not easy for an ordinary woman to emerge as a successful leader. There are very many contributing factors in the process as a whole and, in her case, most of the obstacles have been turned into stepping stones for success.
Case 8
Kaveripoompattinam Village Panchayat
Sirkali Block-Nagapattinam District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. Siva Manimegalai is the President of Kaveripoompattinam village Panchayat in Sirkali Block, Nagapattinam District. She has studied up to S.S.L.C. and is aged 46. She belongs to the MBC community and lives in her father’s house. She is not married. She belongs to a fisherman’s family. Her father has 2 acres of land and Rs. 50,000 is the income from the land per year. She has a house with an open well and coconut trees. Her family members are three in number (Manimegalai, her father and her mother). She has association with SHGs. She is a DMK Party member. In the party she is a District Joint Secretary. She said that party members help the Panchayat in getting loans, OAPs and information.

Village Profile

The total population is 15,000 and there are ten hamlets. The Wards are five and the Ward Members are 12, of whom 8 are male and 4 are female. For the SC category there are 4 males and 1 female. For drinking water 6 OHTs are available. There are 150 public taps and 54 hand pumps. For health and sanitation drainage facility is available in a few villages, public toilet is available and health centre is also available. The total kms of road is 10, of which 8 kms are black topped and 3 kms cement concrete.

For education there are 2 balwadis, 3 noon meal centres, 2 primary schools and one higher secondary school. The other facilities are 3 PDS shops, a community hall, 8 TV rooms, a cinema theatre, a post office and street lights (226). 75% of the people are farmers and their crops are paddy, cotton and coconut. 100 people are engaged in milch animal rearing. A veterinary centre is functioning in this Panchayat.

Village Setting

This Panchayat is a tourist centre. 500 families are engaged in fisheries work. The SHGs are selling fish and sea products. Fish products are sold in the evenings near the seashore by women. The fisher women are also engaged in the sale of fish in Sirkali area. The major castes are SCs,
Padayachis, Chettiars, Asaris and fishermen. An Ayyan Library is available and the key is handed over to the village elders. They are keenly interested in maintaining the library because aged people and the youth are utilizing the library regularly. Daily newspapers come to the library. Women sangams are engaged in small savings activities and lend money at minimum interest rates to the poor. NGOs are functioning in this Panchayat and they are helping the SHGs in terms of awareness and training. The DMK is the dominant party in this Panchayat.

Recruitment Process

Manimegalai’s father and grandfather served for the welfare of the fishermen community for the past 30 years. Besides her father served at different levels for the welfare of the fishermen community, i.e., fishermen’s sangam, fishermen’s cooperative society etc. Manimegalai also wanted to continue her father’s work and involve herself in the welfare of the fishermen community. Hence she contested in the 1996 election. One candidate contested against her. Manimegalai projected the following major issues during the canvassing: basic facilities and the welfare of the fishermen community and other development work. The traditional village elders supported Manimegalai as a good candidate because of her father’s previous work in development activities. The election expenditure was Rs.10,000 for bit notices and refreshments. The reasons for her success were people’s confidence and faith, her father's influence and her own sincerity. Manimegalai won by 1800 votes.

Perception

Manimegalai feels that all the basic facilities will be provided through the new Panchayati Raj system. She is happy that the new Panchayati Raj system has been introduced at the grassroots level. Through block officials and newspapers she has learnt about the new Panchayati Raj system. She says that the new Panchayati Raj system is the best instrument for rural development activities.

Development

Manimegalai maintains that people's participation in all aspects like Gram Sabha meeting and Panchayat development activities is development. The Panchayat economy is not satisfactory because this Panchayat is on the seashore. Agricultural activities are not at all possible. Besides in the rainy seasons there is no employment. For this reason small savings habit is
essential in every family. NGOs should provide loan facility to the poor families.

Politics

The DMK is the dominant party in this Panchayat. Sometimes quarrels occur between two parties with each party spending money. This is a critical situation. In future this kind of activities should to be avoided.

Gender Issues

This Panchayat’s women are engaged in the following activities: i. fish-products, ii. dairy activities, and, iii. small savings. Generally if they are trained they can earn more. As a result they will be well-off. The SHGs are engaged in fisheries work and small savings.

Common Property Resources

Five ponds are available and fetch Rs.4000/- per year. Desilting is needed in the five ponds. If desilting work is done the income will be higher. Ten tamarind trees are available and 36 coconut trees yield Rs.2800/- per year. If more trees are planted the income will increase.

Social Justice

Gradually community feelings have been decreasing nowadays because people are aware and they are closely watching the Panchayat work. Further people participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Ward Members attend the Panchayat meetings and learn about the current activities. Different community people meet and talk together about Panchayat activities. In future social justice should be achieved for all sections of the people.

Socialization

When her father was doing social work Manimegalai also joined him. She developed leadership qualities in the following ways: contact with people and officials, relating with women officials, and, training programmes attended in different places.

Performance

Based on the Ward Members’ discussions and suggestions the resolutions are executed. They discuss the future plans for their own Wards, particularly adequate street lights at the street level, public places and in front of the koil. Drainage is needed. 150 persons attend the Gram Sabha meetings, of whom more are women. The women voice their grievances i.e., health
facility and maintenance of streets. The following works were done in the past five years:

In 1998-99 under the JVVT steps for ponds, bus shelter, irrigation works, bridge, black topped road and TV rooms; under the IAY, group houses for 20 persons in 1999-2000; under the JGSY, black topped road laid to the fisheries community villages and construction of Panchayat office building; and under the CRSP toilets for 25 families.

In 1998-99 the AMT was sanctioned for this Panchayat. Under the AMT the following works were carried out:

1. One light for each hut
2. New transformer and other related works
3. Black topped road up to 5 km
4. Construction of ration shop and purchasing site for ration shop
5. School buildings in different places
6. Maintenance of graveyard road for fisheries community
7. Construction of bridge
8. Syntex tank for drinking water
9. Toilets
10. Extension of pipelines for drinking water
11. Construction of new OHT.

Under the EAS road was formed to the fishermen community village.

Under the NNT drainage system was provided for the fishermen's street. In 2000-2001 syntex tanks were placed in 3 villages by the TWAD. With the help of the Tourist Development Centre, a black topped road to Poompuhar fishermen's street and 20 sodium vapour lamps were provided.

In 1999-2000 from the earmarked fund India Mark II pump, street lights in new places, black topped road for colony areas, store room for veterinary centre, cement thalam, steps in the ponds were provided and 20 group houses under the IAY scheme. From the TWAD, an OHT was provided. Patta for houses and 40 group houses were provided under the IAY scheme. From the MLA Fund primary health centre, store room for keeping medicines in veterinary centre and drainage system were provided besides retaining walls near the seashore areas. From the MLA Fund in 2000-2001 public toilet,
extension of pipelines for water supply to the health centre and maintenance of Ayyan library centre, shed for graveyard were provided.

There are no hurdles in the Panchayat works. But the people’s expectations of the following facilities still continue: ration items, street light facilities, road facilities, water facility and loan facilities to the poor people.

Panchayat Finance

The house tax was raised as follows: for huts Rs.2.20 for group houses Rs.4.20, for tiled houses Rs.20 and for pucca houses Rs.198. Poompuhar is a tourist centre. Its income should be handed over to the Village Panchayat. The entrance fees for 2 wheelers and 4 wheelers should be given to the Village Panchayat. For this reason Manimegalai gave an application to the AD Panchayat at the district level. The Government is not taking necessary steps in this regard. The details of the Government grants are as follows. The SFC grant was Rs.80,000 and the JVVT amount was 1,60,000. Road works have been carried out with the earmarked fund. She said that within a year these grants have to be sanctioned and should not be delayed more than one year.

Social Development

She has planned tree planting within the Panchayat area and on the banks of the ponds. She has planted 50 coconut trees in the hamlets. For school enrolment, the school teachers accompany the Panchayat President for publicity. Manimegalai has planted trees around the schools, especially on festival days in the schools when she participates. Adequate water facility is provided for the schools and retaining walls have been constructed. Child labour is used for fishing work and they go into the sea due to their poverty and employment opportunity.

Maintenance of Panchayat Office

The Panchayat office is situated on the main road of Poompuhar. One table, 12 chairs, 2 benches and 1 almirah are the facilities available in the Panchayat office. 31 kinds of records are difficult to maintain regularly. The office is kept open from 10 am to 5 pm from but Manimegalai is available in the office only between 10 am and 2 pm. The following are the problems in mobilizing the community:

1. Villagers are not having adequate awareness.
2. All villagers are not literate.
3. There is no perception of Panchayat development activities.
4. Among the same community and different communities, there is no effective relationship.

5. Everyone thinks that the Government should give everything free.

Reasons for Success
1. The encroachments were removed with the help of village elders and police officials.
2. One individual has given land to the Government for constructing the primary health centre.
3. Housing patta has been given (BC 68, SC 150 and 50 others).
4. Additional and necessary buildings were constructed for school development.
5. The VAO is having direct relationship with the people and the Panchayat President.
6. With the help of various departments Manimegalai has done useful work for the Panchayat’s development. She has also utilized the MLA/MP Fund and the Namakku Naame Thittam. All scheme works have been done within the stipulated the period.
7. In 1999 this Panchayat was selected the best Panchayat at the State level for which Manimegalai went to Delhi for felicitations and a certificate. Besides, in 2000-2001, this Panchayat was selected the best Panchayat at the district level for which Rs.25,000 was received and that amount has been utilized for a road to the Sivan koil. In 1998-99 Manimegalai was felicitated at the district level for completion of group houses under the IAY scheme within the period.

Summary and Observation

Manimegalai’s personal opinion is that curiosity is essential for everyone, particularly Panchayat Presidents. The villagers have elected her Panchayat President for a second time also. She stated that one should have a curiosity in terms of dream of a developed village. It alone can help the leader to have a proper perception to achieve development of the village. It is also evident that, in the case of Manimegalai, her effective performance has brought more benefits to the village. She has shown keen interest in environmental protection. Awards and recognition have made Manimegalai more cautious and accountable.
Case 9  
Narthampoondi Village Panchayat  
Thuringapuram Union--Tiruvannamalai District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. Geetha Kamalanathan is the Village Panchayat President of Narthampoondi Panchayat. She is a Hindu, aged 36, and has studied upto B.A. Her occupation is agriculture and she possesses 20 acres of land, both dry lands and wet lands. She has good housing facilities. Her income is more than Rs. one lakh per year. Her husband is working as a school teacher in a Government Higher Secondary School. Before 1996, and still, Geetha has involved herself as a member in the activities of APEX, an NGO. Various campaigns were conducted by the NGO and Geetha has involved herself in the activities i.e., eye camp, health camp and political activities too.

Village Profile

This Village Panchayat has four hamlets and five Wards. The Ward Members are 9, of whom 6 are male and 3 female. The following caste groups are living in this Panchayat: Aghamudayar Yadavar, Mudaliar, Vanniar and Scheduled Castes. The total households are 760, which 199 are pucca houses, 293 tiled and the remaining huts. With regard to water facility, 5 OHTs are available besides 84 public taps, 295 individual tap connections and 16 hand pumps. Drainage facilities are available in 2 villages and they are regularly maintained in the proper way. 225 persons have individual household latrines. A maternity centre is available in this Panchayat but there is no quarters for the health staff of this Panchayat. The total length of roads is only 4 km and all the roads are cement roads.

With regard to education there are 3 balwadis, 3 noon meal centres and 3 primary schools. Library facility was made available under the AMT scheme. Six SHGs are functioning in the Panchayat and they are engaged only in rearing milch animals. The NGO APEX is doing certain activities with people’s participation and the help of the Village Panchayat President.

There is a popular Sivan temple in this Panchayat. A cooperative society is functioning in this Panchayat and they are helping the farmers effectively by giving loans. People have repaid the loans regularly and
properly. The major source of irrigation is well only and the crops are paddy, sugarcane and groundnut.

Recruitment Process

Before 1996 Geetha voluntarily involved herself in various activities like medical campaign, school development, street maintenance and Rotary Club. Only one candidate contested against her. The following were involved during the canvassing: local school teachers and APEX members. The issues projected were: basic amenities, road works and school development activities. Geetha won by a difference of 147 votes. Previously, her grandfather was involved in the earlier Panchayat activities. Besides, her husband is a teacher in a Higher Secondary School and his friends were involved in Geetha’s success. She spent more than Rs.20,000 for the election.

Perception

Geetha has awareness about the 73rd Amendment Act and the Tamil Nadu Panchayati Raj Act. She pointed out that the following are the major issues in the new Panchayati Raj System: planning at the grassroots level, beneficiaries’ selection, group houses for weaker sections and Grama Sabha activities.

Development

Geetha said that basic education is essential for all sections of the people. The education processes lead to individual development and social development. With regard to village economy she emphasized that it can be developed in the following ways: agriculture, animal husbandry and village industry. Agricultural officials are not cooperating with the Village Panchayats in issuing seeds and information related to agriculture. For animal husbandry, a separate building is needed for a veterinary centre. For village industry training and loan facility should be provided to the needy people. In this way the villages have to be improved.

Politics

In politics individuals have developed in various ways. But they are not helping the Village Panchayat’s activities. Party members should have discussion with the Panchayat President. Otherwise there will be no development related to certain activities like ration card, pension etc.
Gender issues

Geetha felt that basic women’s education is needed for the weaker sections of the people. More self-employment opportunity has to be created for the SHGs. In this way women can be empowered economically. Besides women also need to be empowered politically because men’s domination continues at the family level. Finally she told that women’s groups should be improved in all aspects of life.

Common Property Resources

Only tamarind trees are available in this Panchayat and Rs.5000/- is the income per year from those trees. Only 2 local ponds are available in this area but the water is used for animals only.

Social Justice

According to Geetha social justice is not possible in the rural areas and so the Government has to take necessary steps in this regard. Free cycle to SC students is not necessary but cycles should be distributed to all school-going students. In addition, appointment and admission should be based on merit and experience. Government information has to be passed on to all sections of the people not only to the weaker sections. The Government has to look at the people equally and not show any discrimination.

Geetha has developed leadership qualities in the following ways: i) close relationship with Ward Members ii) experience from the Gram Sabha meetings, iii) supporting sources at the family level, and, iv) relationship with officials. Besides she regularly reads Tamil newspapers and watches TV programmes.

Performance

Basic facilities have been completed based on people’s participation, i.e., drinking water, street lights, road facility, toilet programmes, hand pump, TV rooms, reading rooms, threshing floor, culverts and school development activities.

87 street lights and 16 hand pumps were installed during 1996 to 2001. For drinking water the TWAD has taken necessary steps. Geetha has provided a free site for the construction of a reading centre. At present library facility is available in the Village Panchayat office. A new school building has been constructed in one hamlet. Five TV rooms have been constructed under the JVVT fund. One marriage hall has been constructed with the Panchayat fund with all facilities and Rs.750/- rent per day is collected for that hall. The total
rent collected is Rs.23,000. Two threshing floors were constructed from the Panchayat fund and they are very useful to the farmers. Road works have been completed from the Panchayat funds.

From the JGSY fund street maintenance works were completed in the year 1999-2000. In 2000-2001 a cement road was laid under the Namakku Naame Thittam. 75 toilets have been constructed under the CRSP. In 1997-98, 20 group houses were constructed under the IAY scheme. In 1998-99, 20 group houses were repaired. In 2000-2001, 16 beneficiaries were selected for katcha houses (Rs.10,000 grant). From the Panchayat fund, play ground facility has been provided at a cost of Rs.25,000/-. In 1999-2000, a commercial complex was constructed under the JVVT scheme.

In 2000-2001, a computer building was constructed for the Government Higher Secondary School from the MLA Fund at a cost of Rs.4 lakhs. Besides an additional school building was constructed from the MP Fund in the year 1998-99. The graveyard road was maintained from the Panchayat fund. Besides culvert works and drainage works have been completed from the Panchayat fund. In 1997-98, loans were issued to 26 persons under the IRDP scheme. In 2000-2001, SHGs were benefited with the help of bank staff by issuing loans to the SHGs.

In Panchayat meetings the Ward Members ask about their own Ward’s development. This Panchayat is considered a model Village Panchayat at the district level.

Two Gram Sabha meetings are enough per year, according to Geetha. For quorum purposes false signature is affixed in the register. The SHG members always ask various questions but do not help in organizing the Gram Sabha meetings. More number of SC people participate in the Gram Sabha meeting but sometimes they do not ask any questions but silently observe the Gram Sabha proceedings. Sometimes they distribute sweets, coffee and other items in the Gram Sabha meetings to other people.

**Panchayat Finance**

From 1997-98 onwards the house tax has been raised as follows:

- **Huts**: Rs. 5 to 8
- **Tiled houses**: Rs. 8 to 12
- **Pucca houses**: Rs.25 to 50/75/100
For other sources of income to the Panchayat Geetha suggested as follows: 1) Planting work to be done in Panchayat areas and near the lake area 2) Shopping complexes have to be constructed. The following problems are faced in getting Government grants:

i) At the block level a lot of problems are faced.

ii) Delay in issuing the cheques.

iii) Even after completion of works issuing cheque is delayed.

The eligible grants are follows:

- SFC grant Rs. 66,000
- JVVT grant Rs.1,16,000
- Earmarked Fund Rs.34,000

With regard to the auditing process Geetha said that auditing work has to be done every month. She added that the Gram Sabha meeting is enough and there is no need for further auditing, since, in the Gram Sabha meeting, all the activities of the development programmes are discussed.

Social Development

For environmental activities she has conducted awareness programmes at district level, taluk level and Panchayat level with the help of the Health Department. For school enrollment she has conducted meetings and awareness programmes with the help of the Arivolt volunteers. Besides, small pamphlets were also distributed to the public for improving school enrollment. For schooling an additional building has been constructed and a new elementary school has been started. In the past 5 years Geetha has carried out the following works: i) development of the school, ii) maintenance of roads and street lights, iii) new roads under the Namakkal Naame Thittam.

In 2001-2002 the AMT was sanctioned. Basic amenities have to be provided under the AMT. With the help of the AMT this Panchayat has to be developed in all aspects.

Personal Achievements

Geetha has attended many training programmes during the period 1996 to 2001.

1. RCH training (Reproductive and Child Health) conducted by PHCs in Tiruvannamalai District.
2. One day training programme related to Village Panchayat organised by the Vellore District Collectorate.

3. One day training programme organised by the Tiruvannamalai District Collectorate.

4. One day training programme organised by DRDA officials, Chennai, for the selection of the best Panchayat Presidents at the District level.

5. Discussion of the best Panchayat Presidents' performance conducted by DRDA, Chennai.

6. One day workshop on “Transparency and Administrative Management” organised by the Anna Institute of Management.

7. 4 day workshop organised by SIRD, Chennai.

Perception on Gender

Geetha said that, she being a woman President, there is high expectation from the womenfolk that gender discrimination could be solved with the help of women elected representatives like her. As an example, she reported that a woman by name Srimathi Govindammal sought her help to bail her out from the Vellore prison. The issue was that she was booked under the Goondas Act due to her illegal sale of arrack. In the meantime her husband expired and the villagers requested Geetha to make use of her power as the Village Panchayat President to request the District Collector to grant special permission to Govindammal so that she could attend the funeral ceremony and to observe the customary practices in this regard. A request letter was sent to the Collector accordingly and she was bailed out for a day. Geetha said that the villagers, especially the womenfolk, took this request seriously and their expectation was realized.

Income and Expenditure of this Panchayat during the period 2001-2002

Income Sources

The SFC grant was Rs.1,29,033 for the period 01.04.2001 to 30.06.2001. The SFC grant was Rs.2,56,000 for the period 01.07.2001 to 31.03.2002. Next to SFC grant house tax matching grant was high. The other sources were stamp duty, taxes, licence fee, deposit amount and rent for Panchayat buildings.
Expenditure Items

The major expenditures were as follows: electricity charges at Panchayat level, maintenance of OHT and extension of pipelines etc. Geetha emphasized that maintenance expenditures are high in this Panchayat. In addition she pointed out that electricity charges should be paid by the Government or electricity should be free to all Panchayats.

Besides she has planned new works in the year 2001-2002 as follows:

1) New building has to be constructed for the cooperative society.
2) The roads have to be improved.
3) Small culverts have to be constructed wherever necessary.
4) New street lights have to be installed.
5) Wells have to be deepened.
6) Hand pumps have to be maintained regularly.
7) Other works related to Village Panchayat development have to be taken up.

Maintenance of Panchayat Office

The Village Panchayat premises are clean and the following facilities are provided in the Panchayat office: one table, 11 chairs, bench, bureau and fan. Geetha said that maintenance of records is difficult and calls for a separate training programme. She maintains a diary related to visiting Panchayat works. Regularly at 10.00 am she is available in the Village Panchayat office. The following problems occurred in mobilising the community:

1. Block level officials should visit the rural areas regularly, not only for the Gram Sabha meetings and festivals.
2. Free items should be distributed to all sections of the people.
3. Loan facility is needed for the weaker sections.
4. The block level officials should participate whenever grassroots level planning is undertaken.

Reasons for Success

1. The library and marriage hall were inaugurated by the Education Minister and Housing Minister respectively on 07.10.1997.
2. On 16.11.1998 a Higher Secondary School was inaugurated for which people contributed Rs.2 lakhs. It is a major success that the high school has been upgraded to a higher secondary school.

3. A new elementary school has been started in Nellimedu Village.

4. Road works were carried out under different schemes and this is another achievement.

5. The community hall rent is Rs.750 per programme and Rs.23,000 has been earned through the community hall.

6. At the street level a cement thalam has been completed at a cost of Rs.4,67,000 under the Namakku Naame Thittam.

7. With regard to housing facility under the IAY 20 group houses were constructed and 20 houses were repaired and maintained. Besides, maintenance of kutcha houses for 16 persons was done.

8. From the Panchayat fund a physical exercise centre was constructed at a cost of Rs.25,000.

9. Geetha maintains association with other departments for the development of the Panchayat. For this reason the District officials suggested this Panchayat as a model Panchayat for other Panchayats.

Summary and Observation

Geetha has taken much effort for the Panchayat’s development. She has close association with block officials and they also support this Panchayat in many ways. She herself is equipped very well by attending various training programmes organised in different places. Openness to learn, adaptability, accountability are some of the key characteristics exhibited by Geetha. Interface with different stakeholders, strong affiliation with grassroots networks and education enable her perception and performance. This has direct connection with the development process. One important factor is workload, or that dual role that normally affects the performance. In her domestic bondage, she could not contest in the second round of elections in 2001.
Case 10
Idayapatti Village Panchayat
Annavasal Panchayat Union-Pudukottai District

Socio-Economic Background

Ms. J. Chellam, aged 33, belongs to the SC community. She is an educated woman who has completed her school final. Her family is a nuclear one. She lives with her husband and two sons. Her husband is a contractor. He is a staunch activist in the MGR ADMK Party. During the 1987 general elections her husband contested for the post of MLA of Kulathur constituency as a candidate of the ADMK (Janaki faction) but could not win the election.

Chellam’s main occupation is agriculture. She owns 5 acres of land with a borewell and with electricity facility. Around Rs.50,000/- is the annual income from agriculture. Her husband devotes much effort to uplifting the SC community. He influenced the government authorities to allocate more houses to the SCs in this area and he himself constructed the houses properly.

Chellam was a member in the ADMK. Later she joined the MGR ADMK and now she serves as the deputy secretary at the union level. She actively involves herself in politics, meets the leaders and attends the public meetings organised locally but she does not attend any convention of the party held in other places like Chennai, Thanjavur etc. Her husband attends all important functions of the MGR ADMK in Chennai and other places.

Recruitment Process

When the Panchayat election was announced, as the Panchayat was reserved for SC women, the village elders suggested to her to contest in the election. Her husband encouraged her in politics. She took it as an opportunity to serve humanity.

There were two opponents. Both of the opponents were less educated. Three days of intensive canvassing was done in the 6 hamlets of Idayapatti. Door to door canvassing was resorted to as there seemed to be tough competition.

Her husband’s social service mentality, her educational status and her socialization process attracted the voters and she won the election.
Rs.15,000/- was spent for the campaign. Her humanity was one of the reasons for her success.

Village Set-up

There are 6 hamlets in the Panchayat. In three of these hamlets the SC is the dominant caste. The next dominant caste is that of the Konars. Muthirayar, Velar, Kallar and Gounder communities are also living in the villages but they are minorities in numbers. Among the SCs about 50% are land owners and among the Konars almost all are land holders. The Muthirayars possess dry land. The farmers of Idayapatti depend on well irrigation. There are about 100 wells fitted with electrified motor pumps. Paddy, cotton and groundnut are the major crops produced by the farmers. Agriculture is feasible only if the free supply of electricity for well irrigation is continued. Otherwise the farmers won’t engage themselves in agriculture and the lands will lie waste and uncultivated. Konar, Kallar and Muthirayar community families engage in animal husbandry. As there is no milk society in Idayapatti the milk produced is sold to the Illupur milk society. If the beneficiaries who availed of IRDP loans properly repay the loan a milk society could be arranged in Idayapatti itself.

Religious institutions

There are two lyyanar temples in which the poorajis are from the Muthirayar and the Velar (Potter) communities. SC persons are permitted to enter the temple but, after a certain distance, they can not go further. Those who observe pooja for God Ayyapan are permitted to go inside the temple. Earlier temple entry was not permitted. The SC youth joined together and entered the temple in spite of the objection by the caste Hindus. In the quarrel that followed there was a clash between the Kallars and the SC community. The issue became serious and at last the Kallars apologized in front of all. The issue was settled amicably. After this incident the SCs slowly gained the right to enter the temple.

There are other temples for Karuppu and Sempuli Karuppu, in which the poorajis are from the SC community. All caste people used to come and worship in these temples. It is a custom that the SCs should not enter the lyyanar temple. They have been threatened in the name of god. But the SC youth are ready to face the curse of god.
Lack of Transportation Facility

As the roads are in a very bad condition the state corporation buses are not operated to the Panchayat area. Even the mini bus operators do not have any interest to get permits to the Panchayat as the roads are unmotorable. The villagers face hardship due to the non-availability of bus services, particularly the youth and women. Chellam met the Union officials and requested them to provide a BT road.

Status of Women

The village womenfolk are mostly illiterate and unemployed. They are not yet oriented towards proper socialization. There are a large number of families affected due to domestic quarrels. The womenfolk do not know how to run the family in a harmonious way. Very often husband and wife resort to quarrels for reasons known only to the couple. The women fall sick and do not understand preventive care. They fail to keep children clean and tidy. Chellam used to personally advise her fellow women but periodical general awareness programmes are essential. An NGO is functioning here but they do not have a general awareness programme. When a medical camp was organised in a nearby village Chellam took it as an opportunity and mobilised about 50 women and took them to the camp. TB, blood pressure, diabetes and scabies are common ailments suffered by the womenfolk. Since she is a woman, womenfolk come to her to seek help for getting admission in hospital for delivery and for major ailments. She used to spend her own pocket money in this regard.

In one way the womenfolk are fortunate. The marriage expenses are very limited as most of the marriages are conducted in the local temple. Moreover the dowry system is not rigidly observed. The bridegrooms' families consent to a few jewels and so marriages are not costly.

There are 6 SHGs, of which only four are functioning well. SC women show more interest in SHGs than BC women. The NGO is helping them to avail of government assistance for group activities. No economic activities other than agriculture and goatery are undertaken in the group. After the group formation a change is seen in the dressing behaviour of poor women.

Political Parties

DMK, AIADMK, Congress, TMC, MGR ADMK are the political parties functioning in the Panchayat. DMK and AIADMK are the dominant parties. There is no hectic activity among the parties. All of them are very cooperative
to the Panchayat. With their cooperation illicit sale of alcohol has been eradicated.

Common Property Resources

There are 10 irrigation tanks, 1 pond, 500 palmyrah trees and 12 tamarind trees as the assets of the Panchayat. From the auction of the trees Rs.2500/- is earned by the Village Panchayat. A large extent of wastelands are under reserved forest. Under Social Forestry, the agricultural department undertook a project at a cost of Rs.1.80 lakhs and planted tamarind, cashewnut and eucalyptus saplings in the reserved wasteland. About 20 families are getting employment in this project. Still a lot of land is available. By proper planning afforestation could be taken up massively. Employment as well as income would be generated simultaneously if Panchayats are given this responsibility along with the funds. The funds could be extended as loan and the same would be repaid after the harvest. To avoid destruction of saplings the rearing of goats was prohibited. The villagers cooperated in this regard.

Public Distribution System

The PDS shop functioned in a private building due to non-availability of permanent infrastructure for the PDS. Moreover it was 3 km away from the main village of Idayapatti. Chellam persuaded the Member of Parliament and got sanction for construction of a PDS shop. When difference of opinion arose with regard to the location of the PDS shop, she persuaded the villagers to agree on Idayapatti which is easily accessible to all the hamlets and the PDS shop was constructed there.

Panchayat Administration

There are 6 Ward Members. Of them 4 are male and 2 are female. Among the male 2 are SC people and among the women one is from the SC. The monthly meetings of the Panchayat are properly conducted. As the Panchayat is poor there are not many transactions on which serious discussion is needed. Within the available funds and scheme funds allocation they easily decide upon the activities. In general they try to fulfill the basic needs like water in all the hamlets.

Provision of Water Supply

There is only one OHT with a capacity of 30,000 litres in the Panchayat. Actually they need at least 3 OHTs to supply adequate water to all the hamlets. There are 14 hand pumps but only nine function well. Cheliam complained to the block officials in this regard. But the pump mechanic is not available. In
Kariapuram hamlet water supply was an issue. Since the election to the Panchayat Chellam frequently visited the TWAD office and pleaded to redress the problem. At last a mini motor was fitted to the hand pump to pump out water from the bore. Now three public taps are provided though this is not adequate for the needs of the villagers. There are now 14 public taps in the Panchayat and a tap has been provided to the primary school.

**Gram Sabha Meeting**

Chellam was really serious about organising the Gram Sabha as she could explain to the people the financial crisis of the Panchayat. Tom tom, bit notices, intimation to SHGs and village elders are resorted to mobilise the public. Around 150 persons attend. The major issues discussed in the Gram Sabha are drinking water, transport, road and drainage. SHG members participate well. The village elders suggested to her to meet the MLA and other VIPs for the Panchayat’s needs.

**Implementation of Development Schemes**

During 1996-97 IRDP loan was provided to 15 families and they are properly repaying their annual instalments. Chellam ensured the creation of asset such as milch animals and goats by the IRDP beneficiaries.

Under the Indra Awas Yojana 27 group houses were constructed. The selection of beneficiaries was properly done in consultation with the Ward Members and local political party leaders. As there is no adequate space in the primary school classes are conducted in the Panchayat office. Chellam met the District Councillor and he was kind enough to allocate funds for an additional school building. For more than four years the Panchayat struggled to avail of the same. Till that time the classes were conducted in the Panchayat office. Along with SHG women Chellam met the District Councillor and the District Collector and at last Rs.3.25 lakhs was sanctioned.

Under the EAS buildings for two noon meal centres were provided by the Union. Under the JGSY allocation to the Panchayat a bus shelter for passengers was constructed. Also from the money available in account No. 1 (i.e. Village Panchayat fund) two TV rooms and 1 km of road were provided. Chellam was conscientious in spending Panchayat money and tried to save money little by little. After a huge amount was saved works were executed from the Village Panchayat funds periodically.

In connection with Panchayat activities Chellam has to visit sectoral offices. Expenses are incurred in this regard. The TA permitted to the
President is not sufficient. Poor Presidents can not manage this. So the TA has to be increased.

**Panchayat Finance**

The income to the Panchayat is nominal. The SFC grant is Rs.25,000/- per quarter. The stamp duty is about Rs.12,000/- annually. The house tax demand is around Rs.2,500/- only whereas the EB bill is Rs.20,000/-. Regular maintenance of pipelines, OHT, streets and roads is undertaken according to the funds availability. Maintenance of streetlights is another constraint, as replacement of tube lights is frequently needed due to the voltage fluctuation. Of 8 kms of road, 4 kms are mud roads. The villagers expect periodical maintenance of the mud road. The house tax was increased in the year 2001. From Rs.2460/- it is now 3750/-. There are more number of huts and so the house tax demand is very low.

**Social Justice**

Chellam is worried about the economic status of the SCs. Due to the failure of the gem cutting industry the SC youth, men and women, who engaged in gem cutting were thrown of employment. Several of them have gone to Thiruppur, Coimbatore and even to Kerala for employment. Educated SC youth need proper motivation and skill training. Otherwise they are at the mercy of vested interests.

Joint ventures may be advised to them for economic activities. There are a number of small and marginal farmers among the SCs. They need guidance in their agricultural operations to gain more profit. The officials only aim at implementing the government schemes irrespective of local felt needs. Successful ventures like poultry as in Namakkal could be implemented in Pudukottai involving SHGs. Instead of spending money on house construction for SCs, more attention is very much needed for providing economic opportunities through self-employment or production related activities.

**Her Perception on Panchayati Raj**

The New Panchayati Raj System ensures people’s participation through the Gram Sabha. The administration of the Village Panchayat is known to people now. Sometimes the President and the members of the Panchayat join the people for direct action on social problems.

Due to reservation for women and Dalits these sections of the community are now getting empowerment. They have the opportunity to share their concerns and enjoy self-esteem. Moreover the officialdom in Panchayat
administration is diluted as the President now has direct link with the district authorities. Hence redtapism is now reduced.

The existing financial devolution is not adequate as even the minimum basic needs of the villagers are yet to be filled. Provision of protected drinking water supply is not yet ensured to all hamlets. Chellam suggested to give special funds to very poor Panchayats.

**Sectoral Linkages**

The President of a Gram Panchayat has to function as a public relations officer to the community. The President has to visit a number of departments in connection with redressing the grievances of individuals and the public like police, revenue, agriculture, social welfare, TWAD, THADCO, highways and the Collectorate periodically. Chellam’s husband sometimes accompanies her. Being a full time party worker of the MGR ADMK, he himself deals with some public problems. So some of the issues related to the Panchayat in the above departments are also clarified by him.

Chellam has established good relation with the Union officials and the Union Chairman and the Councillors. About 4.10 lakh rupees worth of activities were undertaken with the allocations from the Union. With the help of revenue officials her husband took efforts to purchase one and a half acres of land for a housing site. There 20 group houses were constructed for poor families (SC). To a woman who is physically handicapped a tri cycle was provided through the Department of Social Welfare.

**Social Development**

The Gram Sabha meeting is helpful to the school. During the time of the Gram Sabha meetings, with the help of youth volunteers, tree saplings were planted in the school campus. Active members from the PTA facilitated this activity. The headmaster showed interest in the protection of tree saplings and the trees are now grown well. There are 5 coconut trees, five punga trees and five neem trees in the school campus. Toilet and compound wall were also provided in the school by the Panchayat.

With the encouragement given by the public for tree planting Chellam decided to undertake a road improvement work through the Namakku Name Thittam. But she was told that the fund was exhausted at the time of the request.

During the immunization programme the Panchayat took much effort to mobilise children from the 7 hamlets to avail of the polio vaccine and other
medical interventions. A public announcement was made of the details of the mass immunization programme. Moreover through the concerned Ward Members the message was passed on for ensuring maximum attendance.

Summary and Observation

Chellam is very sensitive to the social justice issue, particularly with regard to the empowerment of the Scheduled Castes. During the interview she became emotional. Her husband intervened and pacified her. On the practice of discrimination, she criticised the caste Hindus who showed indifference towards the Scheduled Castes when they entered the temple. After a struggle only the SCs were permitted to enter, that too only to a certain distance inside the temple. The elected rural women seemed to be less oriented towards social justice before they entered public life. After becoming President, they seemed to become very sensitive. It is observed that there is a man behind the success and it is none other than her husband. Affiliation with the NGOs has also helped her to overcome many hurdles. Better understanding and perception have helped her to overcome and achieve the goals.

An Overview of the Case Analysis

It is clearly evident from the case analysis that there are certain interesting outcomes as a result of the series of efforts made towards the empowerment of the elected women representatives to work towards development. The perception and performance are related to each other. The elected women representatives have projected both the positive and negative aspects as common and made themselves examples:

1. The poor socio-economic background, educational status on the lower side and poor access to the basic amenities and facilities have led to the perception, that is, personal sufferings and setbacks have made them think and act first towards the upbringing of the weaker or the marginalized. Provision of basic amenities in order to have a decent living with dignity is seen in all the cases.

2. The strong and sound socio-economic background with good education and access to all the basic amenities has led to the perception that what they have must be made available to others also.

In other words, the pain and pleasure has a serious impact on the perception of the elected women leaders. The correlation drawn here is very clear. They perform their role in a multifaceted manner as a passion. Affiliation and interface with different stakeholders, operationalization of the aspects in a
convergence mode, practicing transparency and accountability, faith in the community are some of the other aspects that moulded the perception and performance of the elected women leaders on the whole. It is evident that the perception of women leaders always has a flavour of human, holistic and honoring touch. Moreover a sense of belonging and ownership will be seen more, as they are attached emotionally with the environment. Readiness to face the challenge, to mobilize diversified support and to consolidate the efforts are also seen as effective strategies of these elected women leaders. Hence, though they are new, they have proved themselves models to others.

The leadership is yet another factor that helped all the women leaders to emerge successfully. In the Indian setting the socio-cultural conditions are not favourable for women's to enter politics. It is always male domination and rulership that govern the public space. But the newly drawn women have given a new leadership to the society which automatically draws the attention of the people.