The seventy-third Constitutional Amendment Act is a landmark in Indian political development, providing for devolution of powers to the people. It envisages the establishment of a uniform three-tier system of strong, viable and responsive Rural Local Governance institutions at village, intermediate and district levels. Article 243(G) of the Indian Constitution recognizes Panchayats as “institutions of self-government,” with the twin primary responsibilities of promoting economic growth and ensuring social justice. Panchayati Raj, as a system of governance at the grassroot level in rural India, has been conceived as the most viable and proper mechanism for realizing the goals of democracy and decentralization. The amendment has also laid down necessary guidelines for the structure of Panchayats, their powers, functions, devolution of finances, regular holding of elections and reservation of seats for weaker sections of the society, including women. This is a landmark in the history of women empowerment too. Empowerment is a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is the capacity to implement) in people for use in their own lives in their own communities and in their own society, by acting on issues that they regard as important. Women empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men to participate in
the development process of the society through political institutions—as equal partners with human dignity. In the present study empowerment means exercising the powers guaranteed by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act to women in Panchayats.

**Statement of the Problem**

Women have reservation of position in rural local government since the year 1994 in Tamil Nadu and 33.3 per cent of seats are reserved for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The reservation of seats for women has created an opportunity for women to participate in governance. Women in power at the grassroots are at different stages in the empowerment process. There are four thousand elected women Village Panchayat Presidents in Tamil Nadu. This large-scale involvement of women in local governance is mainly due to the reservation of seats for them. These women Village Panchayat Presidents have not fully realized their power and are not functioning independently and only a portion of them really feel empowered. So mere reservation itself does not empower women in local governance. The conservative nature of people in rural areas, the lack of education and access to the media, poor exposure to the outside world, the patriarchal nature of the family, economic dependence on men etc. render the women Village Panchayat Presidents vulnerable and make them feel powerless and unequipped to participate effectively in the process of local governance. Evelin Hust (2004) says that “quotas in local politics will not fully empower women in the countryside, they will still open up an important space for them to become politically interested and active which will, in turn, lead to further empowerment in
the long am.” The socio-economic background of the elected women Village Panchayat Presidents, the capacity building measures undertaken for their benefit, their affiliation to associations and political parties play a positive role in the process of empowerment. The present work attempts to study the influence of political party affiliation on the empowerment of women Village Panchayat Presidents in Rural Local Governance.

**Review of Literature**

**I. Studies Related to Empowerment of Women in Local Governance**

Caiman and J. Leslie’s book *Towards Empowerment: Women and Movement Politics in India* documents the existence of a dynamic women’s movement in India, which has emerged in the context of political and structural crises. The authors examine the causes of the emergence of the women’s movement and how it has since fared in relation to the state. They describe the nature, origins, and meanings of the movement for Indian women and discusses the movement’s significance for Indian politics in general as well as for understanding the nature of movement politics worldwide. They outline the women’s achievements so far and conclude with an assessment of their future prospects for bettering their lives through participation in the movement.¹

Evelin Hust’s article entitled “Women's Political Presence and Empowerment: Women in the Institutions of Local Government in Orissa” after the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution” asks
whether the 33% reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), introduced through the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992, has led to women’s empowerment. The main conclusion is that, while the quota for women is indeed an important impetus to women’s empowerment in rural India, the empowerment process will take a long time and will not be secured by the quota alone. The main findings are, the elected women representatives individually benefited from their political presence through gains in awareness, confidence, public speaking capabilities, knowledge, and freedom of movement: women evince greater interest than men in women issues, yet hardly have the power to implement these priorities.²

Evelin Hust’s book entitled Women’s Political Representation and Empowerment in India: A Million Indiras Now? scrutinizes the processes, that have been set in motion through the demand for a 33 per cent reservation for women in rural local governments in India. Taking up the proposition that women’s presence in rural political bodies will also lead to their empowerment, the author developed an analytical framework based on recent theoretical literature on quotas in politics and the concept of empowerment, as well as on studies on women in the Panchayati Raj. The empirical data was collected in Orissa through a survey of 105 women and 80 men and a large number of qualitative interviews. Among the major issues discussed in this book are the socio-economic composition of the new Panchayati Raj, the question whether the women are really present and active in the local bodies, whether they have gained any power and how they deal with corruption. A further chapter assesses how far the women have become empowered
individually, in terms of having gained confidence, and how far the quota empowers women as a group. One of the author’s main findings is that though quotas in local politics will not fully empower women in the countryside, they will still open up an important space for them to become politically interested and active which will, in turn, lead to further empowerment in the long run.3

Bryld Eric’s article “Increasing Participation in Democratic Institutions through Decentralisation: Empowering Women and Scheduled Castes and Tribes through Panchayati Raj in Rural India” analyses the potential and the pitfalls of increasing women’s and scheduled castes’ participation through decentralization by analyzing the Indian Panchayat Raj system. It is shown how technocratic regulations are not sufficient to ensure genuine empowerment for all in democratic decision making. The question whether decentralization can be justified as one of the main means to development remains to be resolved.4

Chattopadhyay, Raghabendra and Esther Duflo’s paper “Impact of Reservation in Panchayati Raj: Evidence from a Nationwide Randomized Experiment” explores the relationship between women’s stated priorities and actual spending patterns in Village Councils led by women in West Bengal and Rajasthan. It argues that reservation makes a difference as both women and scheduled castes (SCs) in village leadership positions invest more in what women and SCs seem to want. Hence, the authors argue that reservation may be a tool to ensure adequate representation and delivery of local public goods to disadvantaged groups, considering that local leaders seem to have some effective control over decisions, even when they are women or SCs, and despite the preconception that
they provide weak leadership. It is also worth mentioning that this study questions the possible negative impacts that the tagging of other objectives onto the reservation policy may have, using the example of laws mandating a two-child norm for members of the Panchayat, which may discourage women from being candidates (especially considering that they don’t usually control their fertility choices).⁵

G.Palanithurai’s article “Empowerment of Women- A Novel Exercise” is based on an exercise conducted in a village with rural women before the enactment of the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994. In this article, the perception of women of the institutions involved in development and the role of development functionaries and the people have been analysed. The missing link between the people and the Government is identified. It clearly demonstrates to what extent women can take up responsibilities under the new dispensation. The capacity level of the women has also been highlighted in this article.⁶

L.S. Buxi’s article “Status of Women in India” presents the status of women in India which can only be improved through a joint program between the media and the community in providing Indian women with power of literacy. Women in India are divided into unequal halves. Of 368 million women in India, 278 million reside in rural areas, and most are illiterate. The majority of women are illiterate (70 percent), 25 percent are semi-literate and only five percent may be considered educated. In an effort to integrate women into the mainstream of Indian social life, a campaign of providing literacy to all women has been undertaken. The welfare state of India has taken up the responsibility of providing education, and maternity and child welfare to these women. It
has gone further in incorporating the media in educating people regarding these various programs. This approach will help integrate women more fully into the economic, political and social mainstream of independent India.\textsuperscript{7}

Srilatha Batliwala’s paper “The Meaning of Women’s Empowerment; New Concepts from Action” analyses the concept of women’s empowerment and outlines empowerment strategies based on insights gained through a study of grassroots programmes in South Asia. The concept of women’s empowerment is the outcome of important critiques generated by the women’s movement, particularly by ‘third world’ feminists. They clearly state that women’s empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power relations that result in women having less control over material assets and intellectual resources. Women participate in their own oppression so they must first become aware of the ideology that legitimizes male domination. The empowerment process starts from within but access to new ideas and information will come from external agents. With new consciousness and the strength of solidarity, women can assert their right to control resources and to participate equally in decision making. Ultimately, women’s empowerment must become a force that is an organised mass movement which challenges and transforms existing power relations in society.\textsuperscript{8}

N. Kabeer’s paper “Resources, Agency, Achievements; Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment” sets out from the understanding that empowerment is a process by which those who have been denied power gain power, in particular the ability to make
strategic life choices. For women, these could be the capacity to choose a marriage partner, a livelihood, or whether or not to have children. For this power to come about, three inter-related dimensions are needed: access to and control of resources; agency (the ability to use these resources to bring about new opportunities) and achievements (the attainment of new social outcomes). Empowerment, therefore, is both a process and an end result. This understanding differs greatly from instrumentalist interpretations which view empowerment purely in terms of measurable outcomes. Instrumentalist interpretations are problematic because they convey the belief that social change can be predicted and prescribed in a cause and effect way and undermine the notion that women’s empowerment should be about the ability of women to make self-determined choices.9

Z. Oxaal and S. Baden, ’s work “Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy” defines what is women’s empowerment. If women are empowered, does that mean that men have less power? Empowerment has become a new ‘buzzword’ in international development language but is often poorly understood. The need to ‘empower’ women responds to the growing recognition that women in developing countries lack control over resources and the self-confidence and/or opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. At the same time, the realisation that women have an increasingly important role to play in social and economic development has become widely accepted. Unless women are ‘empowered’ to participate alongside men in the development process, development efforts will only have partial effect. Empowerment strategies must
carefully define their meaning of 'empowerment' and be integrated into mainstream programmes rather than attempted separately.¹⁰

C. Grown, G. Rao Gupta and A. Kes’s work, “Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women” asks how can the global community can achieve the third Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women. To be empowered women must have equal capabilities such as education and health, and equal access to resources and opportunities such as land and employment. However they must also have the agency to use these capabilities and resources to make strategic choices. This report, prepared by the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, identifies strategic priorities and practical actions for achieving women’s empowerment by 2015. These include: strengthening opportunities for post-primary education for girls; investing in infrastructure to reduce women’s and girls’ time burdens; guaranteeing women’s and girls’ property and inheritance rights; increasing women’s share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies; and combating violence against women and girls. Various countries, communities and institutions have implemented different combinations of these actions and shown good results. The problem is not a lack of practical ways to empower women but rather a lack of change on a large and deep enough scale to bring about transformation in the way societies conceive of and organise men and women’s roles, responsibilities and control over resources. Essential for this kind of transformation are the mobilization of a large group people committed to the vision of a gender equitable society; the technical
capacity to implement change; institutional structures and processes to support the transformation; and adequate financial resources.¹¹

Sida’s document “Discussing Women’s Empowerment: Theory and Practice”, comprises papers presented by Naila Kabeer, Patricia McFadden, Signe Arnfred, Edme Dominguez and Sherin Saadallah. The key issues covered include: the need to recognise how prescribed processes of empowerment may violate the essence of the concept; how culture excludes women from sites and statuses of power; the need to incorporate the language of political struggle into gender and development; how women in Mexico are changing political culture and gendered relationships; and the strategies Muslim societies can use to alleviate gender inequality and power imbalances.¹²

Aujon Malhotra, et al. have written an article on “Measuring Women’s Empowerment as a Variable in International Development”. This paper presents a review of current theories and strategies to foster women’s empowerment in the development context. It evaluates research to date, and points to areas for future study. The paper defines empowerment as the ability of people to make strategic choices in areas that affect their lives. Two key factors in the process of empowerment are identified: control over resources (the conditions for empowerment) and agency (the ability to formulate choices). Section one outlines the conceptual framework. Section two discusses how empowerment can be measured in practice, with an overview of various frameworks which cover economic, socio-cultural, familial, legal, political and psychological dimensions. The report argues that in practice, measuring empowerment depends on the establishment of universal standards
(such as human rights), but at the same time must allow for indicators which are sensitive to context. Section three provides examples of research projects and how they have used these frameworks. Recommendations include: the need to develop a framework that can be used across settings to address empowerment at the mezzo/community level as well as at the level of the macro (legal/political) and micro (family).  

Y.M. Moghadam and L. Senftova have written a paper entitled “Measuring Women’s Empowerment Participation and Rights in Civil, Political, Social, Economic, and Cultural Domains”. In this paper, empowerment is defined as a multi-dimensional process of civil, political, social, economic, and cultural participation and rights. To analyse these, a framework using six key domains is presented. These are used to assess women’s participation (referring to an active social condition), rights (referring to a formal, legal condition) and capabilities (preconditions for the enjoyment of rights and enhancement of participation). The domains are: socio-demographic indicators, bodily integrity and health, literacy and educational attainment, economic participation and rights, political participation and rights, cultural participation and rights. Indicators include: life expectancy at birth, sexual and physical abuse against women, literacy rates, amount of maternity leave, and number of feminist resources in the print and electronic media.  

*Handbook in Gender and Empowerment Assessment* presents a method for Gender Empowerment Assessment (GEA), which records how development projects and programmes affect women and men. It
also helps determine the need to follow up the assessment if basic data is missing. GEA uses 10 empowerment factors to assess, compare and discuss project plans, results and impacts on men and women and can be used during all stages of the project cycle. An important goal with the GEA is to contribute to enhanced awareness of gender and equality aspects within development cooperation. The handbook is a supplement to NORAD's Manual for Programme and Project Cycle Management.\textsuperscript{15}

B.Pradhan’s paper on “Measuring Empowerment: A Methodological Approach” argues that while these quantitative socio-economic measures of empowerment are useful indicators as a first approximation, they are not sensitive enough to capture the nuances of gender power relations. This is because quantitative methods alone are unable to capture the interactive processes through which those in a weaker position strategies ways of gaining from the unequal relationship. Therefore in order to understand the socio-cultural context within which women’s behaviour in social interaction and gender relationships takes place, an in-depth anthropological method is essential.

M.Fiedrich, and A. Jellema have conducted a study on “Literacy, Gender and Social Agency: Adventures in Empowerment”. Based on a study of four adult education projects in Bangladesh and Uganda, this paper argues by contrast that such ‘indicators of empowerment’ actually have little bearing on the reality of women’s complex strategies for coping. The study focuses on Reflect, an approach to participatory adult education which aims to stimulate a wider process of change in
individuals and communities. It argues that although participatory approaches are usually presented as a fundamental break with ‘top-down’ models of development, aid agency reports suggest that Reflect participants adopt the very same attitudes and practices long promoted by the development community. There is an obvious contradiction in the uniformity of outcomes reported and development processes which are meant to have become ‘participatory’ and ‘adapted to local needs’. The paper ends by considering other development strategies which may be more effective for empowering women. In particular, it asks whether recent shifts away from a focus on individual empowerment to more politicised concepts such as rights and voice resolve, or simply magnify, these problems.  

S. Hafez’s study on “The Terms of Women's Empowerment: Islamic Women Activists in Egypt” analyses how Egyptian women find empowerment in Islamism when Islamists are traditionally perceived as the opposers of women’s liberation. This study contends that rather than being dominated and oppressed, Islamic women are empowered as a result of their willing submission to higher levels of religious attainment. It focuses on Islamic women activists in Egypt who seek self-perfection as a means of gaining proximity to God. In the pursuit of this goal, they work to enhance the well-being of others so as to become better Muslims -organising training sessions for women, carrying out community projects, educating women in the skills necessary for employment. Through their activism, these women are entering public spheres once exclusively occupied by men and are highly aware that they are contesting male power. Yet, for them, empowerment is based
not on challenging male authority but from an inner satisfaction derived from helping others. From this perspective, empowerment is not a goal but a tool or method to reach a Muslim ideal. The language of most contemporary feminist scholarship is thus inadequate to describe the work of these women and the nature of their engagement with power. These Islamic women do not see themselves as free individuals who search for independence from unjust male control, but as deeply connected to each other, to the husband and the family, and ultimately to God. Their empowerment is sought through these connective relations rather than despite them.\(^18\)

N. Kabeer’s paper “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal” discusses the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on gender equality and women’s empowerment and highlights ways in which the indicators associated with this goal -women’s access to education, share of non-agricultural wage employment, and political participation-can contribute to women’s empowerment. Each of these indicators has the potential to bring about immediate changes in women’s lives, along with long-term transformations in patriarchal power structures. But unless provision is made to ensure that policy changes are implemented in ways that allow women themselves to participate, monitor, and hold policy makers and corporations accountable for their actions, the potential for women’s empowerment will be limited. For example, while women’s access to education may improve their chances of a good marriage, unless it also provides them with the courage to question unjust practices its potential for change will be limited. Similarly, while
women’s access to paid work may give them a greater sense of self-reliance and greater purchasing power, if it is undertaken in conditions that damage women’s health its costs may outweigh its benefits.¹⁹

S. Longwe’s article entitled, “Towards Realistic Strategies for Women’s Political Empowerment in Africa” observes that current NGO and development agency strategies to support women’s political empowerment are based on two assumptions: firstly, that women’s increased access to resources, especially education, will lead to their increased representation in political positions; and secondly, that governments are genuinely committed to leading national programmes of action for women’s advancement. This article argues that both of these assumptions are seriously mistaken. All development organisations supporting women’s empowerment must recognize the true obstacles women face in gaining political power, and develop programme strategies to overcome them. The key problem is the covert and discriminatory systems of male resistance to women who dare to challenge male domination of the present political system. In addition to focusing on the need to get women into government, NGOs could also usefully support women’s organisations that are engaging in direct action - a key strategy which enables women to push for policy changes from outside government.²⁰

S. Mosedale’s article on “Policy Arena: Assessing Women’s Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework” briefly reviews how women’s empowerment has been discussed within development studies, how the concept of power was debated and refined during the second half of the twentieth century and how power relations might be
described and evaluated in a particular context. A conceptual framework of empowerment is then proposed, which is based on women identifying their contextualized gender constraints, and the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do.\textsuperscript{21}

S. Rai’s article entitled “Political Representation, Democratic Institutions and Women’s Empowerment: The Quota Debate in India” explains that the debate on national quotas in India has reflected disquiet about the perceived elitism of ‘the women’s movement’, and has challenged women’s groups to address issues of difference among women based on class and caste. It argues that the issue of power must be taken into account: empowerment of whom, by whom, through what and for what? There is also the issue of priorities—the question of whether this engagement with the state is appropriate at a time when the pressures of globalization and liberalization are increasing social inequalities within the country. Surely any debate on women’s empowerment should focus on questions about improving women’s life-chances rather than increasing their political representation. Most significantly, the Indian case shows that there is no simple correlation between an enhanced visibility of women in political institutions and a sense of empowerment of women in the country in general. The question of empowerment cannot be disassociated from the question of relations of power within different socio-political systems. The debates on empowerment, and attempts to put them into practice, need to be opened up to these questions.\textsuperscript{22}
II. Studies Related to Women and Governance at the Grassroots

Bidyut Mohanty has prepared and presented a paper entitled “The Daughters of the 73rd Amendment”. This presentation argues that the 73rd Amendment has an empowering impact on women, even where women’s labour is still marginalized and the rural hierarchies remain unchallenged, as the entry of women into politics in such a big way signifies in itself a radical change. The study also disproves the myth of being a proxy woman and argues that, even though in a limited sense, women are engendering the development process, husband-wife relationships are becoming relatively more egalitarian. However, it is also highlighted that there are many constraints limiting the role elected women can play, such as Panchayat’s resource scarcity, the existence of parallel institutions (such as the Water Harvesting Committee) which bypass Panchayats easily, the budget control of line.

Devaki Jain has written an article on “Panchayati Raj: Women Changing People”. Women are Changing Governance in India. They are being elected to local councils in unprecedented numbers as a result of amendments to the Constitution which mandate the reservation of seats for women in local government. In India, this new system is called the Panchayat Raj Institutions system (PRI). The women whom PRI has brought into politics are now governing, be it in one village, or a larger area such as 100 villages or a district. This process of restructuring the national political and administrative system started as recently as January 1994 and so it is too early to assess the impact of women’s entry into formal structures of government. But some evidence of women’s impact can be drawn from the experiences of PRI in the two states which have
experienced a full 5-year term of this new administrative and political regime (1987-1992). This paper discusses the evidence from the state of Karnataka, where elections under PRI (mandating 25% seat reservation for women) were held in 1987 and 14,000 women were elected.\textsuperscript{24}

D. Narayana’s study on “Institutional Change and Its Impact on the Poor and Excluded: The Indian Decentralization Experience” analyses the impact of democratic decentralization on the chances of socially excluded groups to participate in newly created local governance institutions—Panchayati Raj Institutions—in three Indian states. This institutional reform entailed a quota for the disadvantaged (women and lower castes) to ensure their effective participation. The author suggests that the success of institutional reforms aiming to increase political participation depends on the specific design of the process itself as well as local conditions. An effective devolution of resources to Panchayats seems to influence participation positively as does a vibrant political society characterized by a broad spectrum of political parties, active civil society and newspaper reading.\textsuperscript{25}

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Shamim Meer have worked on creating voice and carving space, redefining governance from a gender perspective. Three relevant case studies of interventions were drawn from India: “Building Political Legitimacy for Elected Muslim, Dalit and Backward Caste Women: Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA)” [p.88-94]. COVA is a network of 750 organisations based in Hyderabad, India, that works for communal harmony through participative community empowerment. COVA was concerned that political parties and male politicians had captured women’s quotas

making women’s representation a sham. Considering this, in the 1990s, it embarked on a programme aimed at establishing the legitimacy of women political representatives as political actors, through enabling them to take on the tasks demanded of their office. The idea was that once the women representatives successfully performed their official responsibilities there would be a shift in their self-perception, and in the perception of significant others—such as male representatives, officials, political parties, the community and families—thus establishing women’s legitimacy as political actors.

South Asia Partnership and IDRC organized a workshop on A Decade of Women’s Empowerment through Local Government in India. This workshop, conducted on October 20-21, 2003, was organized by the Ottawa-based SAP Canada and the Delhi-based Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) with sponsorship from the Ottawa-based International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The expected outcomes of the workshop were to gather together current research and innovative practices on this theme; provoke discussion and a cross fertilization of ideas; come to a better understanding of the concept of women’s empowerment within the context of the Indian amendments; and understand the factors enabling and disabling women from entering and being effective in local government.27

V. Vijayalakshmi’s paper on “Rent Seeking and Gender in Local Governance” examines the relationship between corruption and gender in local governments in India. It argues that, despite previous studies supporting the idea that gender equality contributed to reducing corruption, no significant relationship was found between attitudes
towards rent-seeking and gender distribution in local government. The results also point out that institutional measures such as accountability, risk factor and the role of opposition parties were crucial in explaining the level of corruption. The author explains that while women might score high on integrity tests, exhibit community orientation in experimental situations and show a lesser tendency towards corrupt behaviour in hypothetical situations, it need not necessarily be reproduced in political and economic situations where multiple factors are involved.28

V. Vijayalakshmi’s paper on “Gender, Accountability and Political Representation in Local Government” examines the complexities of political representation of women’s interests in the Panchayats of Karnataka. It is argued that lack of effective participation, multiplicity of identities (caste, class, political party) and the absence of the consolidation of gender specific concerns (the absence of the “we” factor, isolated activities, no gender identification), prevent women’s interests from being an issue in their political representation. The author suggests that reservation was a necessary but not sufficient condition to ensure that women’s interests were addressed. Thus, it may be necessary to think about legislation that would make it obligatory to take up issues that concern women, and that will probably increase the chances to bring about change in attitudes about women.29

V. Vijayalakshmi and B.K. Chandrasekar have authored an article entitled “Authority, Gender and Powerlessness: Women and Political Participation in India”. This paper argues that even though reservation policies have ensured the authority of elected women, this has not been
translated into power (i.e. the ability to actually affect outcomes). This duality of women’s authority and men’s power is permitted by the gender order (women were not willing to risk anything that may damage their families). According to the authors, the acceptance of this situation by women was clear when considering male and female perceptions of their resources: The former considered themselves to be in direct control while the latter didn’t perceive themselves in a decision-making position. While reporting on their election, male and female representatives also differed in their perceptions of being elected: the former emphasized the individual self while the sense of self tended to get diluted in the case of women (who gave more weight to the importance of the males in the family).³⁰

Goetz and Anne Marie have authored a paper entitled “Decentralization and Gender Equality”, Chapter 12 in UNDP (Forthcoming) “Striving for Gender Equality in an Unequal World”. This chapter presents an overview of current research on gender and decentralization. It argues that, contrary to common wisdom, women may face greater obstacles to political engagement at the local level than the national level because of local patriarchal norms. Four main obstacles are identified and further elaborated. First, the resistance from traditional authorities, including cases where women act as proxies for male leaders. Second, the existent gender-insensitive institutional arrangements in local government, which need innovations to become women-friendly. Third, women’s voices must be enabled to be heard, as they may not yet feel free to fully participate. Fourth, innovations in local governance are needed, including the development of gender-
sensitive local budgets. Despite these obstacles, it is argued that women seem to have an impact on local decision making, reflected in local spending patterns. It concludes by highlighting the need to both encourage women’s participation in local government and make local governments accountable to female constituents.\textsuperscript{31}

Goetz and Anne Marie’s conceptual framework enables analysis to look at both “voice” and accountability processes, considering how changes to democratic institutions might affect women’s political effectiveness. It argues that when assessing the usefulness of institutional changes designed to enhance women’s political effectiveness, it is not enough to consider whether they enhance both voice and accountability to women, but also to what degree they do so. This is so because “voice” does not easily and simply lead to better outcomes for women, because political institutions can have strong gender biases which undermine the impact of women’s “voice” and presence in public office. At the same time, it suggests that keeping “voice” in mind when reviewing changes to political institutions which are intended to produce more accountability to women help to avoid the “anti-political” problem of promoting bureaucratic changes in isolation from the politics which would make these new procedures work effectively in promoting gender justice.\textsuperscript{32}

United Nations Development Programme- UNDP (2000) Women’s Political Participation and Good Governance: 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Challenges. This publication was launched during the General Assembly Special Session on Beijing. The studies included show that, despite substantial obstacles, women decision makers in developing countries have begun
to make a difference in governance mechanisms, institutions and broader political debates. However, it also highlights that there is still much to be done to increase women’s voice in governance. This goes beyond increasing the numbers of women in politics, but requires addressing the complex relationship between power, poverty and participation. The book has three main parts, in addition to an overview chapter on women’s political participation and good governance. The first part focuses on concepts, including three chapters on women’s agency in governance; gender, governance and the feminization of poverty; and, a review of strategies and trends on women’s political participation. The second part is a collection of cases from India, South Africa, Uganda and Latin America and the Caribbean. The third part includes three concluding chapters on voice, budgets and the global-local tension.33

Asia Foundation’s report “Strengthening Democracy through Women’s Political Participation” is the result of the seminar “Emerging Issues in Asia”, held on April 14, 1999. The seminar’s four panels focused on effective strategies for human rights and legal reform, the participation of women in politics and other sectors of society, governance reform in the aftermath of the economic crisis and the current security challenges in Northeast Asia. The report has four main sections: opening remarks, Nepal, Mongolia and Sri Lanka. A final section with questions and answers, as well as a list of seminar participants, is included.34

The Asian Development Bank’s paper on Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government is an overview of a Regional
Workshop that presents the results of the project “Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government” (RETA 6008), implemented in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan, under the Regional Technical Assistance Program of the ADB. The aim of the project was to build the capacity of grassroots women leaders in local government units to perform their role and function more effectively, and to promote more efficient and transparent public service delivery. This document contains seven sections. The first two present a conceptual framework and a description of the background to the RETA. The third section explains the structure and implementation of the RETA in each country included in the project. The next section describes the methodologies of evaluation and monitoring used. The last three sections present the results and major findings, summarize the lessons learned and suggest recommendations for ADB operations.35

Jane Drage’s report “Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific: A Comparative Analysis of Thirteen Countries” is a comparative study of women in local government in the Asia-Pacific region. It argues that while women are underrepresented in local government throughout the region they have been more successful in gaining access to local than to national reasons. In the specific case of South Asia, it is argued that allocation of quotas of reserved seats for women has changed their participation instantly in this area, but other areas remain unchanged (such as elected mayors and management). The report includes brief summaries of governmental arrangements at the national and local level, with a mention of women’s quotas of reservations if it is the case, in 13 countries including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.
Then, factors ensuring, enhancing and affecting women’s involvement in local governments are identified regionally, including a section on South Asia. Considering this, regional proposals for change in systems, attitudes, strategies and training are presented. Finally, the report includes a section on the impact of women as transformative leaders, considering the issues promoted, their leadership style and their impact on equality.36

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Shamim Meer have written a book entitled *Creating Voice and Carving Space, Redefining Governance from a Gender Perspective*, This book is the result of a three-year programme entitled ‘Gender, Citizenship and Governance’ initiated in 1999 by KIT Gender at the Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam. Sixteen organizations from Southern Africa and South Asia were partners in this. The book has four chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the book which includes an overview of the three topics that chapters 2 to 4 cover, as well as concluding remarks on gender, citizenship and governance in development. The following chapters have a similar structure—they include an introduction, a historical overview, a collection of case studies and an exploration of issues and strategies based on the case studies, as concluding remarks. The second chapter focuses on women’s political representation and includes five case studies from Namibia, Sri Lanka, Zambia, India and Bangladesh.

The third chapter explores responsiveness and accountability of Governance Institutions to women and includes five case studies, two from India, two from Bangladesh and one from Pakistan. The final
chapter addresses citizenship issues and includes six case studies, two from South Africa, two from India, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe.\textsuperscript{37}

M.Nassbaum, A.Basu, Y.Tambiah and G.N.Jayal have authored a book entitled \textit{Essays on Gender and Governance}. This book is based on four essays that look at gender and governance in the context of UNDP's efforts to promote development, and women's role in it. Some of the highlights from the essays include: the role of affirmative action in achieving a greater voice for women in government, the importance of achieving more adequate representation of women in the state (by focusing on engendering policy, not just the people who formulate policy), and the crucial importance of women's education in making political opportunities meaningful for them, and in giving them a voice once they attain a political position.\textsuperscript{38}

“A Case for Affirmative Action: A Fact Sheet on South Asian Women’s Representation in Government”. This short article argues that despite various reformative measures adopted by some South Asian countries, there hasn't been a significant improvement in women's participation in governance over the years. It includes an overview of the current situation and some recommendations on how to improve this situation.\textsuperscript{39}

Chattopadhyay, Raghabendra and Esther Duflo have written an article entitled “Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from an India - Wide Randomized Policy Experiment”. This paper compares the type of public goods provided in reserved and unreserved Village Councils, using a data set collected on 165 Councils. It is shown that women (reserved GP) invest more in infrastructure that is directly relevant to the
needs of rural women (drinking water facilities, recycled fuel equipment and construction of roads), while men (unreserved GP) invest more in education. Women are more likely to participate in the policy-making process if the leader of their Village Council is a woman.40

G.Palanithurai has written a monograph titled “Empowerment of Women: Experience of Elected Women Representatives in Grassroots Institutions”. It brings out the issues of the women leaders who have been in power for the past nine years in both urban and rural local bodies against the backdrop of the new dispensation. It questions the logic of reservation by questioning whether, after reserving seats in local bodies for women with the perception that they are going to form a critical mass will perform a critical function, the critical function has been performed and if not, why? This work is the outcome of a capacity building exercise conducted in Gandhigram for EWRs.41

G.Palanithurai’s article “The Genre of Women Leaders in Local Bodies: Experience from Tamil Nadu” explains the process of recruitment of women leaders to the local bodies and how they handle power in their institutions. It analyses the problem of women leaders while performing their roles and responsibilities. Different types of leaders with varying backgrounds and intensions have come to these positions. How they struggle to perform their functions in the given environment has been analysed in this work. It indicates the need of the hour for the women leaders to perform their roles efficiently. How the women leaders look at their space and how they design their public life at the end of five years’ tenure have also been analysed in this article.42
G. Palanithurai’s article “Role of Women in New Panchayati Raj System” in Tamil is the result of an experiment conducted in a village near Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu. This exercise indicated the possible roles to be taken up by the women in rural areas both individually and collectively in Panchayat activities by which women and dalit issues can be effectively solved. An array of activities have been indicated which have no financial implications. The Panchayats can make use of such resources for administering development.43

K.S. Saxena, in “Women’s Political Participation in India” writes that it is an established fact that since the Vedic age women have played a very important role in the decision making process. Their active participation in our freedom movement and their sacrifice will always be remembered. In the Constitutional Assembly, in parliament as well as in state legislatures, women’s participation has been of a very high degree. Women parliamentarians’ contribution has been very significant as they introduced a number of bills and actively participated in the debates and deliberations in both the houses of parliament. In India women have been holding a number of important positions, like Prime Minister, Deputy Chairperson of Rajya Sabha and Chief Minister, yet atrocities against women are increasing day by day in this male dominated society. This study focuses on the problems of the women politicians holding higher positions.44

P. Jeyabal and K. Dravidamani, in their work entitled “Women Panchayat Presidents”, have made an attempt to analyse the socio-economic conditions of the women Panchayat Presidents in Lalgudi Panchayat Union to find out their level of awareness of the New
Panchayati Raj System, and to assess their planning and execution of Panchayat activities. The study concludes that the majority of women Panchayat Presidents were from the young age group (21-35), backward communities and Hindu religion. The respondents in this study were married, but had limited experience in political and social service activities, and were educated up to higher secondary level. The study also revealed that the majority of the Presidents were persuaded and guided by their husband or their relatives to contest in the elections and that they had a low awareness of the Panchayati Raj System.45

Manu Baskar, in her work “Women Panchayat Members in Kerala-A Profile” attempts to sketch a picture of the socio-economic background and political motivation of women who became Panchayat Members in a Village Panchayat of Thiruvananthapuram District. The study has observed that the political leadership of women in grassroots democracy in Kerala has been influenced by caste and community representation in tune with the body politic of the state. The study has also found that variables like age, occupation and income determine entry into politics and that the influence of the political parties is strong during elections, while it plays an insignificant role in motivating women into politics46.

K.Jeyalakshmi, in her case study entitled “Empowerment of Women in Panchayats-Experiences of Andhra Pradesh”, sets out to analyse the role of women as decision makers in the local institutions and to identify their priorities in bringing about development in Sanasthanpalli Panchayat, an all-woman Panchayat. The study concludes that reservation ensured opportunities for all social groups to participate
in the governance of Panchayats, thereby promoting grassroots level leadership.47

Snehalata Panda in her study "Political Empowerment of Women: A Case Study of Orissa" attempts to explore the rural socio-political situation and the performance of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Orissa, with the mandatory one-third reservation for women provided by the New Panchayati Raj Act of 1994. The author concludes by stating that women have entered politics due to the mandatory provision of one-third reservation. Most of the women are non-political and have entered politics due to the persuasion by their family members or pressure from the village community or pressure from a political party and some entered politics due to personal interest. The study indicates that there is a positive change in the socio-political dynamics of the rural society.48

Dilip K.Ghosh, in his study “Grassroots Women Leaders: Who Are They?- A Study in West Bengal District”, tries to identify the class of rural women who were able to emerge as rural leaders by virtue of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 and their characteristics. The author has chosen Birbhum District as his study area and the women members of all Gram Panchayats were selected for the study. The study concludes that rural women participated in grassroots politics in large numbers irrespective of caste, creed and religion; mostly women of the younger age group with a low status in education, compared to their male counterparts, have come to the forum of Panchayati Raj Institutions. A large number of women leaders have come from agricultural families, while the majority of them are housewives.49
V.B. Athreya and K.S. Rajeswari, in their study "Women Participation in Panchayati Raj: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu" have made an attempt to explore the socio, economic and political background of women Panchayat leaders, their problems and their perspectives and the support they receive from various quarters in the election process.\(^{20}\)

Snehalata Panda attempts to explore the emerging pattern of women’s leadership in Achatrapur Block of Ganjam District of Orissa in her study entitled “Emerging Pattern of Leadership among Rural Women in Orissa”. She undertook this study following the amendment to the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act 1991, in tune with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act providing reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The study reveals the following facts, i. Traditional social structure and cultural milieu have little influence on the perception of the rural people in choosing women as Panchayat Presidents, ii. Personal merit contributed significantly to the choice of women representatives, iii. Age relative freedom from family responsibilities and communication skills were determinants of their selection, iv. They possess the traits of leadership and capability to arrive at a decision, choosing from among several alternatives, v. Guidance from their male colleagues, family members and the villagers has helped them to develop their participatory skills, vi. Non-party background, responsibilities which they shared as change agents and above all the class from which they came indicated the positive direction of change in rural leadership.\(^{51}\)
E.K. Santha, in her report, “Political Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj; Haiyana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu,” explains the various contributing factors towards the effective functioning of the women leaders amidst the various problems faced by them. There are recommendations made towards the effective functioning of the elected women representatives.\textsuperscript{52}

G.Palanithurai, in his book “New Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu”, in Tamil, deals with the basic details of decentralization of powers, the history of local governance, the problems involved in the decentralization of power, how women can make use of the reservation of seats for women, and how Dalits can make use of the reservations of seats for Dalits. Subjects like education, health and employment have been discussed in the context of devolution of powers. The changes to be made in the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Raj Act 1994, the basic details of the schemes and programmes of rural development and the steps taken to devolve the powers to Panchayats have been elaborately discussed in the book.\textsuperscript{53}

S.Saraswathi, in her pioneering work, \textit{The Madras Panchayat System Vol.I}, projects the historical foundation of the Panchayat system in the Tamil province. It brings to light the provisions of the Panchayat legislation of 1958. The author has extensively analyzed finance and administration through some case studies. Rural development schemes and their implementation have been thoroughly examined from the perspective of the involvement of the local communities. The work brings out the efficacy and efficiency of the local body system in delivering services to the people. The author clearly indicates the
operative objective of the British, the Central and State Governments, varied perceptions and intentions of these institutions. It gives a complete picture of the Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu prior to the establishment of the new system after the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.  

HI. Studies Related to Problems Faced by Women Leaders in Local Governance

S. Heerah’s research paper “Creating spaces for Change: Women’s Empowerment and the case of Panchayati Raj in India” examines the theory of women’s empowerment, and explores the challenges faced by practitioners and policy makers in implementing this theory. The author explores the types of struggles women face when taking up new opportunities, some of the impact of political quotas in India, and presents an alternative interpretation of empowerment. The paper begins by looking at the concept of empowerment from the framework of boundaries and spaces. It then moves on to apply the framework to the case study of women in Panchayati Raj, and the factors that facilitated or hindered women’s ability to lay hold of the opportunities presented. The author concludes that empowerment is achieved by degrees and that to claim that complete empowerment per se can be achieved is misleading. 

G.Palanithurai’s article “Empowerment of women: Problems Faced by the Elected Women Representatives-Experience from Tamil Nadu”, is a report on the problems faced by the women gram panchayat leaders in managing Panchayats and public affairs. The problems have
been taken from the reports of the training programme conducted for the women leaders by the Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj Studies, it shows how the women leaders have been facing the problems on different fronts, namely, family, society, party, bureaucracy, Panchayat Council and Gram Sabha. The women leaders have indicated their needs. They strongly demand a support structure. The report gives the details of the issues involved in Panchayat administration while dealing with women’s problems.56

Kalpana Roy in her work “Women in Indian Politics”, states that women still face many obstacles in the process of acquiring representation. No grassroots woman’s organisation specifically focuses on getting women elected at the national level. Unlike the earlier women activists most women have not had the economic freedom to choose their life and career. The material substance of their upbringing has made their choice for them and inhibited their participation in formal politics. Women’s cultural socialization and the fear of unsettling the family and their position in it have made them refrain from active politics. The family is considered women’s domain and this has also lessened many women’s desire to participate in politics. Many unattached young women may be politically active, but, once married, they disappear from the political scene. This study focuses on the problem of the elected women representatives at a higher level.57

Raj Kumar, in his study on ”Women in Politics,” explains that recent years have witnessed a worldwide concern for women. The image of women politicians is not always a correct reflection of the reality. The image perceived by ordinary people or projected by the
media is usually divided into two extremes. Women politicians are seen as either 'man like' iron ladies or as amateur, soft (indecisive) housewife-cum-politician or else they are identified through kin connections, i.e, Mr.X's daughter or Mr.Y's wife etc. Accurate portraits of their life as politicians and women and objective review of their work and achievements as professional politicians are needed. By documenting the work and life histories of some successful and capable women politicians and disseminating such information in popular form, one can present a role model for ordinary women citizens and change the stereotype image of women politicians. The present study also focuses on women politicians looking for power at the central and state levels.\

G. Palanithurai, in his monograph, “Empowerment of Women-Experiences of the Elected Women Representatives in Grassroots Institutions” brings out the issues of the women leaders who have been in power for the past seven years in both urban and rural local bodies. He begins with the backdrop of the new dispensation. He questions the logic of reservation by asking whether reservation of seats for women in local bodies was made with the perception that they are going to form a critical mass which will perform a critical function and whether the critical function has been performed and, if not, why. This work is the outcome of a Capacity Building Exercise conducted in Gandhigram for elected women representatives.\

G. Palanithurai, in his article titled “Impediments to Empowerment of Women: Experience of Elected Women Representatives in Panchayats in Tamil Nadu” has investigated the problems faced by the elected women representatives while they manage the local body institutions.
He has classified the nature and intensity of the obstacles and hurdles in
the process of governance and explained how these problems are being
tackled by them and with whose support. The article has brought to
light the ways and means by which the problems can be met by external
agencies.60

G.Palanithurai and V.Ragupathy, in their report “Empowering
People through Panchayats: Problems Faced by Elected Panchayat
Leaders in Tamil Nadu”, have indicated the administrative, financial and
political problems faced by elected Panchayat leaders while
administering development through the Panchayat. It is a report
prepared out of the reports on the training programmes conducted for
Panchayati leaders during the first period after implementation of the
1994 Act in Tamil Nadu. In all the training programmes, the leaders
were asked to indicate the problems faced by them in managing the
Panchayati affairs. This was done purely for policy advocacy. The needs
of the leaders have also been indicated.61

IV. Studies Related to Support Structure for Women in Politics at
the Grassroots

Pinto and Patricia have written an article entitled “Making
Democracy Work in Goa: Promoting Partnerships between NGOs and
Local Government”. She is a civil and environmental activist and was
elected Councillor on the Municipal Council of Panajim, in the
southwestern state of Goa, India. This is the presentation she gave
during her visit to Canada in September and October 2002, as part of the
activities of the South Asia Partnership, Canada’s India Linkage Program.
The presentation provides an overview of women’s political participation in Goa and a brief description of the activities carried out in the Council.62

G.Palanithurai’s article “Women Leadership and Women Empowerment”, stresses the need for leadership training before providing training in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Given the environmental backdrop of the women leaders in the Indian rural setting, the mindset of leaders has to be changed. It requires a clear understanding of the condition of women in Indian society and the role expectations of the women leaders. Specific programmes have to be developed and thereby the leadership quality has to be developed. Empowerment of women can be made possible only by bringing the right kind of women leaders to the institutions at the grassroots.63

G.Palanithurai’s article “Glittering Women Leadership” is a study of the impact of the training programme conducted for women leaders of Gram Panchayats of five districts in Tamil Nadu. While evaluating the impact of the training of women leaders it is found that now they are conscious about their roles and responsibilities and they are serious about the issues of women and the poor. More particularly there are certain skill they have acquired quickly while performing their roles in Panchayat administration. It indicates that there is discrimination against women in managing the institutions at the grassroots.64

The Rajiv Gandhi Chair has produced a manual for leadership training for women to give leadership training to Panchayat leaders. It contains the information needed to conduct leadership training for women on the aspects of attitude, behaviour and performance. Many
exercises have been suggested on women’s issues and strategies to solve the problems of women have been presented in the manual.65

N.P. Stromquist, work “Education as a Means for Empowering Women” discusses how the concept of empowerment has been applied in formal schooling with young students, and in non-formal education programmes with mostly adult populations. Girls’ access to schooling in many developing countries is often so low that the term empowerment is frequently used to mean mere participation in the formal system. This is problematic because it assumes that the experience and knowledge attained in schooling automatically prepares girls to assess their worth and envisage new possibilities. Moreover, while several governments have taken steps to modify school textbooks and provide teachers with gender-sensitive training, a gender-sensitive education is not the same as an empowering education. Empowering girls should mean offering them courses with content that not only attacks current sexual stereotypes but also provides students with alternative visions of a gender-equitable society. At present, women’s empowerment reaches its highest forms in non-formal education programmes. The alternative spaces provided by women-led NGOs promote systematic learning opportunities through workshops on topics such as gender subordination, reproductive health, and domestic violence, and provide the opportunity for women to discuss problems with others. The positive effects of these spaces for developing women’s confidence cannot be overstated.66

G. Palanithurai, in his work “Capacity Building for Local Leaders,” records the whole process of the Capacity Building Exercise organized by him for the elected representatives of the three tiers of the Panchayati
Raj Institutions, which was supported by different government and supporting agencies. This is a well-recorded exercise on the problems faced by the elected representatives and also the various measures to overcome the recorded problems. It is of much help in the context of analyzing the performance of the elected representatives.67

G.Palanithurai, in his article “Capacity Building Exercise for Elected Representatives in Tamil Nadu,” has underlined the need for building the capacity of the local body leaders as roles and responsibilities have been fixed for the leaders of the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj System. He also indicates the methodological nuances to be adopted to conduct capacity building programmes for Panchayat leaders by keeping in mind the leaders’ level of understanding as they come from different socio-economic backgrounds. He has indicated the necessity for preparing a module and a manual for training, which should be state-specific. More particularly, the training institutions have to be identified and they are to be equipped. The training programme should be conducted throughout the state and to all categories of leaders of the Panchayati Raj System.68

G.Palanithurai, in his article, “Needing Social Actions for Panchayati Raj Functioning” indicates the fact that in the process of democratic decentralization of power, initiatives come form the center and not from the people. But, to ensure the success of this dispensation, initiatives have to come form the people. Social Action, Community Participation, owning the institutions and taking responsibilities are the imperatives for the success of the Panchayati Raj System. In the process of devolution of powers, people have come to the forefront by pushing
the government to the background. He has also underlined the importance of conscientisation of the people on the role of people in governance at the grassroots.69

G. Palanithurai, in his article entitled “Capacity Building for Women Local Body leaders”, explains the aspects to be considered for preparing a training module for women Panchayat leaders. It clearly explains the circumstances in which the leaders are drawn towards Panchayat institutions and also their socio-economic background. Realizing the role expected of the women leaders, the gap has to be identified and what skills they require to fill the gap and what has to be instilled in their minds have to indicated in the module.70

D. Narayana has authored an article on “Local Governance without Capacity Building- Ten Years of Panchayati Raj”. With the passing of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in India the structure of governance has changed permanently from a two-tier to a three-tier system with Union, State and Panchayats/Nagar Palikas. However, a necessary condition for the transformation of Panchayats into local governments is devolution of powers, resources and functions to them and capacity building among the elected representatives. In all three states, Panchayat Presidents understand the legislation better but planning for development is a far cry as little effort seems to have gone into capacity building and devolution of powers and resources. Unless larger powers and resources are devolved and elected representatives are trained, local government will be a dream.71

Vissandjee et al., paper entitled “Women’s Political Participation in Rural India Discerning Discrepancies through a Gender Lens” explores
selected underlying themes related to rural Gujarati women’s political participation. An analysis of the subset provides an understanding of how gender operates in rural Gujarat with respect to women’s social mobility as mediated by dimensions such as age, education, socio-economic status and household dynamics. Through qualitative inquiry and a gender-based analysis, this paper reveals the discrepancies between female and male perceptions concerning persistently low levels of female political participation, and in turn informs future directives working towards women’s empowerment and gender parity.72

Shushmita C. Dutt’s article on “Working for Women’s Empowerment: Issues before the Agency that Catalyses Change” focuses on the catalyst role played by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). NGOs have played a key role in catalysing change within development activities in India. It is widely perceived that NGOs have a greater capacity to reach the grassroots, even in case of women’s organisations. However, such groups working with women need to ensure that class, caste and ethnic differences are included in their analyses of women and development. Postmodern thinking has fostered a growing awareness of an absence of race and class analysis in mainstream feminist discourse on development.73

Devaki Jain in her analysis of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment writes that the main intention of the policy makers behind this reservation is two-fold: one is democratic justice and the second is resource utilization (human). She further states that as the half of the population are women, the country’s development cannot be achieved without the proper participation of women.74
Objectives

The present study has the following set of objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic background of the women Village Panchayat Presidents in Rural Local Governance.

2. To study the influence of party affiliation of women Village Panchayat Presidents in the process of empowerment.

3. To suggest measures to strengthen the process of empowerment of women in Rural Local Governance.

Hypothesis

Based on the survey of literature, the following hypothesis has been formulated to fulfill the objectives of the study:

Affiliation to political party influences the empowerment of elected women Village Panchayat Presidents in Rural Local Governance.

Theoretical Framework

B.S.Baviskar has given a framework for empowerment. According to him, the process of empowerment is not one quantum jump. One does not jump from a zero power situation to an all power situation. Empowerment is a long journey and there are several stages in its path. The most important stages in this process are:

1. *Opening Up or Coming Out*: When women who never came out of their homes acquire enough courage to come out and sit in a public
office along with relative strangers belonging to different caste and age
groups; it is the first step in empowerment; this applies to women who
come out and occupy seats as equals in a Panchayat meeting.

2. **Acquiring Symbolic Features of Power**: Women may not take
decisions and may accept the decisions taken by others; presiding over a
meeting and signing the papers as an office bearer is also a sign of
empowerment, however limited it might be; the women Village
Panchayat Presidents may be just affixing their thumb impression on
papers recording decisions taken by village notables—it is still
empowerment.

3. **Using power for one’s self or one’s family**: When a woman
Village Panchayat President gives a contract to her husband or other
family members, it is an important stage in her empowerment; it makes
her learn the process of acquiring tangible benefits by using her position
of power.

4. **Using power for the benefit of one’s own group, community or political party**: This means using power for a higher
purpose. In this stage of empowerment, the elected women Village
Panchayat Presidents cater to the needs and welfare of their own group,
community or the political party to which they belong.

5. **Working for the village as a whole**: This is the ultimate test of
empowerment, i.e., when they transcend the boundaries of their limited
constituencies and work for the community as a whole; it also implies
acceptance by the community of their larger role.
These stages need not occur discretely or sequentially. The above mentioned stages may overlap in real life situations and vary from individual to individual. Based on the socio-economic conditions, affiliation to political parties and affiliation to self-help groups, the women Village Panchayat Presidents are to be found at any one of the above mentioned stages. By using this framework, empowerment of women Village Panchayat Presidents in Rural Local Governance has been thoroughly analysed in the present study.

**Measuring Indicators**

Based on the framework, the following indicators are constructed.

**1. Opening up or Coming out**

Contested in the election based on,

a. Personal decision

b. Family decision

c. Community decision

d. Party decision

e. Non-governmental organizations decision

f. Self-help group decision

g. Village elders’ decision

h. Self decision
2. **Acquiring symbolic features of power**

Acquiring features of power can be measured through the following indicators:

a. Attending to work in the Panchayat office regularly.

b. Chairing Panchayat meetings.

c. Regulating Panchayat meetings.

d. Receiving government officials.

e. Meeting officials at Panchayat Union and District level.

f. Collecting demands from the people.

3. **Using power for one’s self or one’s family**

a. Giving contract to her husband (or) other family members.

b. Appointing her son/ daughter/ brother/ sister/ relatives as Panchayat Assistant/ Staff.

c. Encroaching/ tackling Common Property Resources rights.

d. Providing infrastructure facilities to help family/ relatives.

e. Influencing decisions of the Panchayat for personal benefit.

f. Getting income from the Panchayat.

4. **Using power for the benefit of one’s own group**

a. Giving contract to her own community or political party.

b. Majority of the beneficiaries of various government schemes are her community people.
c. Providing infrastructural facilities to her community people.

d. Giving appointment to her community people as Panchayat Assistant.

5. **Work for the village community as a whole**

a. Effective implementation of Central/ State government sponsored schemes.

b. Infrastructure building.

c. Welfare of weaker sections.

d. Engaging rural youth for the welfare of the Panchayat.

e. Promoting education.

f. Promoting health and sanitation.

g. Promoting gender equality.

h. Promoting information dissemination.

i. Common property resource management,

j. Recreational activities.

k. Bringing about consensus.

l. Ensuring equity.

**Methodology**

It is an empirical study based on the census method. Since the universe is small and accessible, no sample has been taken. A census study was conducted. In Theni District there are 130 Village Panchayats. Out of these the President’s position for 44 was reserved for women and
one woman Village Panchayat President was elected from a general constituency. All these 45 elected women Village Panchayat Presidents were covered for the purpose of this study. The analysis and findings of the study were complemented with case studies of women Village Panchayat Presidents.

**Sources of Data**

The data for the present study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected by administering an interview schedule to the respondents. The secondary data were collected from books, articles, reports, Acts, newspapers, election results, manuals, monographs, the internet and records of Panchayat offices. Discussions were also held with officials and non-officials connected with Rural Local Governance.

**Tools for Data Collection**

The administered interview schedule has been divided into six parts, covering such aspects as respondents’ profile, the stage of opening up or coming out, the stage of manifesting signs of empowerment, the stage of using power for one’s self or one’s family, the stage of using power for the benefit of one’s own community and the stage of working for the village as a whole. Ten case studies have also been undertaken.

**Chapterization**

The thesis is organized as hereunder. The first chapter introduces the study and offers an overview of the research problem, study of
related literature and design of the study. The second chapter traces the status of women empowerment in India. The third chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of results. The fourth chapter presents the case studies. The fifth chapter presents the findings, suggestions and conclusion.

References


14. V.M. Moghadam and L.Senftova, “Measuring Women’s Empowerment: Participation And Rights In Civil, Political, Social,


64. The Rajiv Gandhi Chair has produced a Manual for leadership training for Women, Gandhigram: Rajiv Gandhi chair for Panchayati Raj Studies, 2002.


