CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Preamble

Women have been elected Presidents of not less than one third of the total panchayats in India consequent to the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India and the provision of reservation of seats for women in it. These women are in nascent stage in the art of governance and management. The majority of these women have been forced to contest the local body elections and become presidents as substitutes for the politically connected men in their family or traditional panchayat male leaders, irrespective of whether they have the necessary aptitude, skill and capacity to handle a public office or not.¹ The elected women representatives, who have come from poor, illiterate, socially and economically backward segments, face many problems.² They play into the hands of their husband or some other male whom they have substituted.

The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution and the subsequent Panchayat Acts enacted by the State Governments in India have transferred a volume of responsibility to the grassroot organizations with emphasis on people centered approach, people’s participation, accountability and transparency.³ To discharge all those responsibilities in a community fragmented by caste, religion and class and complicated administrative systems the women panchayat presidents need adequate
knowledge, skill and capacity. Training is one of the means by which these women can be empowered to discharge their duties and responsibilities expected of them. It can impart them the basic ground rules and make them handle the office, the issues and the people effectively to bring about the desired results.4

The role played by women in governance in India has been generally negligible. Right from the Vedic and the Sangam period to the current parliamentary system, the number of women who have served as rulers and ministers have been negligible.5 This is due to the position occupied by women in the society. Women have always been given a lesser role compared to their male counterparts in all spheres of life-social, economic and political. The status of women was conditioned by the thoughts, doctrines and attitude of the society as a whole towards women. They have always had to fight for their legitimate place in all walks of life, particularly in local governance, which has a major influence on the life of women.6

The participation of women in public life got a fillip during the Indian struggle for freedom. Thousands of women took to the streets to strengthen the hands of the nationalist leaders and this opened up a new outlook on women. During this period many social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Pandit Rama Bai also took up the issue of women empowerment. As a legacy of the freedom struggle the governments that were formed after independence have taken strenuous efforts to empower women in the social, political and economic spheres. However the participation of women in governance was deterred by
lack of participation in the decision making process, apathy, lack of education and resources, social constraints and gender exclusion.

India has a patriarchal order of society that gives men the predominant role in social and political institutions and women depend on men and assist them to perform their duties. It denies any public life to women and mandates seclusion. Freedom of movement has been strictly curbed. The caste system widely prevailing in India, coupled with the patriarchal society, inflicts a double seclusion and denial of public life and freedom of movement to women belonging to lower castes, that is, SCs and STs.

The phenomenon is not universal or common throughout India. It is contextual with reference to the attitude of the local society. The level of oppression against women and opposition to women empowerment through participation in local governance is in direct proportion to the oppressive patriarchal structure and the caste system prevailing in any area. The male migration for some reason or other gives a greater opportunity to women to participate in public life, particularly in local governance.

The illiteracy and lack of resources at the disposal of women make it nearly impossible for women to participate in the decision making process since they may not be able to grasp the written documents, rules, regulations, agenda, minutes etc. which remain alien to them.

One of the most extreme forms that social constraints take is the physical violence to which women and lower caste/Scheduled Caste
representatives alike have been subjected to. This coercive mechanism of exclusion is more serious than the simple disfranchisement that issues from illiteracy or patriarchal values that are enforced or internalized. By contrast, physical violence represents direct intimidation and coercion against women and other unprivileged social groups, intended to threaten them into withdrawal.

Despite their own reticence-stemming from the internalization of generations of gender bias—there are many women who observe and remark upon the manifest discrimination against them in panchayats. Among these, they cite: the attempt by elected male colleagues to dominate; the inattention to suggestions and opinions put forth by women; and the negative attitude of male officials. Social custom often dictates that the women sit separately (with each other) and do not speak in the presence of men. This aspect is, however, gradually undergoing a change in many regions. As a result of the successful SHG movement and strenuous efforts by many agencies women get accustomed to sitting with and even speaking in the presence of men.

The government, through various interventions, has attempted to empower women. It includes a handful of legislations covering social, economic political spheres of women’s life, the formation of a National Commission for Women, a National Women’s Policy and the landmark 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act carving out a definite place for women in local governance. The impact of various developmental policies, plans and programmes implemented over the last few decades has brought about a perceptible improvement in the socioeconomic status of women, but problems like illiteracy, ignorance, discrimination
and violence continue to exist even today. The development of women has been receiving the attention of the government right from the very First Plan.

The momentum gained during the freedom movement continues to be maintained today by Governments, NGOs, educational institutions and a few individuals. These agencies/individuals provide the much needed support to women to acquire knowledge, skill and the courage to work for the empowerment of their own folk in the face of an unfriendly atmosphere.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The Constitution of India offered equality of men and women and universal adult franchise. However no positive safeguards were established for women to participate in public life. The patriarchal form of society, the attitude of men and the socio-religious belief that women are best suited to be at home looking after the needs of men excluded women from public life. The women were given the responsibility of maintaining the household by fetching water, cooking, cleaning, gathering firewood apart from satisfying the other needs of the husband. They were left with little time for public life. In such an antagonistic atmosphere, a woman who dared to participate in public life ended up with disastrous consequences for herself. She ran the risk of being excluded from the society and becoming a victim of character assassination. There were no real opportunities for the women to participate in the electoral process and get into public office though it was theoretically available. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act
made this possible by carving out a specific place for women to compete and occupy.

Parliament passed the 73rd Amendment Act in the year 1994. The amended Act warrants that not less than one third of all the offices and membership of the local bodies be reserved for women. An independent State Election Commission, a State Finance Commission and ban on the State Government dismissing the local bodies as a whole gave the women the opportunity to participate boldly in local governance. It has created a structure at the grassroot level for women empowerment. Globalization of economy and localization of politics have made everyone look at the new system for governance and women participation in local governance contextually. The new system has brought in new roles and responsibilities for the women. It has to break new ground in governance for women empowerment and tackle problems and issues which are unmet and unsolved through the policy options of the governments at the state and central level. It should be clearly noted that the new institutions have to perform a variety of activities at the grassroots, for which the grassroots women leaders should have a clear-cut perception of the roles and responsibilities that are to be discharged and the skills needed to manage the institutions which are under the purview of the elected women panchayat leaders.8

The 29 vital subjects brought under the purview of local bodies have a direct bearing on the empowerment of women. The existing capacity level of the women representatives to perform these roles and responsibilities are veiy weak. The elected women representatives act amidst oppression and gender exclusion, antagonistic attitude of men
and apathy of government officials. The strength to take on these social constraints and perform on the opportunity structure that has been created by the 73rd Amendment Act has to come from within. The elected women representatives should be knowledgeable on the rules and regulations governing the local bodies, the guidelines and scope of various government schemes, understand the attitude of men and government officials and be assertive to carve their own place in local governance.

Training is one of the major inputs that can prepare women to perform their functions. The Government of India as well as the Government of Tamil Nadu have evolved many training programmes and modules for elected women representatives. The State Institute of Rural Development and the Regional Institutes of Rural Development have taken up the responsibility of organizing training programmes sponsored by the Government. The District Collectors organize training programmes for the elected women representatives with the resources available at their level. These training programmes primarily focus on imparting knowledge on rules and regulations and orienting them to carry out the schemes and programmes of the central and state governments. They suffer mainly due to lack of focus to convert them into sustainable leaders by proper orientation, non-participatory method of training and poor evolution and follow up.¹⁹

Gandhigram Rural Institute, with a commitment to make elected women representatives perform their duties in an efficient manner, has evolved its own training programme. It is participatory in approach. The training manuals are prepared with the aim of functioning not only as
training materials but also as a manual for further reference by the women representatives. Hundreds women representatives trained by Gandhigram Rural Institute are functioning in the field along with others. Evidently the 73rd Amendment is a formal opportunity structure for women panchayat leaders and the capacity building exercises are also in operation for enabling women panchayat leaders in developing their functional ability. With the women being first and new entrants as leaders, a number of research questions have been raised.

This research study will find out what are the levels of capacity existing among women panchayat presidents to perform the required functions, what are the training inputs provided by the training institutions for women empowerment, how far the women panchayat presidents are capacitated through the training programmes and what are the outcomes of the training programmes provided to the women panchayat presidents. To get the answers through empirical research, this research study analyzes the role of training in the empowerment of the women panchayat presidents.

1.3. Review of Literature

Gender equality, women’s power and empowerment of women have emerged at the forefront of social consciousness and theoretical conceptualization, triggered off by deep understanding about gender as a socio-cultural system based on unequal power relations between men and women.10

The concept of empowerment is currently used by a vaety of people in diverse contexts. Several factors have contributed to the
currency and widespread use of the term *empowerment* which has found earlier expression in radical writings on US politics. The failure of state run development efforts, increased understanding of the role of women in development, the increased role of non-governemental sector in development efforts, the prominence gained by participatory democracy along with the efforts of feminist writers have contributed in some way and coincided with the emergence and popularity of the term *empowerment*.11

The concept of empowerment has a long history with several predecessors during the last decades. During the early years of the international women’s decade, ‘status of women’ was widely in use and it was meant to increase the status of women in relation to that of men. The concept of ‘status of women’ implied the role of woman and the extent of her influence in decision making in family and community. It was urged to enhance the status of women through improvement in socio-economic indicators such as income and employment, education, enhanced decision making power and access to resources or assets.

The concept of ‘status of women’ gradually gave way to ‘women’s autonomy’, when the former concept failed to capture the dimensions of women conceived as agents of change. Though the concept and terminology had undergone changes with the changes in the perception of the role of women in society, the measuring rod continued to be the same socio-economic indicators, due to the dearth of qualitative data and absence of appropriate techniques for collecting such data. Currently, the term *empowerment* is in vogue, says Bina Pradhan.12 In general, the concept describes women making
independent choices, enabling them to emerge from their subordinate position of passive recipients of development interventions as their right.

Empowerment of women as a goal of development projects has gained wider acceptance since the 1990s.\textsuperscript{13} In fact, the multiple use of it has contributed to the ambiguity of the term rather than to its clarity. Nowadays, it has become an elusive concept that escapes any attempt to define and measure objectively.\textsuperscript{14}

The concept of empowerment varies from those predominantly found in works in sociology, education and radical politics to the attempts by community development organizations as well as international development organizations like the UNDP and the World Bank. As Carr et al\textsuperscript{15} observe, there has been much debate at the theoretical level as to what empowerment comprises and how best it can be achieved. However, there has been little primary research at the grassroots level to contribute to our understanding of what empowerment means in everyday terms. What Zoe Oxaal with Sally Baden\textsuperscript{16} observed in this context approximates the reality. There are a variety of understandings of the term \textit{empowerment} due to its widespread use. Although the term is often used in development work, it is rarely defined. Similarly, a vide variety of attempts to measure empowerment, ranging from those at the macro level to the micro level, can be traced.
1.4. Conceptualizing Empowerment

The term *empowerment* has its root in the term *empower*, which means “to give power or authority” and “to enable or permit”. Generally empowerment implies enabling and providing power and they reinforce each other. However, in practice, it entails the process of challenging the existing inequality, power relations, and gaining greater control over sources of power by the underprivileged.

As observed by B. Pradhan, the concept of empowerment comes from the need to enable women to overcome those systemic sources of subordination and their implications for intervention strategies to enhance the power of women and its sources to effect change. This notion of power and empowerment is a major shift from the conventional socio-economic measures of power indicated by education, income or access to resources. Empowerment, according to Pradhan, is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives and it includes control over resources such as physical, human, intellectual and financial.

It also includes control over ideology like beliefs, values and attitudes. As Sen and Battliwala put it, empowerment means greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one’s consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology.

Central to the concept of empowerment is an understanding of power itself. As a matter of fact, empowerment of women hardly refers to women taking over control previously held by men, but rather the
need to change the power relations. Power may be understood as ‘power with’ or self-confidence, ‘power within’ or the capacity to organize others for a common purpose and the ‘power to’ effect changes and take decisions rather than ‘power over’ others. The ‘power over’ view dominated the development perspective during the 1970s within the paradigm of women in development. Foucault have elaborated on the various notions of power in the context of empowerment.

Rowlands points out that empowerment is a bottom-up process and cannot be bestowed from the top down. Rowlands feels that most models of power hardly address the question of how power is distributed in society and she has proposed other ways of understanding and conceptualizing power, which focus not on a particular set of results, but on the process itself. Contrasting with this, the model of power proposed by Foucault includes an understanding of resistance as a form of power. Rowlands concludes that empowerment involves undoing negative social constructions, so that the people affected can perceive themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and have influence.

It is true that the meaning of the term empowerment is subject to quite different interpretations. First it is translated as participation in the labour force. But there is an observation that mere participation in the labour force is not a sufficient condition for empowerment, if the structure remains unchanged-exploitative and oppressive. The later view of empowerment looks at it as development of strategies that empower women by challenging existing social, economic and political
structures. The primary objective of empowerment of women is to create more equitable and participatory structures in which women can gain control over their lives.

The UNDP has viewed empowerment from the perspective of participation. Accordingly it states that development must be by people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. But, at the same time, the UN promotes a rather instrumentalist view of empowerment: investing in women’s capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development. But, for Oxfam, empowerment is about challenging oppression and inequality: empowerment involves challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights.

Feminist activists stress that woman’s empowerment is not about replacing one form of empowerment by another: women’s empowerment should lead to the liberation of men from false value systems and ideologies of oppression. It should lead to a situation where each one can become a whole being, regardless of gender, and use their fullest potential to construct a more humane society for all.

The UNDP's Gender In Development Policy (GIDP) has interpreted empowerment in a more precise and comprehensive manner. The policy aims at
1). Promotion of women in policy and decision making process;

2). Emphasizing women’s income generating activities; and,

3). Providing women with access to empowering facilities like education and training.

The policy framework offers the potential for addressing individual and collective empowerment of women through practical focus on participation in decision making, individual skills and economic self-reliance. The emphasis is on power too, with little attention to the need to create spaces for women to be involved in the decision making. The framework assumes that income generating activities will increase women’s access to resources, ignoring the fact that such programmes will add to the work load without increasing the decision making powers of women.

Kabeer argues that one way of discussing empowerment is in terms of the ability to make choices: disempowered means one is denied the opportunity of making any choices. The notion of empowerment, according to Kabeer, is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the process by which those who have denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. Empowerment entails a process of change in the sense that it implies that the ability to make choices was denied to them in the first place and empowerment enabled them to make such choices. For those who had such choices earlier, empowerment is meaningless. Hence, Kabeer defines empowerment as the expansion in people’s ability to make
strategic life choices in a context wherever this ability was previously
denied to them. Interpreted in this way, empowerment has got three
dimensions: resources, which form the conditions under which choices
are made; agency which is at the heart of all the processes by which
choices are made; and achievements, which are the outcome of choices.
These dimensions are interdependent because changes in each
contribute to and benefit from changes in the others. Thus, as Kabeer
observes, achievements of a particular moment are translated into
enhanced resources or agency and hence capacity for making choices at
a later moment in time.

Empowerment calls for modalities such as those other than mere
economic betterment, because much of women’s powerlessness stems
from non quantifiable rather than quantifiable and monetary impositions
or handicaps. Conventional strategies only address poverty, not
powerlessness or subordinate status, which are crucial issues, according
to Sakunthala Narasimhan.32

A rather more comprehensive concept has been given by Khanna,
Khamboji and Sreevastava.33 According to them, empowerment is a
process, conscious and continuous, comprising enhancement of capacity
building, gaining confidence and meaning full participation in decision
making. Empowerment enables them to participate in development as a
democratic process. It is a process that emancipates women from their
subordination and lack of freedoms and it enables them to gain the vital
capabilities for decision making and participation in the democratic
process.
Micro credit is nowadays globally accepted as an effective tool for empowering women. There is a heap of literature on the role of micro credit and empowerment of women. However, provision of credit on favorable terms is not a lacuna for the question of empowerment, as it does not automatically empower women. Male control over loans and repayment is the danger involved in it and there is the possibility of worsening women’s position. Thus it is argued that improving women’s access to credit is a positive step towards empowerment, but it cannot be considered the means of empowering women. Apart from the danger of male involvement, provision of credit and subsequent micro enterprises for the purpose of empowerment of women will definitely add to the burden they have to shoulder in terms of labour contribution towards such activities. In fact, such programmes will demand further female labour and will aggregate the worse position of women.

Besides there is the danger of reducing the free time of the women due to the home based production units started with the help of micro credit and micro enterprises. This will hinder the process of socialization of women, stealing the time allotted for public interaction, political meetings and even the attempts to switch over to formal employment in the case of qualified and educated women.

Further, credit programmes promote the narrow individualistic definition of empowerment of women and ignore the collective dimension of it. By offering credit, they attempt to tackle the problem technically, without taking care of the deep structural transformations. Credit and income generating programmes, if they are to have the
expected impact on women, need to move from the framework in which women are passive recipients of a service.

The scope of credit programmes has to be increased from individual self-reliance to broader social development goals. Awareness campaigns, para legal trainings, non-formal education, family and health care education, training to provide e-awareness and capacity to overcome gender-specific constraints to assertive confidence and power within households have to be the part of the programmes.

Goetz and Sen Gupta\(^{35}\) have observed that focus on credit alone will leave out qualitative social change as objectives. Hashemi et al\(^{36}\) observe that participation in credit programmes is positively associated with women’s level of empowerment defined as a function of their relative physical mobility, economic security, ability to make various purchases of their own, freedom from domination and violence within family, political and legal awareness and participation in public life.

It is hardly contested that women’s empowerment is a participatory process in which the role of outside agencies is confined to the provision of needed resources or suggestions. A number of studies stress the grassroot level participation of them through their organization against the top down processing of projects. Moser and Elson\(^{37}\) cite examples from history to assert that capacity to confront the nature of gender inequality and women emancipation can only be fulfilled by the bottom up struggle of their concerns and problems through local grassroot participation. Generally, women’s empowerment has historically been based on grassroot initiatives that are designed to meet the specific needs and interests of local women themselves.
However, empowerment need not be the result of all participatory exercises. Theoretically, empowerment and participation are the two sides of the same coin. But, practically, much of the exercises that pass in the guise of participation are hardly in any way empowering women or the poor, unless participation is the process. Participation needs to be more than a process of consultation over a decision made elsewhere if it is to be genuinely empowering. One has to take care that strategies to empower must ensure participation of women in all stages, including evaluation. The proceedings, time of meeting, venue of meeting etc., all have to be women friendly and encourage the participation of women. This way it will be easy to make the process of participation itself empowering. More research is needed to bring the required gender perspective into the current debates on participation and empowerment.38

One important approach to supporting empowerment programmes is the promotion of the participation of women in political life, alongside the support for good governance and democratization, as well as supporting women organisations and movements. The affirmative actions for increasing women’s participation include the following:

1. Quotas for Women
2. Training and Awareness Programmes for generating gender awareness
3. Development and promotion of political organizations.
Quotas have proved to be an effective technique for empowering women. Several nations have attempted this technique. The Norwegian Labour Party has stipulated that at least 40 per cent of parliamentarians have to be women. Though the quota system has proved to be one of the most efficient techniques for the inclusion of women in the political system, it is found that it has certain fundamental flaws. First, through the quota system, token women, the blind obedient women of political parties, will be coming up as representatives who will be puppets in the hands of the male leaders. Secondly, the quota system may be interpreted as the upper ceiling for the number of women in parliament. Transfer of powers to local bodies through decentralization and fixing quotas for women has proved to be successful in India and Bangladesh for enabling women to reach local politics. Rather than quantity of participation, what needs to be focused on is the quality of participation. Sometimes the women political representatives may be from the affluent sections and this may hinder the process of empowerment.

Empowerment, particularly political empowerment, results from the attempts at decentralization, as evident from the attempts in Kerala, India. Handler\textsuperscript{39} has studied the consequences of decentralization, deregulation, and privatization for citizen empowerment. He argues that decentralization—the deliberate allocation of authority to lower bureaucratic units, whether public or private—is a major technique for managing conflict and, because decentralization often works to the advantage of most of the important stakeholders, it is ubiquitous in public programmes. He has examined the concepts of power and empowerment as well as the conditions of empowerment-how it can
get started and how it can be maintained. He has explored empowerment by invitation of the stronger party, studying cases involving the delegation of enforcement authority in worker safety, cooperative regulation in human service agencies, tenants assuming control over public housing and neighborhood political organizations.

Stephen has explained how politically neglected and excluded women actively and invisibly partake in mobilization of opinion. The techniques they often use are gossip, persuasion, consensus building among kinships and communities. Says Stephen, “As they were excluded... women also developed strategies for participating in local politics through kin networks and cultural institutions. The political skills they develop in this arena are not built on public speaking and maintaining control over large assemblies. Instead, their skills are related to listening, consensus building and persuasive discourse to women to whom they are closest. Their local interests and identities strongly influence the ways that they mobilize and organize politically. Radclilff and Westwood are of the opinion that women hardly take this as a political activity. The attitude of women to political activity is diametrically opposite to that of men, as Moser contends saying that men often pursue leadership positions for personal advancement unlike women, who demonstrate deeper commitment to community goals.

Empowerment of women needs to be discussed in the context of women’s practical gender needs and strategic gender needs, as Wieringa attempts to. Wieringa looks at the empowerment approach in relation to issues of women and development and discusses two central problems in this regard. The first problem is the conceptualization of
women's gender interests. The distinction between women's practical and strategic gender interests was introduced by Molyneux and popularized by Moser. It is argued here that this distinction is theoretically unfounded and empirically untenable. Secondly, gender planners tend towards a preference for simplified tools and quantifiable targets. Here it is argued that women's realities should not be bent into this planning framework but that, instead, planners, working from an empowerment perspective, should demonstrate flexibility and theoretical grounding, and be aware of the political dimension of their work.

The concept of empowerment is defined and its potential role in programmes combating poverty is discussed and illustrated with examples from India by G. Sen. Empowerment is the process of gaining power to control external resources or increase internal capacities and self-esteem. External change agents can catalyze the process or provide a supportive environment, and group processes are frequently decisive, but individuals, in the final analysis, empower themselves. Genuine empowerment may entail social disturbances. There may be winners and losers in the process, although empowerment is not a zero sum game. Empowerment is not synonymous with decentralization or participation. Women, racial or ethnic minorities, and other groups often suffer discrimination in more than one dimension. A strategy based on empowerment may confront this multidimensionality more effectively than a standard aid programme oriented to welfare. Empowerment of groups may enable them to protect programmes benefiting them from abuse and pilferage.
Empowerment programme may be catalyzed by a nongovernmental organization (NGO), develop as movements of persons with internal or external change agents, or be joint government-NGO initiatives. Each form has advantages and disadvantages. The strategies and achievements of several successful empowerment programmes developed in India by NGOs or government-NGO collaborations are analyzed, including SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association), YUVA (Youth for Unity and Volunteer Action), and the literacy campaign.

A careful examination of the current strategy towards empowerment of women provides a clear idea that there are two basic approaches empowerment of women. The first strategy, employed by development agencies like Governments, involves economic intervention to increase employment and income and to eliminate poverty. But this hardly involves space for the participation of women in the programmes or defining development according to their perspectives. This strategy imposes the development perspectives of others, often male centered, on women, and hardly involves any transformation in power relations based on gender. These strategies are purely based on the concept of empowerment, viewing it as participation in the labour force, without any voice to remold the power relations or the existing unequal gender structures of society.

The second approach, the most popular version of it, often shared by NGOs and action groups, envisions a concept which envisages creation of awareness, capacity building and participation that leads to transformation of unequal relationships, increased decision making at home and community and greater participation in politics. The present
study particularly focuses on this version of empowerment attempts. This approach has the advantage of providing a space for challenging the existing social, political and economic structures, with a view to creating more equitable and participatory structures in which women can gain control over their lives. According to this approach, empowerment of women must increase their self-reliance, provide independent right to make their decisions and challenge their subordination and enable a multifaceted process of development involving the pooling of resources to achieve collective strength and countervailing power and enhance the capacity of women.

Empowerment involves the bottom up process of transforming gender power relations through individuals or groups, developing awareness of women’s subordination and building their capacity to challenge it. The concept is highly political and often contested, say Hazel and Baden.45

Empowerment needs to be defined contextually, as what empowers in one situation need not do so in other situations and with different individuals. Often it is described as being about the ability to make choices, with a judging of what choices are offered.

It is generally agreed that empowerment is a process, that too bottom up, rather than something that can be formulated as a top down strategy. It is quite illogical to claim to empower women, nor is it fair to define empowerment in terms of specific activities or end results, as empowerment involves a process whereby women, individually or collectively, freely analyze, develop and voice their needs and interests, without their being pre-defined, or imposed from above. Hence, any
strategy gearing towards empowerment must therefore enable women
themselves to critically assess their own situation and shape a
transformation in society. In other words, the strategy for women
empowerment must provide women the necessary space for themselves
acting as agents of transformation in gender relations. Hence Sen has
defined empowerment as the process of gaining power to control
external resources or increase the internal capacities and enhance their
self esteem.

Empowerment has been often viewed in static and dynamic
frameworks according to P.K. Garba. The former may lead to
exogenous power strategies, while the latter may lead to endogenous
empowerment, a bottom-up process that develops the capacity of
individuals. This process can be accomplished in six stages that
encompass awareness, skills and capacity assessment, capacity-building
and skills development, participation and greater control in decision
making, action for change, and evaluation.

According to Overholt et al empowerment is access to and
control over resources and benefits. Korten (1986) has observed that
empowerment is control over and ability to manage productive
resources. For Schuler, empowerment is a more comprehensive
concept, comprising individual consciousness raising, collective
conscious development, and mobilization of resources for political and
legal action.

Conger and Knungo feel that empowerment involves the
process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational
members and it is not confined to simply delegating. Peggy observes
that empowerment implies political activities such as individual resistance, mass mobilization etc. for challenging existing basic power relations in society. Keller and Mbewe\textsuperscript{51} have identified the components such as increasing self-reliance, right to choice and control of resources that constitute the process of empowerment. Empowerment at household level is a prerequisite for entering public life, according to Caiman.\textsuperscript{52} Helen\textsuperscript{53} views empowerment from the perspective of economic freedom. Samar Singe\textsuperscript{54} observes that empowerment is access to and control over resources.

Schuler and Hashemi\textsuperscript{55} have identified the salient components of empowerment such as sense of self and vision of future, mobility and visibility, economic security, status of decision making power within the household, ability to interact effectively in the public sphere and participation in non-farm groups. Batliwala\textsuperscript{56} has defined empowerment as the process of challenging existing power relations, gaining greater control over the sources of power. Holcombe (1995) has viewed empowerment as participation, sharing control, entitlement and influencing decision making by women. As stated by Karl,\textsuperscript{57} empowerment involves collective awareness building, capacity building and skills development, participation and greater control and decision making power and action to bring about gender equality. Carr et.al.\textsuperscript{58} have viewed empowerment as economic gain and bargaining power for women.

What stems from the above discussion is that empowerment is a bottom up process which involves women participating and acting on their own with minimum interference from external agencies and the
process resulting in the autonomy and self-reliance of women, entitlement to resources, participation in decision making, creating awareness and building capacity. Hence the working model of empowerment for this study constitutes the individual empowerment of women at the household and community levels, enabling her to take her own decisions, possess her own income and resources, have an enhanced role in family and community, participate in and influence crucial decisions in the family and community and enjoy a free, peaceful life.

1.5. Measuring Empowerment

Empowerment, the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives, is difficult to measure using the conventional measures of power collected purely through quantitative data methods. Empowerment has been traditionally measured in terms of socio-economic indicators such as education, income and participation in the labour force. These indicators have been used widely for promoting socio demographic and developmental goals, but their appropriateness as the indicators of empowerment is still debated.

There are several attempts at identifying the indicators that clearly show the direction and magnitude of empowerment. Since the nature of empowerment is multifaceted and hardly quantifiable, none of the indicators appears to be complete and comprehensive. Generally there are two categories of empowerment indicators explained as follows:
1. Those which measure empowerment at macro level for the purpose of comparison, often called Macro Indicators.

2. Those which measure effects of specific programmes or projects, often called Micro Indicators.

**Macro Indicators**

The first set of indicators, Macro Indicators, were designed and developed by the Human Development Report (HDR) of 1995. The Human Development Report (1995) states that there are four essential elements of human development:

1. Productivity
2. Equity
3. Sustainability
4. Empowerment.

The HDR defines empowerment as people fully participating in the decision making process that shapes their lives and has devised two types of Empowerment Indicators:

a. Gender Empowerment Measure—GEM

b. Gender Related Development Index—GDI

GEM is a composite indicator of achievements in gendered development. It looks into the participation of women in parliament, professional and managerial position and their share in national income. GDI is the human development index adjusted for gender inequality.
1.6. The Critical Mass and Women Empowerment

Most discussions of the critical mass focus on such matters as gender differences in legislative style.59 But the early formulations of the concept of the critical mass in social sciences included the idea that once that point was reached, the increase of women members in a legislature would be self-sustaining.

The implication was that both the elected and the electorate would come to view women’s participation as normal and that capable women candidates would step forward in greater numbers.60 In other words, both the supply and the demand problems in women’s representation would be simultaneously solved.

Although often cited as the earliest source on the topic, Kanter61 did not use the term ‘critical mass,’ but, instead, discussed differences in behaviour in organizations resulting from skewed sex ratios (as well as from other identifiable ascriptive characteristics). Kanter’s62 rather tentative formulation identifies four types of groups with different majority/minority ratios: (1) uniform, with no significant minority; (2) skewed, with a minority of perhaps up to 15 percent; (3) tilted, with perhaps a 15-40 percent minority, and (4) balanced, perhaps with a minority of more that 40 percent. From this work, other scholars deduced the concept of a critical mass.

Several scholars have attempted to calculate at what level the critical mass is formed. Dahlerup63 argues that the critical mass for women occurs when they constitute about 30 percent of an organization. In a discursive analysis, she surveys what differences the
presence of this proportion of women in almost all Nordic legislative bodies by the mid-1980s has had for the political influence that women can exert (the empowerment of women). She asks, ‘Are we in Scandinavia witnessing a critical mass at work?’\textsuperscript{64} As noted below, others have suggested a figure lower than 30 percent. After women rose to 18 percent in the British House of Commons in 1997, Lovenduski\textsuperscript{65} commented, ‘Whilst much has been achieved, it is not even clear that the critical mass, the movement from a small to large minority that made a difference in other countries, has been achieved’.

Moreover, Dahlerup is unable to isolate the critical mass as the key process in her list of possible changes benefiting women. She argues that the analogy to physics should be discarded in favour of the idea of ‘critical acts,’ decisions that change the position of the minority and lead to further changes. ‘Most significant is the willingness and ability of the minority to mobilize the resources of the organization or institution to improve the situation for themselves and the whole minority group’.\textsuperscript{66}

Thus, it is not the threshold of a critical mass but the willingness of women politicians to recruit other women as candidates that is most important. Kittilson’s\textsuperscript{67} analysis of how change occurs in women’s legislative representation levels in advanced industrial democracies provides some support for this point of view, with women in party leadership roles and the adoption of quotas/targets for women candidates being significant factors.

The concept of the critical mass was first brought into the study of U.S. politics by St. Germain\textsuperscript{68} who argued, based on her study of the
Arizona State legislature, that once women reached 15 percent of the legislature, they were more inclined to push ‘women’s issues.’ But probably the most influential work on the critical mass in political science is Thomas’s,\textsuperscript{69} which focuses on the effects of different proportions of women on legislative style, procedures, and public policy in twelve U.S. State legislatures. She finds some impact of more women on style, policy priorities, and policy outcomes, especially bills concerning women, children, and the family, but not on legislative procedures. In legislatures with over 20 percent women, they were more likely both to sponsor and to shepherd such legislation to passage.

These findings suggest that a critical mass may exist in the 15-20 percent range. Thomas\textsuperscript{70} however, also argues that an organized women’s caucus can serve much the same purpose even without these shares of women in the legislature. Later, she suggests three different measures of the critical mass. First, she speculates that once women reach 35-40 percent of legislatures, then more changes will be evident. Next, she endorses another study that found women’s legislative behaviour altered at the 25 percent level. Finally, she argues that the ‘critical point for making a priority of legislation to help women’ may vary over time and location.\textsuperscript{71}

A recent compendium on the state of women in U.S. legislatures in the 1990s Thomas and Wilcox, \textsuperscript{72} contains eleven index references under "critical mass," plus five more under the associated term of "tokenism." But there is no consistency in the use of the term among the contributors. In his introduction, Thomas says that "theories of critical mass suggest that when a large enough group of newcomers or a unified
group is present in an organization, their attitudes and behaviors will permeate the mainstream.” Dolan and Witt and Kathlene also have a broad concept of the term.

On the comparative level, Davis also supports the idea of a critical mass. Unexpectedly, she found that the percentage of women in parliament was more important as an influence on women’s share of cabinet positions in Western Europe over the 1968-92 period than was women’s proportion of the governing parties. Along with party competition, a critical mass effect is a possible alternative explanation for these results. For Davis, critical mass means ‘an irreversible process of change’ rather than an acceleration of the rate of change. Thus she does not test the concept formally as a threshold, but instead argues, in linear fashion, that the more women in the legislature, even in opposition parties, the more likely women are to hold cabinet positions.

The critical mass concept has also been applied to studies of developing democracies in Latin America. Using a highly modified version of the critical mass concept, Stevenson indicates that the concept of having 30 percent women has become a rallying cry internationally for activists pursuing greater women’s political participation, but her own empirical work in Mexico suggests that, combined with other facilitating factors, a ‘critical mass’ of as little as 13 percent ‘is sufficient to allow the effective legislation of gendered policies for women’. The problem with applying the critical mass concept in Latin America is that several pieces of women-friendly legislation, including quota systems, have been adopted without anywhere near 30 or even 15 percent of the legislature being women.
Studies by other scholars in various countries and jurisdictions have cast doubt on the implications of a critical mass. In their study of the impact of women on U.S. state abortion policies, Berkman and O’Connor find some effect for a critical mass, measured as the logarithm of the number of women in the legislature, on parental notification policies, but none on public funding for abortions. Comparing two U.S. state legislatures, Reingold found that women in the Arizona legislature, with 30 percent of the seats, were, in fact, less united in political attitudes than their sisters in the California legislature, with only half that quantum.

Kathlene found that men in Colorado state legislative committee hearings reacted to increasing women’s numbers and authoritative positions on committees by becoming verbally aggressive in an attempt to control the meetings. In contrast to the interview reports of Thomas and Welch, she found that observation of actual behaviour indicated that ‘the more women on a committee, the more silenced women became’. Reingold also found that legislative behaviour of women often did not match their expressed interest in women’s issues.

Rosenthal’s (1998) study of the effects of women in leadership positions in state legislatures draws on the implications of Kanter’s analysis, especially for minorities as they move beyond ‘token’ status in numerically skewed groups. She posits that women making a difference is not merely a question of numbers but involves power, that is, what leadership positions women hold to shape the behaviour of others.

But this depends, among other things, on women’s power. Although she avoids the use of the term ‘critical mass,’ in order to test
some hypotheses about competitive versus integrative leadership styles, Rosenthal\(^84\) divides legislatures into ‘skewed’ (less than 18 percent women), ‘tilted’ (18-28 percent), and ‘balanced’ (more than 28 percent). Yet she finds no clear pattern of effects.

Some empirical studies also have cast doubt on the claims for a critical mass. Bratton’s\(^85\) study of three U.S. state legislatures—California, Illinois, and Maryland—found that passing a 15 percent threshold did not significantly change the proportion of women-related bills that feminine legislators introduced or that were passed. In a broader theoretical and methodological critique, Weldon\(^86\) argues that the idea of a critical mass relies on a mis-specified model based on numbers alone without attempting to account for the interactions which actually occur in a legislative body—a fallacy of aggregation.

Her research, encompassing both cross-state and cross-national studies, finds that passage of ‘women’s concern’ policies is unrelated to the presence of more than 15 percent women in the legislature as well as 15 percent women among government ministers.

This overview suggests that the concept of the ‘critical mass’ has a vague and shifting meaning as well as a surprising paucity of empirical support. Properly, it should refer to a threshold beyond which there is a change of behaviour through acceleration (‘chain reaction’). At some point, the characteristics of women become subject to a group dynamics that increases their influence on various political phenomena. We test for the existence of a critical mass across the central legislatures of advanced industrial democracies by examining whether there is such an
acceleration effect for the election of women legislators at different levels.

1.7. Conceptual **Framework** for Understanding and Assessing Empowerment

The World Bank practicing Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn (2005) Framework for understanding and Measuring Empowerment in five countries. This Particular theoretical framework is taken up for this study and the research design framed their under. The Operational definition is being defined based on the statement of this research problem.

**The Relationship** between **Outcomes and** Correlates of **Empowerment**

![Diagram of the relationship between key elements of the framework used in this research study to measure empowerment.](source)

*Source: Ruth Aslop and Nina Heinsohn, Framework for understanding and Measuring Empowerment in five countries*

The simple illustration above demonstrates the relationship between key elements of the framework used in this research study to measure empowerment.
Empowerment

If a person or group is empowered, they possess the capacity to make effective choices, that is, to translate their choices into desired actions and outcomes. This capacity to make an effective choice is primarily influenced by two sets of factors: agency and opportunity structure.

Agency

Agency is defined as an actor’s ability to make meaningful choices; that is, the actor is able to envisage options and make a choice.

Opportunity Structure

Opportunity structure is defined as the formal and informal contexts within which actors operate. Working together, these factors give rise to different degrees of empowerment, amidst which actors operate.

Degrees of empowerment

Degrees of empowerment can be measured by assessing

1. Whether a person has the opportunity to make a choice,
2. Whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose,
3. Once the choice is made, whether it brings the desired outcome.

Elements into measurable indicators

1. Agency

How can agency—the capacity to make meaningful choice—be measured? Asset endowments are used as indicators of agency. These
assets can be psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial, or human. Some assets are easier to measure than others. For example, it is easier to quantify human assets (such as skills or literacy) than psychological assets (such as the capacity to envisage) or social assets (such as social capital).

2. Opportunity Structure

Actor’s opportunity structure is shaped by the presence and operation of formal and informal institutions, or rules of the game. These include the laws, regulatory frameworks, and norms governing people’s behaviour. The presence and operation of the formal and informal laws, regulations, norms, and customs determine whether individuals and groups have access to assets, and whether these people can use the assets to achieve desired outcomes. Measuring opportunity structure involves analyzing the presence and the operation of formal and informal institutions.

3. Degrees of Empowerment

Measurement of assets and institutions provides intermediary indicators of empowerment. Direct measures of empowerment can be made by assessing:

1. Whether an opportunity to make a choice exists (existing of choice).
2. Whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose (use of choice).
3. Whether the choice resulted in the desired result (achievement of choice).
1.8. Operational Definitions

Agency: The ability of women panchayat presidents to take up required actions for development of the panchayat. The following asset endowments are used as indicators of agency such as education, awareness, accessibility, self-confidence, general ability, decision making power, dominating character, leadership quality that are determining the ability of the women panchayat presidents to use the opportunities given in the 73rd Amendment are deficient among the women panchayat presidents.

Opportunity Structure: The ability of women panchayat presidents to take up required actions for development of the Panchayat depend upon opportunity structure. Opportunity structure is defined as formal and informal contexts within which women panchayat presidents operate.

The formal institutions are the legislations, rules, regulations, women reservations, policy on training for improvising capacity, rising clarifications and doubts about the power and function, which are supportive/obstructive to perform functions of women panchayat presidents.

The informal institutions are social customs, public opinion on women leadership, traditional panchayat, caste system, gender discrimination, and spouse/family cooperation, officials and non officials’ attitude to women leadership which are supportive/ obstructive to perform functions of women panchayat presidents.
Degree of **Empowerment**: The empowerment of women panchayat presidents is to be assessed with the following perspectives.

1. Level of assets and opportunity structures existing for the women panchayat presidents.

2. Use of the power and functions of the women panchayat presidents.

3. Outcomes of the performance of the women panchayat presidents.

1.9. **Objectives**

- To study the level of capacity existing among women panchayat presidents to perform the required duties.
- To study the formal and informal institutions which support/obstruct women panchayat presidents in performing the required duties.
- To analyze the training process adopted by the Gandhigram Rural Institute for empowering women panchayat leaders.
- To assess the impact of training on increasing the capacity, controlling the formal and informal institutions, using the power and functions and performing the duties.
1.10. **Methodology**

1. **Participatory Observation**

   The researcher participated in the training programme and observed the content, process, method of knowledge delivery, participants’ need and interest during the training programme and maintained the overall impact of training inputs and process,

2. **Ex-post-facto study**

   The researcher started his research from the inception of the training programme and studied it up to the impact of the training programme on the personal life of the women panchayat leaders and in the panchayat administration and development: the researcher used the method of ex-post-facto study.

3- Collection of **Secondary Data**

   The research included the module, syllabus, process, methods, panel of resource persons, duration, content of the each syllabus unit and results of pre and post evaluation of each training programme conducted by the State Institute of Rural Development and the Gandhigram Rural Institute. In this exercise, the researcher used all the secondary data relevant to the series of training programmes for this study and for understanding the process and the input and expected output of all training programmes.
1.11, Collection of Primary Data

\textit{a. Primary Data Collection from Trainees}

The researcher prepared an interview schedule and collected the information directly from the women panchayat presidents before they attended the training programme. The same women Presidents were interviewed with an interview schedule after a year of attending the training programme. Fourteen cases are documented in five zones in Tiruchirappalli District for exploring the performance of the women panchayat presidents.

\textit{b. Primary Data Collection from the Trainers}

In order to be aware of the process, methods of knowledge sharing and duration of training days, course content and modifications, if required, the researcher interviewed the trainers. The researcher prepared an open interview schedule and collected information directly from the trainers who delivered knowledge and experience during the training programme conducted by GRI.

4. \textbf{Sample Units}

This research selected 100 samples from Tiruchirappalli District where 132 women panchayat presidents were trained in GRI which provided training to women panchayat presidents from 8 districts under the Hunger Project.
5. Case Studies

Successful women panchayat presidents were selected at the rate of each one for a block in fourteen blocks. The researcher stayed with each for a week and observed their whole activities related to the Panchayat. The observation of the researcher was made within the conceptual framework which this study relied on.

1.12. Application of the operational definitions

Assessing the agency and opportunity structure of the women panchayat presidents before attending training programme, assessing the degree of empowerment of women panchayat presidents when they use power and functions and assessing their performance a year after the training programme.

Study area

Tiruchirappalli District.

Indicators

The following indicators have been developed and classified under each factor of empowerment.

Agency/Assets

The agency/assets are to be indicated by various aspects which determine the performance of the women panchayat presidents. These aspects may be;
♦ Educational background

♦ Awareness and knowledge of Panchayat Act

♦ Accessibility to adopt the Panchayat Act

♦ Positive attitude towards panchayat development

♦ Personal interest and responsibility to perform the duty

♦ Self confidence in all the positions to be taken as panchayat president

♦ General ability to serve as best panchayat president

♦ Timely decision making power on all occasions of panchayat development

♦ Best leadership quality to attract colleagues and people

Opportunity Structure

The opportunity structure is defined as formal and informal contexts within which women panchayat presidents operate. This may be indicated by the following characteristics which determine the opportunities for the women panchayat presidents.

Formal Structure

♦ Panchayat legislation and its support for women empowerment.

♦ Rules of panchayat and its circumstances for holding up the women presidents.
♦ Panchayat regulations and their relevance for the women to be a good panchayat presidents.
♦ Reservation for women and SC/ST people.
♦ Training policy and its availability.
♦ Clarifications and doubts about power and function of women panchayat president.

**Informal Structure**

♦ Social customs at the local/grassroots level
♦ Public opinion about women leadership
♦ Role of traditional panchayat
♦ Caste system in the society/village
♦ Gender discrimination in all spheres
♦ Spouse/family cooperation and support for the women who are panchayat presidents
♦ Official and non official attitude about women leadership.

**Training Process**

♦ Contents and relevance of the syllabus of the training manuals
♦ Uses of participatory methods in the training programmes
♦ Opportunities for clarifying the doubts in the training sessions
♦ Accessibility of the training places
♦ Contacts and correspondence of the trainees with the resource team after the training programme
♦ Follow up activities of the training institute.

Degree of Empowerment

♦ Changes and development that transpired after the training programmes in agency/assets of women panchayat presidents.
♦ Changes and development that occurred after the training programmes in the opportunity structure
♦ Level of changes that happened after the training programmes in the use of power and functions of the women panchayat presidents.
♦ Achievements of the women panchayat presidents.

Development Outcome

♦ The performance of the women panchayat presidents
♦ Collective action (women federation) on panchayat development.

1,13. Chapterization

The second chapter gives an overview of Women and Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu. The third chapter gives an analysis of the process and implications of training and the narratives of cases. The fourth chapter provides an integrated analysis. The final chapter forms conclusion and presents recommendations.
Notes and References


19. Ibid.


24. Ibid.

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64. Ibid


70. Ibid.

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