CHAPTER - VII

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The main focus of this empirical research examines the role of women elected Panchayat presidents in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. During the Vedic period the women had enjoyed all the respect and freedom to participate in the different social,
cultural, political and religious functions in the society and they occupied a very respectable position and honour in the prevailing socio-cultural system. In fact the presence of women along with their male counterpart was regarded compulsory for the success of performing various religious and cultural functions. The changing socio-cultural system during the post Vedic Period reduced the involvement of women in carrying out certain activities and also refused the opportunities to receiving the education, participating in outdoor socio-economic and cultural activities. During Vedic period, the caste system was highly practised which also created the discrimination between the upper class and the lower class women in terms of social status and socio-economic status and privileges and freedom regarding education in the society.

Therefore majority of women candidates were mainly elected among the former communities and socio-economic groups as the representatives of the Village Panchayats. One significant indicator of democratization of the political process is to see which socio-economic stratum of the people occupies the seats of power. Now-a-days the elected representatives take the credit for all developmental and administrative activities being carried out in the village and have become the symbols of authority in rural areas. It may be stated here that age factor is of course a significant factor. A matured age reflects quite sound and reasonable views in conformity with the needs and necessities warranted by the circumstances. It indicated that they tend to enter the Panchayat Raj Institutions when they had become relatively free of family responsibilities regarding children. It was
observed during the data collection that young and average age group (48.2%) of women elected representatives actively participated in the village developmental activities.

It was found from the study that 42 percent of the respondents had completed the middle school level of education and 36 percent of the respondents had completed the primary level of education. The researcher could conclude from data that majority of the respondents had completed the middle school level of the education.

Majority of the respondents agree that income, education and occupation together best represent women elected panchayat presidents, while some others feel that changes in family structure should also be consider, Since majority of them are housewives, they have taken politics and public activities as an extension of their domestic work. Women village presidents have been playing a crucial role in the development process since the early stages of civilized life. It is observed that the widows are more free to do their duties as Panchayat functionaries. The entries of unmarried women to Panchayati Raj Institutions are prevented due to some reasons. It is understood from the discussions with women that unmarried girls are not allowed by their parents to hold such posts. Another reason is that girls would stake their marriage, if before the marriage they indulge in public activity.

In all, the advantages of initiating reservation policy for women under the Panchayat Raj System had gone mainly in favour of the most backward and the backward caste groups of women but a little bit of opportunities had been provided to the schedule caste women to associate themselves in the Village Panchayats. This could be mainly due
to the fact that later groups of women were possessing limited freedom to participate in
different social, economic, cultural and political activities from their family as compared
to other castes. Because the most backward social systems, and the cultural evils were
found greatly prevailing among the upper caste families which were restricting the
opportunities of women even to participate in out-door activities of their household to a
certain extent.

Analyzing the occupational structure of women elected panchayat presidents of
the Madurai district 75.9 percent were engaged in the agricultural activities, which
indicates agriculture is the pre-dominant occupation of the majority of the panchayat
leaders. The amount of money spent for travelling from one end of the constituency to the
other is substantial. Candidates spend money on sending campaign literature to voters
also, expenses are incurred for election workers food, transportation, and other
necessities. The reality now is legitimate campaign expenditures are forced to go
underground. In an effort to regulate expenditures, genuine expenses such as posters,
campaign worker expenses, electronic equipment, supplies, transportation and the like are
paid through black money. One solution is to designate certain areas for all the parties to
use for campaign speeches, rallies, hoardings, and other forms of campaigns.

In Indian villages, people were and still are organized in a rigid hierarchical social
order. Of the total, 95 respondents accounting for 58 percent were did not contest in the
past local bodies election and 70 respondents accounting 42 percent did not contested in
the previous election. This indicates that some respondents did not participate in the
election due to the reservation policy in the present election. Most of the women entered the Panchayat Raj Institution due to persuasion by their family members, pressure from the village community and pressure from political party.

No women representative from the rural areas reported and her workload on the home front decreased due to her work in the public space. In a joint family system attention to routine work cannot be reduced. After the reservations of seats for them in grass roots institutions, they have also assumed the role of players in the political game. So far, they had not been dragged into this game. In order to acquaint them with politics, they need the support of men. But while drawing upon the support of men for their work, they run the risk of men trying to make women representatives submissive.

This study reveals that because of their family political exposures and media, the awareness level has been increased among the elected women panchayat presidents and also the Government has initiated to endorse the level of awareness among the respondents through the training programmes and campaign for the elected women respondents. The family members on political trends and developments and the changes taking place in the political parties are the immediate source of information for the family members. It is found out 31% of the respondents have low level of political awareness. The high level of awareness among the joint family was due to more exposure to political awareness within the family which facilitates more of political discussion within the family.
All women elected panchayat presidents were participating among them (94%) of women elected panchayat presidents were actively participating in the Gram Sabha meetings. During field visits, people of one colony complained that they were not informed about convening of Gram Sabha and selection of beneficiaries. But the increase in the rate of participation of women may be due to self help groups formed in the Panchayat.

The women panchayat presidents said that domestic responsibilities, lack of conveyance and apathy towards the development of other wards prevented them from attending Gram Sabha meetings taking place in other wards. In TamilNadu, as part of people's planning different kinds of training and orientation programmes were conducted at Village, Block and District Panchayat levels. Besides these, Panchayat representatives are getting good support and guidance from their husbands. Now, some women Panchayat presidents are able to organize, address crowds, plan and implement programmes on their own, boosting their morale and self-confidence. Majority of the women elected representatives were willing to redress the people’s problems, but there is some restriction from the family level.

Ninety one percent of the respondents had awareness about the rural development schemes in the panchayat level and only 9 percent of the respondents did not have awareness about the rural development schemes. The government had initiated a lot of development and welfare schemes for the rural development. The training and orientation programmes had helped in different manner to the elected women presidents to be aware
of the rural developmental schemes in the study areas. The village panchayats were providing increasing thrust in favour of undertaking and implementation of employment oriented development programmes, poverty eradication schemes and rural housings for these people who are living below the poverty line. The emphasis had been provided for initiating such development programmes which directly or indirectly improve the social condition and quality of the human resource.

It found out that 80.7 percent of women elected presidents from the study area are not involved in the activities of the preparation of proposals to get development programmes from the different funding agencies and other government funding agencies and 81.3 percent of the respondents were not involving in the process of selection of beneficiaries for the welfare activities. Women have always operated within the parameters determined by tradition wherein reasoning about their economic independence or political participation is not entertained. Political participation, according to Sidney Verba and others, refers to the acts being intended to influence the behaviour of those who have such decisional powers.

Of the total, 88 percent are willingness to hold the panchayat president position. It was observed that most of the respondents had become the panchayat presidents as fresher and they had been forced to contest the election in some way. They had learned a little knowledge about the politics.

**Conclusion**
As far as this study is concerned the focus is on how the elected women panchayat presidents who assumed responsibilities have performed their roles and responsibilities by making use of the opportunities provided to them constitutionally, and what kinds of problems the women elected panchayat presidents are facing in the PRI.

The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act was legislated to give full opportunity for grassroots democracy to be strengthened with an added special right for women’s participation in all the activities. At the field reality is that women’s participation in decision-making at all levels, whether national or local, is still marginal, this calls for concerted and committed efforts with initial support from agencies such as committed NGOs to assist them in their efforts.

TamilNadu is one of the states of India which is viewed by many as one of the better performing states in respect of initiatives for democratic decentralisation through Panchayat Raj Institutions. The present study focused only on the Madurai district which is one of important city in the TamilNadu of the elected women panchayat presidents. The socio-economic status of the district totally depends upon agriculture. This study strongly brings out the contradictory reality of Panchayat Raj System in the district. On one hand there is a progressive legislation, policies and guidelines for the panchayat backed by strong political will, while on the other, the ground reality indicates weak and ineffective implementation of the functions leading to little progress on the path of real democratic decentralization.
The main sources of basic information for women are family, relatives and friends. Political knowledge about Gram Panchayat was higher. This shows that the three tier panchayat system which made panchayat presidents more autonomous and powerful through the 73rd amendment and the changes which happened due to this had its impact and made them more informed. Other sources of information for the rural people are the television and cinema. The increase in the number of local channels and ownership of channels has greater impact on the people about their political knowledge. The level of political awareness was assessed by using set of statements. The Most Backward caste people have high level of awareness and most of the powerful political positions in these villages are occupied by them. Education is considered as one of the important tools of development and in developing countries it plays a prominent role in the development process. The study reveals that the educational respondents are having high level of awareness and there is a direct relationship between the education and the level of political awareness. Political socialization of the individual starts from family leading to peer group and media. As far as the study is concerned, it is the family and friends that are the most important aggrieves of political socialization.

This study clearly identifies three broad sets of issues that are hampering the effective involvement of the elected women panchayat presidents in the Panchayat Raj System. Firstly there is a resistance and non-cooperation from the bureaucracy by way of support and providing inadequate financial backup, corruption and the like. Secondly resistance from the family members and finally elected women panchayat presidents
themselves are lacking the capacity to run a Panchayat Raj effectively. Lack of information about the Panchayat Raj system and the lack of political education are found among the elected women panchayat presidents.

Due to the constitutional measures various initiatives were taken such as social legislation adopted for the upliftment of women’s status and achieving overall equality among women and men. But in real terms the women are still lagging far behind men in availing different facilities and participating in different activities due to widespread developed traditional form of social evils and cultural backwardness and are limiting the scope of women to participate in different activities according to their choice, even in the affairs and decision making processes on certain matters of own family and the freedom to move for participating outdoor socio-economic activities which can provide them an opportunity of bringing improvements in their status. Even the rural women are visualized lacking the freedom to participate in the various rural development programmes and welfare schemes, which are especially introduced with the intention of improving their socio-economic status, because of the lacking freedom from the households, social restrictions to move outside, prevailing illiteracy and increasing control of male family members over the decisions of women.

It is accepted through the study that providing an opportunity to women to represent village panchayat is improving the social status and strengthening empowerment of women. Increasing the involvement of women in the activities of village panchayat could possibly minimize the traditional feelings of people in terms of
keeping them under the subjugation of men, imposing restrictions and limiting freedom by the households against their movements outside the household and to participate in various activities.

The achievement level of concerned intervention undertaken by the government to safeguard the interest of and provide empowerment to women would more especially depend upon the implementation pattern of reservation policy, general outlook and actual intention of elected women representatives of village panchayats towards undertaking and evolving measures in undertaking associating themselves with certain socio economic reform activities and the extent of awareness about their rights, duties and functions and the objectives behind introducing reservation policy in their favour of different socio-economic groups of women. Their background and characteristics, prevailing attitudes of families, particularly male family members in providing freedom to elected women panchayat presidents participate in different activities of panchayat nature and extent of participation in different social, cultural, political and related activities. Elected women representatives also participated in the implementation of different development schemes and in decision making processes about the various activities of village panchayats.

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