CHAPTER IV
WOMEN AS GRASS ROOTS LEADERS

Panchayat Raj Institutions are the grassroots units of self-government. They are the instruments for participatory democracy and decentralization at the grassroots level. They carry back to the people the power that really belongs to them. Thus they have an immense potential for democratic decentralization and devolving power to the people. They are the vehicles of socio-economic transformation. It is therefore necessary that these bodies are effective and function meaningfully. This demands an active involvement, contribution and participation of the people. Participation refers to direct involvement of people, both women and men, in (i) decision making, (ii) implementation of development programmes, (iii) monitoring and evaluation of programmes and (iv) sharing the benefits of development. Thus there has to be a ‘bottom up approach’ rather than one where people are mere observers and total dependents. The people should operate and the government should co-operate.

Significance of Women Leaders at the Grassroots Level

The equality guaranteed by the Constitution of India, demands active political participation by women which is integral to the whole issue of the progress of women. Women constitute 50 per cent of the rural population. This gives them the legitimacy to play an important role at the grassroots level. Such participation is important primarily due to following reasons:

1. To initiate, formulate and implement policies and programmes which will benefit women. It has been observed that in most of the Panchayats the decision-making has been in favour of men, and the needs of rural women go unnoticed.

2. To bring in a feminine perspective to the process of planning, policy formulation and execution of rural development programmes. It is expected that more women would change the focus of rural administration towards important facets of life like health, nutrition, children’s welfare, family care, drinking water etc.

3. Election of more women to Village Panchayats would play a major role to empower women. Empowering women refers to strengthening their innate capacities through acquiring knowledge, power and experience. Power here means not power to dominate but power to reduce helplessness and dependency.
Thus women's access to power structures would help them in overcoming inequality and subordination they have been experiencing for ages.

4. The entry of more and more women into the realm of grassroots politics suggest that their increased number will offer them equally increased opportunity to influence the local decision-making. Once a group reaches a certain 'critical mass' then its position, power and influence is likely to increase. Therefore, increase in number will help women in becoming an effective pressure group through the instrument of collective bargaining.

5. Women are the active agents of socio-economic transformation in rural areas. They have the potentials for effective networking and pooling of resources. They can understand better their problems, identify them, give priorities and preferences, and are aware of strategies towards its solution. Hence their active participation will not only enhance the status of women in the village, but will also help in development of the village.

6. The elected women can act as an intermediary between the government and the women in rural areas. Their accessibility to other women in the village, their contacts at the grassroots, and their awareness of the needs and interests of women will improve the condition of women in rural areas.

7. Larger participation will provide women an exposure to outside world. Their participation would improve their status in society as well as at home. It would also give them an opportunity to work in groups on projects of common interest and associate with on-going programmes.

8. It will provide a platform for women to gain experience, overcome their fear and build in confidence, break the shackles of patriarchy and orthodoxy. It will create an access to women at state and national level politics.

'Thus women's entry in village political system would ensure change in the political system of the village, the familial and social perceptions of the role of women and development of grassroots leadership among women. At the Gram Sabha and Panchayat levels a new leadership would emerge which is expected to administer

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better financial resources and would provide constructive thinking in village administration and its development.\textsuperscript{2}

**Empowerment in Historical Perspective**

The Constitution of India has provision for village panchayat in the part IV, in the Directive Principles of State Policy. Art. 40 reads: 'The State should take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.'

Time and again concern has been expressed about the under-representation of women on local bodies. The Balwantrai Mehta Committee appointed to study the working of the Community Development Projects and the National Extension Service submitted its report in November 1957. This report revolutionized the entire thinking about the community development as well as the local government. It marked the beginning of new phase of democratic decentralization. It recommended that Panchayats should be composed of elected representatives and enjoy autonomy and freedom. One of the suggestions of this committee was of particular importance to women. It suggested that women should find representation in the rural political institutions. Hence it recommended that there should be two women 'who are interested in work among women and children' as co-opted members on the Panchayat Samiti. A similar provision was suggested with regard to the village Panchayat. However, such a provision led to co-option of women from dominant socio-economic class and political groups, and they could not contribute in any significant way towards the gender cause.

Ashok Mehta Committee was appointed in 1977 to inquire into the working of the Panchayat Raj Institution, and to suggest measures to strengthening them so as to enable a decentralized system of planning and development to be effective. The committee emphasized the importance of a system of decentralization of power and people's participation. It saw a wider developmental role for such bodies in spheres like agriculture, forestry, cottage industries and welfare activities. It recognized value of women's contribution to these areas and suggested a greater representation of women in Panchayat bodies to influence both planning and its implementatio

recommended that two women who get the highest number of votes in Zilla Parishad elections should be the members of Zilla Parishad. If no women came forward for elections, two women might be co-opted. This pattern was also to be followed at Panchayat level. In the light of this provisions certain reservations for women were made in states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharastra and Karnataka.

The National Perspective Plan for Women(1988) emphasized on two aspects:

- The economic development and integration of women into the mainstream of our economy.
- Equity and social justice to all women.

It suggested for 30 per cent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The champions of the Panchayat Raj desired that rural women should not only become the beneficiaries of development, but more importantly be contributors to it. The committee on status of women drafted a plan for women from 1980-2000. This plan stressed on (i) reservation for women at the local level and (ii) establishment of All women Panchayats. The most desired change came up with the 73rd Amendment which came in force in 1993. It removed the obstacles in the way of smooth functioning of Panchayat Raj. It curbed tendencies like irregular elections, prolonged super sessions, inadequate representation to weaker sections, absence of administrative and financial autonomy etc. It endowed the Panchayats with constitutional status. Thus it was a move to reconstruct, reinforce and revitalize Panchayats as an integral part of democratic process.

The new Amendment emphasized on:

- Reviving Gram Sabha, and constitution of Panchayats at village level.
- Direct elections to all seats in Panchayats
- Devolving of power and responsibilities upon the Panchayats with respect to the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice.
- Adopting measures for sound finance of Panchayats and setting up of Finance Commission in the states for periodical review of their financial position.
- Setting up superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral roll and conduct of all the elections to the Panchayat.
- The 73rd Amendment has the following provisions relating to women {Art. 243 (D)}:
i) Not less than one-third of the seats will be reserved for women (including those for SCs/STs). These may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies of a Panchayat.

ii) There would be reservation for women in the seats that have been allotted to SCs and STs. Not less than one-third of the SC and ST seats may be reserved for women.

iii) Not less than one third of the total number of seats for the offices of the chairpersons at each level would be reserved for women. This would be rotated among different Panchayat at each level.

The Amendment also added the XI Schedule to the constitution which identified twenty-nine areas of development in which Panchayats will have a free hand in planning and disbursement of funds. These include land reforms, agriculture, small-scale industry, animal husbandry, education up to secondary level and health care. In these activities women can play a crucial role. 25th item of these 29 items deals with ‘Women and Development’.

The 73rd Amendment came in force in April, 1993 and accordingly, all the states amended their laws relating to local self-government. This led to a large number of women leaders coming to power at the grassroots level. ‘Thus 73rd Amendment is a milestone in the way of women assuming leadership and decision-making positions as it makes such a role mandatory and universal for the whole of India.’

Women in Panchayats - Post 73rd Amendment - A Review

Various research studies have been conducted to study the women leadership at Panchayat level in different states. The women’s representation has been very encouraging in states like West Bengal, Haryana, Maharastra and Rajasthan. In fact, in Kerala and Karnataka Gram Panchayat elections, not only 33 percent seats but over 43 percent have been captured by women. Even in state of Orissa a large number of women have come to power at grassroots level, and this achievement becomes all the more spectacular when it is seen against the backdrop of a low literacy level of

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women in the State, which is 29.1 per cent only. The outcome of these studies is of mixed nature.

The studies in different states reflect that women were used as proxies. The proxies suffer from certain characteristics: (i) They display a lower level of political awareness. (ii) They owe their primary loyalty to their family. (iii) Their role of an elected representative is merely an extension of their role as a housewife. (iv) They serve the patriarchal interests of the family. (v) They enter the political arena for protecting the constituency of their male relatives and are prepared to vacate the same, once de-reserved. Illiteracy is considered as the major cause for women to be used as sheer proxies. A study of the role of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Madhya Pradesh found that a majority of women panchas were housewives and were either illiterate or educated up to the primary level. In large number of cases the decision to participate in the election was not their own. If a seat was reserved for a woman, the men who were politically active convinced their wife, mother, sister-in-law to contest the election, in order to keep the family's presence alive in local politics. And it is the men who are exercising the power by proxy today. 'The institution of “Sarpanch-Pati” or “Adhyaksha-Pati” might not have any legal sanction, but it is thriving in many Panchayats in the state of Madhya Pradesh'. Similar observation was made by another study in Uttar Pradesh, where female illiteracy, and lack of independent voting rights did not allow women to play active role in the village politics. The Pradhanis played an almost insignificant role in the functioning


 b) Pai, Sudha (1998), ‘Pradhanis in New Panchayats; Field Notes from Meerut District,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2(May), pp.1010-1011  


of the gram and block panchayat level bodies. They have never attended any meeting or made any decision about allocation of funds to individual and schemes.  

It was also observed that the male members in the family often dominated the women panchas. It has been found that male relatives usually coach women to speak at meetings, or actually do the necessary paper work when the women are illiterate. A survey in Rajasthan showed that women panchas were not interested to contest again as they felt that the male members in their family did not allow them to function independently. A study of women elected representatives to Karnataka Panchayati Raj institutions between 1987 to 1990, conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences at a time when the Zilla Parishads had just come into being, revealed that majority of the women elected members had no experience of active politics: usually a male member of the family had been instrumental in persuading the women to contest, and in many cases women continued to have all their time for household chores as usual, because the men in their families were involved in discharging the political responsibilities on their behalf. However, it has been reported after two years when the same Zilla Parishads were studied, changes were evident.

Another important observation made by these studies is that, unlike the trends at national and state politics, there is predominance of younger women in grassroots politics. A study of the women elected representatives of Lalgudi Panchayat, Tamil Nadu reveals that there is predominance of the younger members among women Panchayat Presidents. UMA study group also noticed the same trend, that women in the child bearing age group are coming forward to join politics in spite of the domestic responsibilities. The experience of Maharashtra revealed similar features in one of the micro studies of the state. Alva the studies of Gujarat, Kerala and Karnataka have shown that the effective female participants are those from the age group of 25-40.

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9 Nair, Janaki (1997), ‘An Important Springboard,’ Seminar, (September), 475, p.44.
11 Mathew, George (1995), op. cit., p. 34.
14 Nair, Janaki (1997), op. cit., p. 44.
Caste play an important role at grassroots politics. The work of UMA and of Indira Hirway on Gujarat’s Panchayat Raj institutions has revealed the enhanced role of women from dominant castes such as the Vokkaligas and Lingayats, while Dalit and tribal participation has been muted. A similar picture emerged from the primary survey conducted in Orissa. Around 66% of the women elected members in the state are from Karans (Kayasthas) and Khandait (cultivating caste). A study conducted in Kerala on women Panchayat members found that only about 30 per cent of the members belonged to the forward caste/communities, while the bulk of them were from the backward caste/communities. The Panchayat elections that took place in the state of Madhya Pradesh in 1994 brought forward a large number of women, many of whom belong to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

In some States, it was revealed that Panchayat Raj has made women more vulnerable than before due to increasing atrocities towards them. There are hundreds of cases where women Panchayat members are humiliated and even killed. The cases of stripping a women Panchayat member of Salheona village and gang rape of an OBC woman Sarpanch of Gujjarkhedi gram Panchayat in Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh are well documented. In Kachranli village near Panipat in Haryana, an incumbent Dalit women member was beaten up and abused by the police, while inquiring about a land deal. In Madhya Pradesh, in the village of Harpura, both the hands of a woman were broken. Tapati Sarkar, a member of Chandpara Panchayat in the Gaighata Thana area in West Bengal was assaulted with an iron rod. Besides there are various cases of sexual harassment registered.

However, a ray of hope emerges, as the studies shows that these women have a development agenda for their village. Sweta Mishra has quoted a large number of instances to show how women were keen in development of their village. Thus one Sarpanch of Rewari block in Madhya Pradesh, removed the wine shop from her area, another told the SDO that if he did not get the water supply to the village she would drag him to the village. Elected women in some states have taken part in protest and rallies against wages and for drinking water. Some are reported to have participated in

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15 Ibid.
demanding better implementation of Government schemes and have communicated information of Government schemes to the people for whom they were meant. In Arunachal Pradesh some of the newly elected Panchayat leaders have even faced imprisonment in the process of persuading the Government to build a twelve-bed hospital for women. Women have raised many issues like alcoholism, lotteries, drinking water, health facilities, etc. Panchayat women in Karnataka paved the way for the economy of women to flourish by arranging to impart floriculture training to women. In west Godawari district of Andhra Pradesh, Panchayat women were successful in stopping the employers from hiring labour for less than the minimum wages from outside their village depriving the women of their work and wages.20

Thus women in local government have made a difference through their sincere, dedicated and mature approach to issues that significantly affect the daily lives of the people such as supply of drinking water, firewood, literacy projects, access to credit, etc.21

The research studies conducted on functioning of All-women Panchayats have also revealed some interesting findings. Such all-women Panchayats are functioning in Maharashtra, in Tripura, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh. Medha Kotwal and Sinorcita Gopal Singh who looked at all-women Panchayats in Maharashtra for Aalochana felt that women here are working more effectively than the women Sarpanches of other Panchayats because the former could get encouragement and strength from the fellow women.22 The members of all-women Panchayats have shifted the developmental priorities of the village. The Sarpanch, a tribal, an old woman of eighty, has set eradication of illiteracy from the village as her top priority in the all-women Panchayat in Tripura. In the Kultikri Gram Panchayat of West Bengal, all eleven women members of the Panchayat are young(30) and have not passed even high school. Yet, they have managed government projects involving Rs six lakh. They have tried to utilise the waste land resources by setting up shrimp farms and mango orchards. In this way they have been able to create employment opportunities.23 According to the study, each and every girl child is attending the

22 Mohanty, Bidyut op. cit., p. 3349.
23 Ibid.
school in this village. In an all-women Panchayat of Vitner in Maharastra the
Panchayat implemented ‘Laxmi Mukta Scheme’ whereby women have been given
land. However Bhandari opines that even though the women have been elected and
have formed Panchayats, they have not been empowered except in a few cases. In
those cases the personality of the women mattered a lot. The Indian Express study
has confirmed Bhandari’s observation.24

The Problem

Women’s entry in grassroots politics has given rise to various questions which
requires detailed analysis.

1. Have the women become mere puppets in the power play of men and politically
vested interests? Are these women mere proxies, and if so, would this be an
everlasting phenomenon, or in a span of time, will they be able to assert
themselves?

2. Has the burden of woman increased, as now she has to carry the household work
and also attend the Panchayat work. Would this over burden woman?

3. Has woman’s entry in politics brought about qualitative change in her life? Does
she now enjoy larger share in family’s decision-making? Has it altered the
public-private dichotomy with regard to household responsibilities?

4. Has the empowerment of women brought in qualitative changes in local politics?
Can they check, and are they willing to check, the increasing corruption at
grassroots level? Do they have different leadership styles or do they imbibe the
“masculine ethos” as survival instinct overpowers them?

5. Are they capable of espousing the cause of women? Do they try to understand the
problems faced by women and take initiative towards solving them?

6. The increasing money and muscle power is well known. Are the women likely to
become target of attacks of social elements when they move out of their homes?

7. Would the bureaucracy cooperate with the women panchas or will they become
the hapless victims of officialdom?

This chapter analyzes the above questions with a study of women panchas in
Goa.

24 Ibid.
Women Leadership at Grassroots Politics in Goa

I) Origin of Panchayats in Goa

The historical origin of the modern Panchayats in Goa can be traced back to the local self-governing institutions called *communidades*. They were also known as *Gaunkari*. The origin and development of Goa is interlaced with that of the *communidades*. In spite of the fact that Goa was ruled by various dynasties, from the Kadambas to the Vijaynagar rulers, the Adil Shahis, and the Portuguese rule, these institutions have survived through the generations. The origin of *communidades* is still obscure. Some thinkers believe that they were formed by the *Kunbis* also known as *gauddis* or *Zolmis*, who are regarded as the first settlers.\(^{25}\) According to The Report of the Goa Land Reform Commission a large number of families from across the Western Ghats, abandoning their original homesteads on account of wars, epidemic or finances, came over and settled in Goa. They formed themselves into cooperative associations governed by heads of the families who were known at that time as ‘*gaunkars*’. The *gaunkars* reclaimed and brought under cultivation worthy and other lands lying waste in villages with the assistance of their dependents and the servants they had brought with them. They appropriated the land collectively and divided the produce amongst themselves.\(^{26}\)

The *communidades* carried out large number of functions. They build the network of public roadways, the aqueducts of rain waters to those for irrigation of fields and area groves, the top draining by marshy land, catchment of waters, the public security and other works carried out today by the Municipalities and Panchayats. They also looked after the institutions like temples and carried out activities of literary, scientific, artistic and religious nature. The *Gaunkars* also tried criminal cases. They settled all types of disputes and punished offences committed within the village. They collected some professional, commercial and industrial taxes. The *communidades* also set up primary schools, regular health services in respective villages, and created additional emergency cell in cases of epidemics for all the inhabitants. Thus they were considered as bodies of public utility and were called upon to execute social works.


The membership of *communidades* consisted of the *Joneiros* and *Actoes*. *Joneiros* were the male descendant of the original *Gaunkars* and they received some amount of annual income known as *Jone*. The Hindu women never had any right to the ancestral property but only the right to alimony. As a result women remained alien to the village *communidades*.27 The *Actoes* were the shareholders. Some *communidades*, specially the *communidades* of *Velha Conquistas* instituted alimony, of the surplus per capita in favour of widow and children of deceased members. The *communidades* were administered on the pattern of Hindu Joint family.28 The *Vodil* (elders) who were experienced and had knowledge of village affairs were chosen to fill in higher positions. The voting was by the *vangods* (aggregate of families) and not on individual bases. Every decision had to be unanimous in its legislative and administrative body called *Gaumpona* and even one negative vote ‘*Naca*’ (no) would lead to rejection of the proposal.

With the advent and establishment of Portuguese rule in Goa, there was a slow decline in the functioning of *communidades*. The Portuguese appointed *Camara Agrarias* which began to exercise tremendous pressure on the *communidades*. They acted as a link between government and the *communidades*. They were set up in every taluka and enjoyed the powers to decide upon common *communidades* matters. Overload of taxes, and economic depression further led to decline in *communidades*.

The liberation of Goa in 1961, and the Goa, Daman and Diu Village Panchayat Regulation Act, 1962, gave an opportunity to the people in Goa to elect their representatives to the village bodies on the basis of adult franchise. The first elections to the Panchayats were held on 24th October, 1962. Thus in Goa democracy had its roots right at the base. The elections to the first Legislative Assembly in the state, and Lok Sabha were held on 9th Dec. 1963, that is a year later. All these years Goa had a single tier system of Panchayati Raj, which was located at the gram Panchayat level. ( The elections to the second tier - Zilla Panchayats were held recently that is on 6th February, 2000). In addition there is also a gram sabha at the village Panchayat level. As per The Goa Panchayat Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 1999 there shall be four ordinary meetings of the Gram Sabha every year.29

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27 Rui Gomes Pereira (1986), op. cit., p. 54.
28 Ibid., p. 100-101.
strength of membership of the gram Panchayats varies according to the population covered. Before the implementation of 73rd Amendment, one seat in each gram Panchayat was statutorily reserved for women. All the village Panchayats were grouped into taluka-wise blocks. Each of these blocks had a block advisory committee. These committees comprised the local M.P, the local M.L.A.s, Sarpanches of all the gram Panchayats within the taluka, representatives of the local institutions like the cooperative societies, government appointed representatives of S.C. and S.T and government officials. In Goa there has been timely elections to the Panchayats. In accordance with the 73rd Amendment, the Goa Legislative Assembly has enacted Goa Panchayat Raj Act, 1994. The same was subsequently amended twice, in 1996 and August, 1999. These amendments have provided for establishment of Taluka Panchayats at the taluka level and Zilla Panchayat at the District level. Thus, for each taluka there will be a Taluka Panchayat having jurisdiction over the entire Taluka excluding such portions of the Taluka as are included in a Municipal Council. It will consist of one member each elected by the voters from each village Panchayat, members of Council of States and Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly who are registered as electors within the Taluka, Sarpanch of Panchayats elected by the Sarpanches in that Taluka, and the B.D.O. The Taluka Panchayat will overall supervise developmental works undertaken by Village Panchayats. There will be two Zilla Panchayats in Goa, one in North Goa and the other in South Goa. Its main function will be to overall supervise, coordinate and integrate the development schemes and prepare the plan for the development of the District. 30

II) Study of Women Panchas in Goa

With the increasing emphasis on rural participation, Panchayats are expected to play an important role in planning and development, social welfare, education and in the cultural field. The January 1997 elections to Panchayats in Goa, under the 73rd Amendment, saw a sizable number of women coming to power at grassroots politics. The cumulative representation of women in Sarpanches and Deputy Sarpanches positions came to 40%. The total representation of women in the Panchayats is 34%.

As per the Goa Village Panchayats Regulation Act, 1994 the seats for Sarpanches post are reserved for women on the alphabetical order of the names of the villages. Thus from 1997 till the next elections to the Panchayats, the villages whose names begin with alphabet A or B or C will have women Sarpanches. Thus from the 185 villages in Goa, 64 villages are having women Sarpanches.

**TABLE 4.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TALUKA</th>
<th>VILLAGES</th>
<th>WOMEN MEMBERS</th>
<th>TOTAL MEMBERS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERNEM</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37+2</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARDEZ</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>80+10</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TISWADI</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>46+2</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BICHOLIM</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>39+2</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATARI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PONDA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>51+3</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALCETE</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>72+9</td>
<td>223</td>
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<td>MORMUGAO</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUEPEM</td>
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<td>24+2</td>
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<td>SANGUEM</td>
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<td>CANACONA</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>185</td>
<td>445+33</td>
<td>1402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[445 women members are elected from the reserved ward while 33 have won from the general category. (Source: Compiled from the records from the Official Gazette, (1997), 17(January), Series II, No. 42, Government of Goa)]

**Study Design**

Bardez taluka in North Goa was selected for the study of leadership of women panchas. It is the largest taluka in Goa. It is among the *Velha Conquistas* and was ruled by the Portuguese for a longer period of time compared to other parts of Goa. The Uniform Civil Code which gave socio-legal equality to women was first implemented in Bardez Taluka. Today, it is a well developed taluka and has a high female literacy ratio. This taluka has 33 village Panchayats, with 90 women panchas. To study women leadership in this taluka, a sample of 33 women panchas, each from one Panchayat, was chosen through lots. The survey was conducted in the month of September-October, 1998. 10 women Sarpanches were also interviewed. These
interviews were taken in the month of September, 1999. Data was also collected through observations made during the meetings of the Panchayats, and at the meeting of Sarpanches at the B.D.O office, Mapusa. The data collected was tabulated and analyzed under the following headings:

A) Socio-economic Profile of Women Panchas
B) Political Background
C) Influence of Woman's entry in Politics on Quality of her life
D) Has Women's entry brought in Qualitative changes in Local Politics?
E) Assessment of Work Undertaken by Women Panchas

A) Study of Socio-Economic Profile of the Women Panchas

a) Age

Age by itself can be a significant variable for the structural analysis of political leadership of women. The studies conducted on the entry of women at the national and state level politics have shown that women enter politics in later years of life. This late entry rigidifies the existing male-dominated structures. However there is a positive shift observed in women's entry in Panchayats. In the survey conducted, 51.5 percent of the women panchas came from the age group of 31-40 and 21.2 percent came from the age group of 25-30. Such trend is also observed in some other states. The youngest among the panchas interviewed, was Ashwini Bhonsle, from Camurlim. She is from Mumbai, and married to a Goan. She is twenty five years old. She has studied upto S.S.0 and they run a small business of making iron window frames. She belongs to Kharvi community. When the ward was declared reserved, people from the ward approached her and requested her to contest, and assured her full support as she belongs to their own community, is well educated, and is well known to them. She gives credit to her education, her husband's persuasion and the support from the villagers which gave her the confidence to win this elections. She is also the Sarpanch of the village. Similarly Anita Pereira, from Marra, Siolim, who is also of 25 years, felt that it was the people's confidence which made her win the elections. Anita's husband is working abroad. She has studied up to S.S.C. People from the village know her from her childhood. Both these cases reveals that the male members in the village have reposed confidence in this young women. They believe that the younger persons are more educated and mobile than older women. Thus the
relationship is one of cooperation and not of competition. Lack of experience, has often led these women to look at the male members for their guidance and advice. Besides, being from the same village, they are respected and have less fear of character assassination. They have the backing of family members, neighbours and friends. They are looked upon as ‘Dhu’ (daughters) or ‘Sun’ (Daughter-in-laws) of the village.

b) Marital status

Data on marital status of women panchas shows that a majority of them are married. 93.9 percent of them are married. Most of the women panchas felt that, hadn’t their husband taken the initiative and given the support, they would not have entered politics. However, though there is high female literacy in Goa and the trend of late marriages, there are very few unmarried women in politics. Only two of the women panchas were unmarried, one is a beautician and the other is a lecturer. This may be because unmarried girls are busy pursuing higher education, or making their carriers, and since politics is looked upon as a ‘dirty game’, they are not attracted towards it. Also there is no remuneration paid to the panchas, thus it cannot give the economic independence which is one of the primary desires of unmarried women in Goa. There were also three women panchas who were widows, and one of them is a Sarpanch. The presence of widows is a positive sign as it reflects the loosing of the patriarchal holds over the Goan society.

c) Caste

Political dynamism in Goa is rooted in caste politics. The sudir caste has come to play a very important role in local politics. This include the artisans, masons, potters, carpenters, coppersmiths, blacksmiths, boatmen, washermen, milkmen, agricultural labourers, toddy tappers, fishermen, weavers, labourers, all belong to this group. These castes are also clubbed under ‘Bahujan Samaj’. It is a general observation that the socio-economic and political privileges are enjoyed by the high caste people. Earlier the Gaud Saraswat Brahmins were the elders or the Gaunkars who dominated the village administration. They jointly owned the rice fields of the

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village and enjoyed certain special privileges in the village by virtue of their traditional authority. There is evidence that the Portuguese administrators regarded them as intelligent and gave them very high positions in the early period of their rule.\textsuperscript{32} However with changing times the other caste people have been able to overthrow the yoke of the upper caste, and have asserted themselves in political positions. This is also true in case of women panchas. 24.2 percent of the respondents came from castes such as Karvi, Randor, and Naik. The Bhandaris form the dominant caste federation in Goa. This is also reflected in local politics. 36.6 percent of the women representatives came from the Bhandari Samaj. Women from these castes have been major contributors to their family income. The economic independence has resulted in less discrimination, giving them an opportunity to be on an almost equal footing with men. It was also observed that very few women came from higher caste. This is mainly because there is patriarchal hold and rigid value system still existent in these families. Some of the respondents were not aware of what caste they belonged to, while one of them refused to state the caste to which she belongs.

d) Occupation

The analysis of occupational status shows that 63.6 percent of the women panchas were house-wives. Here household work comprised of cooking, washing and cleaning, and taking care of the family members. These women did not have to go to distant places to fetch water, fodder and fuel. None of them had cattle. 21.2 percent had fields and they work in the fields during monsoons. Thus the women could manage to get free time which could be utilized for other social activities. This has enabled them to blend the household work with the Panchayat work. The small size of the territory of Goa, has also helped in yet another way. The panchayat office is not far away from the village, and as a result, women can manage on their own to attend the panchayat meetings. 18.18 percent of the respondents supplemented their family income. They worked in fields, did tailoring, helped male members in business and one of them gave tuition. 3.03 percent were self employed while 15.1 percent have full time job. In spite of being occupied with jobs, and the household chores, these women were able to devote time to the Panchayat work. In fact, the sense of

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
economic independence, and the socializing impact, have equipped them better to carry out their work.

e) Education

A positive trend was observed with regard to the educational status of women panchas. 75 percent of them have completed middle or high school which enables them to carry out the paper work of the Panchayat. Thus compared to some other states, women panchas in Goa are better educated. In fact, an analysis of relationship vis-a-vis education and men in Panchayats reflected that women panchas are almost on an equal footing with men. In some Panchayats women panchas are more educated than men. Those who are graduates and post-graduates have edge over others, even over male Panchayat members, as they can understand the functioning of the Panchayat in fullest term. Their relationship with the Secretary and Talathi of the Panchayat, and other male Panchayat members is one of equality and co-operation. They are better aware of the various schemes, are members on the committees of the Panchayat, and can analyze the financial position of the Panchayat.

TABLE 4.2
EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE WOMEN PANCHAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A-illiterate, B-primary, C-middle School, D-High school, E-Graduate, F-post graduate)

middle school education, however expressed their dependency on the administrative staff in certain matters. However they are aware of the problems of their village and initiate proposals for its development. While the others with less or no education had to depend on others, specially males members in the family to get acquainted to the rules and procedures of the Panchayat. A point requires to be noted that education is
The study revealed that a woman Sarpanch from Moira, who has studied up to middle school, and who has worked as an anganwadi worker, took her job confidently from the beginning. While, woman Sarpanch from Penha da Franca, who has studied up to 12th std., and who is a house-wife, took time to assert herself.

B) Political Background

a) Reasons for entry in politics

It is commonly believed that women’s increased presence in local politics will lead to their greater power and influence in policy-making. It was decided to examine women’s participation in policy making and leadership experiences. 90.9 percent of them had contested and won for the first time. Being new entrants in politics, they were less aware and informed about the processes of local politics. This acted as a major obstacle to their effective share in decision-making. When asked about the reason for their entry in politics, 51.5 percent replied that the male members in their family influenced them to do so. In this 9.09 percent were the wives of the Sarpanches. Their Sarpanch husbands wanted them to contest as this would strengthen their panels. 15.1 percent contested from the ward because now it was reserved for women. This was necessary to continue the hold of the family on the ward. 6.06 percent of them, literally admitted that they contested because men told them that they would not have to do anything. A woman pancha from Nerul Village Panchayat, who is illiterate and works in fields, narrated how her husband forced her to contest, though she was not interested as she had lost her mother few days before. She has not been attending the meetings and is neither aware of functioning of the Panchayat. Her husband was reluctant even to allow her to be interviewed. Thus, reservation, which is instrument for empowerment of women, can also be used for their exploitation. It was observed that the main reason for entry of young women in local politics was the support from the ward people. (ref. Table 4.3). Similarly most of the Hindu women panchas entered politics as the family members influenced them.
It was also observed that women from lower income group contested as they got the support from their ward people.

### TABLE 4.3
AGE AND REASON FOR ENTRY IN GRASSROOTS POLITICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(42.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(42.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46&amp; above</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(15.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(51.51%)</td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( A- I was interested, B- Family influenced me, C- Ward People requested me, D-Party asked me)

### TABLE 4.4
RELIGION AND REASON FOR ENTRY IN POLITICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(63.63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(36.36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(51.51%)</td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( A- I was interested, B- Family influenced me, C- Ward People requested me, D-Party asked me)

(Note: The women panchas from the sample were chosen by system of lots, as a result the Catholic respondents were 12 in number. Otherwise for total Bardez Taluka out of 90 women panchas there are 39 catholic women panchas)

### TABLE 4.5
INCOME AND REASON FOR ENTRY IN POLITICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income group</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 25000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(18.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26000-50000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(15.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51000-1 lakh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(27.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above one lakh</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(51.51%)</td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(39.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(51.51%)</td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( A- I was interested, B- Family influenced me, C- Ward People requested me, D-Party asked me)
TABLE 4.6
EDUCATION AND REASON FOR ENTRY IN POLITICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6.06%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(6.06%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6.06%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(6.06%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30.03%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(30.03%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(45.45%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(45.45%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9.09%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(9.09%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.03%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.03%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td>(51.51%)</td>
<td>(24.24%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A- I was interested, B- Family influenced me, C- Ward People requested me, D-Party asked me)

b) Are women proxies?

Interesting picture arose when the study looked into these women 'proxies'. Proxies here refer to women who had contested as the ward was now reserved, and all these years the male members from their family were contesting. There were four such cases in the sample. It was heartening to note that some of them have already been able to tow an independent line. Women Pancha from Assagao, contested elections because all this years her husband contested from the ward which was now reserved. She is S.S.C. pass and is working as U.D.C in a well known school in Mapusa. Now that she is elected she takes deep interest in the functioning of the Panchayat. So is in the case of pancha from Guirim. All this years her younger brother in law use to win from this ward. She has passed her S.S.C. and is teaching in school. She was highly aware of Panchayat functioning and of the various schemes of the Panchayat. Both of these women panchas agreed that it was the male family members who persuaded them to contest, and they did the campaigning for them, but now both of them were interested in grassroots politics. Another women pancha studied up to the primary level, contested as her brother in law could not contest as the ward was reserved. She said that she was dependent on him on matters related to the Panchayat. Yet she was vocal about how the Panchayat does not have sufficient finances to implement various schemes. She also indirectly hinted how the Sarpanch
was not keeping them informed about various schemes. She could not attend all the
meetings of the Panchayat as she runs a general stores shop in Mapusa. She was
enthusiastic to show how she has given water connections and put street lights in her
ward. A pancha from Parra contested as her husband could not contest as the ward
was reserved. They own a liquor shop. She was not able to answer anything as her
husband is doing all the paper work for her.

A look at the women panchas, who contested because their husband
Sarpanches wanted them to do so, showed that these women were more docile, not
willing to annoy their husbands. This is exactly where the fear of women as proxy
comes in. However the trends show that this is a transitional stage, which will
subsume as more and more educated and employed women will come in politics, and
this is not far as 24.2 percent said that they contested because they were really
interested in politics.

c) Role in decision making

It is interesting to study, how these women participate in decision-making.
Statistics revealed that for 21.2 percent, the decisions were made by the male family
members. This reflect the disparity between shadow and substance of female power.
It is necessary to bring about a qualitative change with women’s participation in
grassroots politics, rather than bring it down further with women simply joining as
puppets in this enterprise. 33.3 percent were influenced by the male members in the
family in decision-making. They were influenced by their husbands or by their
brother-in-laws. Thus it is necessary to look at two questions; (i) Do women want to
remain in a male dominated political set-up, or (ii) Do they really want to participate
in Panchayat functioning? However 45.4 percent answered that they took their
independent decisions. It is heartening to note that they can make a distinction
between the decision-making process and the ultimate decision making. In the
decision making process they took the help of their neighbours, friends and family
members, asked for more information and discussed the pros and cons on various
Panchayat related matters. The advise given helped them in making decisions.
However when they took the decisions they did what they felt was the right thing for
them to do. As some of them said that they did discuss the matter with the family
members, but the ultimate decisions with regard Panchayat matters were taken by
them (implying that it could not lie with anybody else). A positive trend emerged
which reflected that women from the age group of 25-35 are more likely to take independent decisions. The education they possess, and the confidence reposed in them by the villagers have been the major reasons for young women to take independent decisions. (refer Table 4.7) Also catholic women are better than Hindu panchas in making independent decisions. (refer Table 4.8)

TABLE 4.7
AGE AND DECISION MAKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(42.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(42.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 &amp; above</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(45.4%)</td>
<td>(33.3%)</td>
<td>(21.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A- on their own, B- influenced by family members, C- totally made by male family members)

TABLE 4.8
RELIGION AND DECISION MAKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(63.63%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(36.36%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(45.4%)</td>
<td>(33.3%)</td>
<td>(21.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A- on their own, B- influenced by family members, C- totally made by male family members)
TABLE 4.9
EDUCATION AND DECISION MAKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A- on their own, B- influenced by family members, C- totally made by male family members)

TABLE 4.10
ECONOMIC STATUS AND DECISION MAKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income group</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 25000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26000-50000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51000-1 lakh</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above one lakh</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A- on their own, B- influenced by family members, C- totally made by male family members)

d) Are they dominated by male panchas?

When asked about whether these women were dominated by men panchas, an interesting picture arose. 27.2 percent being Sarpanches and Deputy Sarpanches, they were not dominated. Similarly three of them were wives of the Sarpanches of their villages, thus the domination was not visible. 6.06 percent did not go for meeting at all. 9.09 percent said that they rarely spoke in the meeting. They preferred the informal ways, where they communicated their grievances to the Sarpanch after the formal meetings were over. Some felt timid to participate when the men made it
plain that they were not wanted. The writer had an opportunity to witness a Panchayat meeting at Marra, Siolim. There were four women panchas in a nine-members village Panchayat. Three had won from the reserved wards, while one had contested from the general ward. The latter was more articulate and vocal then the others. She insisted that men would like to dominate but women should be assertive enough. She insisted with the Sarpanch that she required two trucks of laterite stones for her ward. In the same Panchayat there was a pancha who went out of the meeting after every five minutes. She communicated to her husband, who was not allowed to attend the meeting but was waiting outside, the Panchayat proceedings and came back and spoke whatever her husband told her. When requested for an interview she refused. Similarly, when I went to interview the women panchas, who are wives of the Sarpanches of Soccoro, Sangolda and Nachinola, their husband Sarpanches offered to answer all the questions. However on insistence they let their wives to be interviewed. One of these women pancha, came with indifference and could hardly give any information. This reflects the cultural bias that exist in Goa. There are instances where the husband and other male family members are supportive towards their women in the family, and encourage them to participate in public life. This gives an optimistic picture of Goan society where the patriarchal hold is declining. However the above few examples of over-protectionism makes us aware of presence of patriarchy in its invisible form.

It was observed that young and elderly women felt less dominated from the male panchas. For young panchas, the possession of education has helped in resisting such domination while for the elderly women it is the age and experience over the years which has helped in asserting themselves. (refer table 4.11) Also Catholic women felt less dominated by the male Panchayat members. (refer table 4.12) However 48.4% of the women panchas said that they did speak in the meetings and expressed the needs of their areas. It was also observed that women panchas from the ruling panel were more vocal, and regular for the meeting than the others. Also it was observed that those who were employed were more articulate than the housewives. The sense of economic independence, the exposure and awareness have made these women more articulate. It was also felt that women who had won from unreserved seat were more assertive then the others. This was mainly because they were self motivated, and had contested because they were interested in grassroots politics. It was observed that Catholic women were more assertive than their Hindu counterparts.
### TABLE 4.11
**AGE AND DOMINATION BY MALE PANCHAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14 (42.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14 (42.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 &amp; above</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 (15.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9 (27.2%)</td>
<td>20 (60.6%)</td>
<td>4 (12.1%)</td>
<td>33 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 4.12
**RELIGION AND DOMINATION BY MALE PANCHAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21 (63.63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12 (36.36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9 (27.2%)</td>
<td>20 (60.6%)</td>
<td>4 (12.1%)</td>
<td>33 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 4.13
**ECONOMIC STATUS AND DOMINATION BY MALE PANCHAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 25000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 (18.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26000-50000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 (15.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51000-1 lakh</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9 (27.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above one lakh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13 (39.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9 (27.2%)</td>
<td>20 (60.6%)</td>
<td>4 (12.1%)</td>
<td>33 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 4.14
EDUCATION AND DOMINATION BY MALE PANCHAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27.2%)</td>
<td>(60.6%)</td>
<td>(12.1%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the 10 women members from Bardez Taluka who have won elections from the general category, seven come from Catholic religion. Due to Portuguese rule, which granted a large number of privileges to Catholic, there was tremendous impact in the Catholic way of living. It brought in progressive changes in the institution of family. The relations in Catholic family are more based on democracy and equality. This has given Catholic woman more freedom in areas outside family to exert herself and nourish her identity. On the other hand, Hindu family patronize and cherish the old authoritarian paternal set up. It becomes difficult for a Hindu women to break the umbilical cord of male domination.

A look at the relationship between the Panchayat officials and the women panchas it was found that they shared a cordial relationship. A few of them had grievances against the Secretary and the Talathi of the Panchayat. A finer observation emerged when the women who aggrieved said that the attitude of officials was biased towards women from ruling panel. It was also observed that many of them had contested and won for the first time. Being new entrants in politics, they required time to learn the grassroots politics.

e) Attendance at the meeting

The change is evident. There is growing sense of responsibility and assertion among the women panchas. 39.3 percent went regularly to the Panchayat meetings.
30.3 percent visited government offices for Panchayat work and 6.06 percent visited local M.L.A. with their problems. 50 percent of them went to Panchayat besides attending the Panchayat meetings. In Goa, men and women panchas are treated on equal footings and they sit together in the meetings. The phenomenon observed in other states, where women sit on one side and men on other, or women sit on floor and men on chairs, women observing purdah etc are not practiced in Goa.

**f) Profile of Women Sarpanches**

Study of women Sarpanches revealed interesting information. There are 10 women Sarpanches in Bardez Taluka as these posts are reserved. All the ten Sarpanches were interviewed. Six of these have studied up to S.S.C, while two have passed middle school, one is with primary education, and one of them is a lawyer. Two of them are from kshatriya varna, while seven are from Bahujan Samaj, while one of them refused to indicate her caste. Five of them were from the age group of 35 to 40, two were between 25 to 30 years, and three were above 45 years. Five were Catholic and five belonged to Hindu religion. It is necessary to note that seven of them did not come from a political family. Most of them came from middle class family. While one was poor, staying in a small kaccha house. A note of husband’s occupation revealed that three of them are working as clerks, one in government and two are in private service, one is a driver, one is working abroad, two of them run small businesses and one works in agriculture. Two of the women Sarpanches are widows. Thus the grassroots politics offers opportunity to common women to enter
politics, unlike state and national politics where women from elite background and from political family have a upper say. Three of them had political experience. Two of them had been elected for a previous term of the Panchayat, while one had contested earlier elections to the Panchayat in the general category, but could not win it. All these women are particular in attending the meetings of the Panchayat. They are aware of the procedures of the Panchayat. Except for the Sarpanch from Bastora, all others were able to assert themselves. The Bastora Sarpanch, with primary education, belongs to Bhandari Samaj. She is poor, works in the fields and is a tailor. It was her father’s link with the Maharastrawadi Gomantak Party, and the villagers which prompted her to contest elections. She declares her helplessness to understand the Panchayat proceedings and has to depend on other male members, and the Secretary of the Panchayat. However she opined that they were co-operative and helpful to her. Now that women have emerged as Sarpanches they are also involved in party politics. Many women found themselves subjected to politicking particularly by the political parties. Two of them openly declared that they were from the ‘Narvekar’s Panel’ (belonging to Congress party).

The writer had an opportunity to attend a meeting of Sarpanches of Bardez Taluka at the B.D.O. office, Mapusa. It was the meeting of ‘Building Construction Clearance Committee’ of Bardez Taluka. The Government of Goa has constituted this committee to bring in transparency and expediency in matters relating to grant of permissions for the constructions of Buildings. The meeting is chaired by B.D.O and its members are Sarpanches of the village Panchayats, Town Planner or her/his representative, Technical Officer from the P.W.D, Health Officer or her/his representative, and Assistant Engineer, Department of Electricity. For any construction in the village, the applicant has to send the copy of the plan and other required documents to all the above departments. On the meeting day, the representatives gives the N.O.C or rejection of the plan to the concerned Panchayat. This meeting is called twice a month. The Sarpanch has to place the applications which are recommended in this meeting before the next meeting of the Panchayat, and convey the decision of the Panchayat to applicant.

The meeting was attended by four women Sarpanches. They all were very assertive. They expressed their problems and gave suggestions. One of them had a

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33 As per the Order No. 30/3/DP-99 dated 21st April, 1999, Government of Goa.
genuine problem. The earlier Sarpanch in her village had laid down pipe-lines in the village some eight years back without filling any tender. Now, the present Sarpanch was ‘pressurised’ to fill in fresh tenders for the same pipe line and show that it is built now. The earlier Sarpanch asked her to give him Rs.15,000 which he had then spent in building this line. She told the B.D.O that she has refused to listen to such ‘nonsense’. She then approached the Dy. Collector with regard to some file that was pending with him. She complained that the files moved at a snail pace in the government. She also asked the representative of the Health Department as to why they were so particular about the construction cases, when the soak-pits in the State were over flowing and was an open invitation to malaria. The Arpora Sarpanch expressed her anger that none of her files was cleared. She questioned the representatives from the departments for the delay. When one of them told her that he was not the authority to answer her question, she responded and asked him ‘Why if he did not have the authority, did he attend the meeting’. The Anjuna Sarpanch told the concerned departments to send their N.O.C. to the concerned parties. She complained that such permissions led the villagers as well as the panchas in her Panchayat question her about the permissions granted. Thus Panchayat no longer exercise the control over deciding construction legality in its village. The Sarpanches read the replies that came from the various departments very carefully. One of the plans was rejected because it was that of a farmhouse, while the proposal that was put forward was for a Bungalow. The concerning woman Sarpanch then and there studied the whole plan. It was observed that the Secretaries of the Panchayats occupied the back seats. They were consulted only to know about some pending files or to get the full names of the parties involved. Thus the women Sarpanches were confident and knew exactly what they were working upon. They personally looked into each file of their Panchayat. They also raised queries about the files rejected.

They also discussed about the M.L.A’s promises to supply electricity connections to their Panchayats. They were very vocal that they does not get any allowance and they had to spend from their pockets in making visits or attending meetings. They refused to use Panchayat amount on the grounds that it was public money and that it would also create problem while auditing the finances of the Panchayat. They were clear that they required T.A./D.A or some salary, as they did not want to appropriate money through any ‘other’ means. They requested the B.D.O. to put forward their suggestion to the Directorate of Panchayat. The trends
indicate that women Sarpanches have been assertive, to a larger extent, in carrying out duties entrusted to them.

C) Influence of Woman's Entry in Politics on Quality of Her Life

It was interesting to study how women's entry in politics has influenced the quality of their lives. The study looked into three aspects:-

a) Challenges from the family front
b) Relief from domestic/economic activities by sharing the same
c) Challenges from men and community by way of assault on her character or body.

a) Challenges from the family front

Women play multiple and vital roles of housewives, mothers and care-givers. Family is considered as an integral part of the society. One of the strong argument put against the women's entry in politics is that it will disturb the harmony of homes, of family life and it may upset the existing pattern of behaviour in the family. The children may be ignored, the women may offend the elders, including their husbands. If males and females do not adapt themselves to the new situation, it will face tensions, and this old age institution may undergo a drastic change. Family is regarded as sacred institution in India, and women has been given greater responsibility of looking after the well being of it. In any given society women shoulder larger responsibilities of nurturing this institution. Therefore the argument put against women's entry in politics is that this will affect her other roles.

It was decided to test this hypothesis. In the survey twenty six of the total respondents were having children. Four of them have children below 5 years, while eight have children from 5 to 10 years age group. Seven of them have children from the age group of 10 to 15 years, while seven have children above 15 years. When asked whether they were able to devote time and attention to their homes as they did earlier, all answered positively. In fact, the membership of Panchayat have built in them a sense of self confidence. Many of them felt that their image was heightened in the minds of the family members. Now people visited them often, asked their help, neighbours respected them, and this elevated the respect the children have for their mothers. They realised that their mother was an important person. Though, being a Panchayat member, there is increase in work in form of attending the meetings,
visiting the ward or meeting ward people, but it is the quality time rather than quantity time devoted to the family that matters. Thus women’s needs, interests and concerns are not just those of women themselves, but reflect their primary role as mothers, wives and care-givers. Therefore, incorporating a women’s perspective in decision making should result in better decisions that more adequately reflect the needs and interests of children and families.

b) Relief from domestic/economic activities by sharing the same

When it came to sharing of household work, interesting points were noticed. 69.6 percent were nuclear families and 30.3 percent were joint families. 16.6 percent of them revealed that since their paper work was done by their husbands and they only put down their signature, it did not affect their household responsibilities. Also when they went for meetings they were accompanied by the male members of their family, usually their husbands or brother-in-laws. However 18.1 percent of them felt that it would be impossible for them to carry out their duties without their supportive family members. 16.6 percent conceded that their husbands not only encouraged them to take part in politics but also willingly shared the domestic responsibilities. Thus small works like cleaning, sweeping, making tea or dropping the children to school were no longer considered as women’s realm. Thus increasing participation of women in politics has enhanced their lobbying power over public affairs and that will in turn result in their power over private life too. The Sarpanch of Anjuna gave all the credit to her mother-in-law who not only managed all the household work but also took care of her grandson. She expressed that her mother-in-law was like her mother, and without her she would not have been able either to practice law or to carry out the work as Sarpanch.

c) Challenges from men and community by way of assault on her character or body

It has been observed that women’s entry in local politics have made them vulnerable and victims of violence. There are incidences of violence against women grassroots leaders in various states (as reported on p. 98) like rape, physical assault, verbal abuses, etc. These assaults are due to the reasons like:
They are usually attempted by men from privileged class or caste from the village. These people want to extract some benefits from the women panchas. However, when women refuses to listen to them or does not release some illegal benefits, they are made the victims of violence.

Violence can also be the result of caste rivalries, and a woman Sarpanch may be assaulted as to take revenge against people belonging to her caste. This is more so with regard to women belonging to OBC or Dalit caste.

A worst type of violence may erupt from within the family in the form of wife-beating. Sometimes, men from the family may become aggressive when they can no longer digest the idea of women becoming more powerful and respected by the villagers than them. Sometimes husbands also inflict harm to women as they can not tolerate the idea of their wife mixing with other men panchas and talking with village men, or staying away from home due to longer hours of work.

Women panchas may also have to be victim of abuses from the men panchas. The reasons are like reservation of post of Sarpanches for women, the refusal of women to listen to the dictates of men panchas, their refusal to change panels, or when women Sarpanches are not willing to release schemes or other such benefits to the relatives or friends of the men panchas.

The community at large also can be the source of violence, though it may exist in a more subtle form. There may be character assassination of women panchas as they have to work with other men panchas, government officials etc. The worst is when they are looked down by other women from their own village.

It was decided to test whether women panchas in Goa have to face such inhuman treatment. There are no reported incidences of any physical assault on women panchas, or any complaint of misbehavior of male panchas (except the Guirdorim Sarpanch who has been reported to assault a women staff working in the Panchayat). Yet some of the respondents did complain of the men panchas using double meaning language. Also some of them said that they were often looked down as they had won from reserved post, were new entrants and were not aware of real politics. They were often told that they ‘talked too much’ and they were rudely told to shut up. It was witnessed by the writer how even the secretary of the panchayat abused the women Sarpanch in English, because she did not understand English, is

34 ‘Guirdolim Sarpanch released on bail,’ (1999), The Navhind Times, 24 (February), p. 3.
illiterate, and is a migrant who has settled in Goa for last twenty years. One respondent was very vocal on this issue, where the male Sarpanch of the concerned Panchayat chose cheap method of character assassination when she refused to bow to his illegal demands. A new form of harassment of women panchas by men panchas has been uncovered. When the post of Sarpanch is reserved for woman, the men panchas form a panel not to allow any woman pancha to become the Sarpanch. Thus the post of Sarpanch of the Advalpal village Panchayat, in Bicholim taluka, which was reserved for woman candidate is still vacant since holding of the last Panchayat elections. This Panchayat consists of seven members, out of which two are women. Women panchas have also worked upon a strategy to stop men panchas from harassing them on the above ground. In some Panchayats where the post of Sarpanch is reserved for women, all the women panchas of that Panchayat have reached to an agreement to be the Sarpanch in rotation. Thus in Panchayat having three women members, each woman would hold the post of the Sarpanch for the term of one year and eight months.

Though there may be male domination in the Panchayat, and there may be some instances of character assassination, there are less chances of men inflicting any physical harm on the women panchas. Firstly, villages in Goa are small where people know each other, secondly the caste conflicts in these villages have never taken severe forms, thirdly and more importantly, women are educated and less likely to cow down to the pressures from men. Besides, survey clearly reflected that the male members from their family were strongly behind these women, which served as a check for other men to do any harm to them. However it was difficult to extract information as to whether within the family there were instances of violence, as no woman was willing to confine her personal matters. However the incidence which I have cited elsewhere, where a woman was forced to contest by her husband, when she was not at all willing to do so and her mother had expired few days back, can be categorized as mental assault which is more harming and painful than the visible bruises on the body.

However the overall picture shows that woman’s participation has altered her condition. In day-to-day existence she is not rendered powerless, whether on the domestic front or outside through the decision making process which takes place in

different spheres of life. She can assert her rights, right to work, her matrimoni
relationship, her basic rights as human being. She can actively participate in the
decision-making and can also influence the decisions in her favour. The women
panchas are getting more exposure and they are associated with many dignitaries. It
has given them not only power but prestige and respect too. It has given them
equality and freedom in shaping and sharing of power, respect for their life, work,
and thought. They have motivated the women of their area. Their status at home has
changed. Their friends in the village treat them well, and even look at them for some
help. This makes them feel good and important. This confidence has helped them in
voicing their concern about improving the village. Couple of them are bold enough
and have approached the local M.L.A with their problems. The social and cultural
barriers are reduced. It has given them an opportunity to exercise the public power in
a manner that they consider appropriate to change the power balance for democratic
change. They need opportunities for improving their condition, and men need to
appreciate their role better.

D) Has Women’s Entry in Politics Brought about Qualitative
Change in Local Administration?

There has long been heated debate in the feminist movement as to whether
women should be seen as essentially different from men or essentially similar. The
’sameness’ lobby argues that women and men are more or less a blank slate on which
gender identity is inscribed in the process of a lifetime of learning experiences. By
contrast, the ‘difference’ lobby proposes that women’s physical difference from men
results in a different psychology and different (and better) moral values. It is
claimed that female leaders would speed up the passage of social welfare legislation,
and enhance consumers protection. By virtue of their sex, they would act as a
cohesive force to bring out social change. Reformers believe that once women come
to power the entire political system would be transformed. Mahatma Gandhi wanted
women to enter public life as selfless, devoted social workers to undertake the crucial
task of social reconstruction. He wanted women to cleanse politics, to feminise it by

37 Ibid.
bringing in the spirit of selfless sacrifice rather than compete with men in power-grabbing.

It was therefore decided to analyze whether women's entry in grassroots politics have led to qualitative change in local administration. Besides the replies from the sample respondents, the data for this section was also collected through observation, talking to the ward people, and interviewing some men panchas. It was found that some women panchas have been involved in corrupt practices, though the reasons for involvement varied from person to person. Sometimes it was the result of more than one factor working together. The following observations were made in this regard:

- Some women members felt that now that they have assumed the office of power, they should also have equivalent economic status. They aspired for a good house, a fridge, T.V, sofa set, etc. Since the office of the pancha is non-remunerative, the way left to them was to extract money through illegal means.
- Some of the women panchas had spent a sizable sum of money during elections to cultivate support from their ward members. Now that they were elected, it was the harvest time for them. They had to recover the cost they had borne.
- One women pancha was bold enough when she said that she does not mind accepting bribes because people are willing to offer. People want their work to be done within a day or two, and they do not mind bribing the concern Panchayat members.
- An interesting finding came up when one woman pancha said that it was the desire for power that made women get involved in corrupt practices. When promised of anonymity, she elaborated her point by giving an example. She is in the ruling panel. Their Panchayat consist of seven members, and the ruling panel consist of five members. In a particular case an applicant approached the Sarpanch and asked him to issue him a license for construction of a house. The land on which he wanted to build the house was the *comunidade* land and was not converted (*Comunidades* lands are used for agricultural purpose, and if it is to be used for any other purpose, the conversion has to be sought through proper procedures). The applicant was told to go ahead with the construction work when he willingly offered the Sarpanch Rs. 50,000/-. This was shared by all five ruling members, thus each got Rs. 10,000/-. It was also observed that women
panchas who did not have an independent power base of their own became dependent on the male members who have been dominating politics for years.

- Low education and Lack of proper information may also result in women unknowingly getting trapped into mal practices. As one of the respondents said she was given some money by the Sarpanch who told her that the money was given to her by the government for the services she renders.

- It was also felt that the male members in the family often coaxed or even pressurised women to make money through illegal means. Women did not object probably because their well being in the family depended on the goodwill of men.

Thus there is a case where CID arrested red handed, Sarpanch of Honda, Ms Sita Rama Gawde, while accepting monetary gratification.\(^\text{38}\) There has been allegations against some of the women Sarpanches for granting licenses in illegal constructions. The Sarpanch of Anjuna was alleged for issuing license to a hotel project within 200 Mts. of hide tide line at Ojra beach.\(^\text{39}\) In the survey, one of the respondent’s husband, who is the Sarpanch of that village has number of corruption charges registered against him but she hasn’t raised her voice against it. Similarly in a years time, two of the women Sarpanches took to building their houses, cannot be considered as mere coincidence. In another survey conducted in Bardez Taluka, which covered 172 panchas in 25 villages, only 39 % felt that women would be more honest than men. While 8% felt that it would bring in less honesty, 42 % felt that it would make no difference.\(^\text{40}\)

- Some of the women panchas are also involved in other types of mal practices. They did not hesitate to change the panels when they knew that there were various perks together with the chances of becoming Sarpanch, the post being reserved for women. In fact many of them expressed unhappiness because there was lot of groupism and threats of ‘no confidence’ within the Panchayat. In a simultaneously conducted survey which scrutinized the local daily ‘The Navhind Times’ from June 1998 to Feb. 1999, there were large number of cases where there was no-confidence vote passed against the prevailing Sarpanches. There were eight cases


\(^{40}\) Survey conducted by the undergraduate students of Goa University, Political Science Department, as a part of their Project Curriculum in 1996, unpublished.
of women Sarpanches and Deputy-Sarpanches voted out of power in Goa. The reasons were that Sarpanch was not taking the members into confidence over the Panchayat work in the village, not initiating developmental projects, not equally distributing the government schemes, and encouraging illegal constructions in the village.

Another mal practice was followed by one woman pancha and it was brought to the notice of the writer by a man pancha from the same village Panchayat. This woman pancha who has been winning from the general category for last four terms, has evolved a strategy to win elections. She has got inserted a large list of names of migrant labourers in the voters list from her ward. These labourers are seasonal. During the time of elections whoever is available is paid and made to vote in anybody’s name. These cases of impersonalization have gone unnoticed! When this information was scrutinized it was found to be true.

However a ray of hope emerged when it was found that some of the women panches did protest against issues like corruption. In the Construction Committee meeting attended by the writer, all the four women Sarpanches who attended it, were vocal that they should get T.A/D.A or some salary, implying that they did not want to appropriate the Panchayat finances. A case is already cited elsewhere, where a woman Sarpanch refused to fill in fresh tender to lay water pipe lines which were actually laid eight years ago without filling any tender. She was told that she would not have to spent any amount on these pipe lines as they were already been built and were in good conditions and therefore whatever amount that was sanctioned by the government would be shared between the earlier Sarpanch and her. The woman Sarpanch was adamant and refused such illegal offer. Another women Sarpanch narrated how she was pressurized by so called ‘privileged’ person from the village to issue him a license to build a cow shed in the centre of the village. She refused to cow down to such pressures. Another women Sarpanch in a swift move removed the illegal fencing of an ‘established’ villager which was encroaching upon the public pathway.

Thus women cannot be considered as monolithic bloc and expected to behave in a same fashion. Various factors influence woman’s behaviour:

- The individual as a rational person, is competitive in his/her attempt to maximizes his/her gain. Thus the women may respond to public affairs as
individuals rather than as members of a special group with a distinctive set of interests.

- Women belong to variety of groups which hold different political opinions.
- Their outlooks are determined primarily by the socio-economic background of their families.
- Also as long as women are expected to follow the lead of their husbands and fathers in activities outside the home, it is hardly likely that they will act as a separate and autonomous segment.
- Also most of these women panchas are new entrants in politics. They lack an independent power base of their own. As a result they become dependent on the male members who have been dominating politics for years. Because of their own political survival, they too are likely to imitate the autocratic model of male panchas as they know that men like to retain control, and they preferred women who go down to the 'practical things of politics'.

Thus it is observed the cultural lag and the fear of the materialistic and affective aspects of life running parallel in the society do create a series of strains in the society. The mindset of the people has been conditioned and various factors like economic status, hunger for power, cut throat competition, have been responsible for this conditioning. A drastic change needs to be brought in, in the very functioning of the society. Values of integration, harmony, ahimsa, selflessness, have to be practiced by all and not merely preached. Women as well as men should enter politics with devotion and work towards social reconstruction.

E) Snapshot of Their Current and Potential Impact - Assessment of the Work Undertaken

There are many areas where women Panchayat functionaries have made a better contribution especially in such fields as primary education for girls, créches, wasteland development, provision of fuel and fodder, drinking water etc. They have implemented certain schemes like schemes under R.D.A, and Directorate of Women and Child Development. There are various schemes under IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) which provide for 30 per cent beneficiaries should be women. Similarly under TRYSEM there is a provision that over 33 per cent trainee should be women. The Jawarhar Rozgar Yojana has also provided that 30 per cent
beneficiaries should be women. Besides there are various schemes assisting women to improve the educational and nutritional standards of children.

It is interesting to note that these women have a manifesto of development items for the village. This included street lights, toilets, sewing machines for young girls, old age pension scheme, widow pension scheme, transport facilities, soak pits and drainage, organising health camps, development school playground, children parks etc. Their priorities have been different from men where the latter have been emphasizing on layout and making of new roads, construction of bridges, issuing or withholding licenses for buildings and constructions, leasing lands for hotels, factories, shops and kiosks, etc. The survey showed that the women felt that they must do something for their village. Many of them gave priority to solving the problem of water and street lights. They did communicate information on government schemes to the people. When asked about their work towards the gender cause, most of them answered that their Panchayats have started the tailoring classes and implemented widow pension scheme. However they were not able to give any information about how many women in their ward have benefited from this scheme. They complained of the red tape. They were articulate about problems like they were not taken on important committees, specially on Finance Committee and Vigilance Committee. Most of them were included only on the Garbage Committee. They complained about lack of transparency about the decisions. They also said that most of the funds which were reserved for women were utilized for construction purposes and building of roads. Also these women did not mobilize women on issues like prohibition, lotteries, matka, or protection of forests. In fact 15.1 percent of the women panchas have their own liquor shops. Only one respondent, from Calangute village Panchayat said that she tried to solve local conflicts and educate women of harmful effects of alcoholism. Another women pancha from Socorro village Panchayat, whose husband is Sarpanch of that village, was successful in persuading him in implementing number of schemes for women. She organised Mahila Mandal, started Anganwadi, implemented widow pension scheme, organised health camps specially on health and nutrition care for pregnant women. Another women Sarpanch from Moira, who was earlier an anganwadi worker, has been working for her ward. She visits the local M.L.A. with the problems, bombards the B.D.O. Office, and dare to go to the M.P. if need be. Joane Fernandes, village Sarpanch of a small island of Calvi in Aldona, has been able to establish her identity due to the amount of work
she has undertaken for the village. Riding a scooter, with a cap on the forehead, she visits her ward as often as possible. She has provided the widow pension scheme, given approximate hundred water connections, and has been insisting on the authorities to give a bigger pipe line of pure water to the village. She has been demanding for a small fly-over to connect their village to the Aldona Mapusa road, and she has regularised the ferryboat services. She forced the then local M.L.A. to visit the village which had been ignored for a long time. A woman pancha from Reis Magos got the drainage system laid for her ward. All these years, this problem was ignored which led to water sipping in their houses during monsoon. She was in the ruling panel when she did this work. However the then Sarpanch was voted out of power. Now she is in the opposition panel. She expressed the desire to work for the village, however she felt that being in the opposition panel was the biggest handicap in the process of getting work done. The woman Sarpanch from Assagao has build parapets, a crematorium shed and repaired the wells in the village. She has also taken the initiative to built toilets in the village under the GIA (Grant in Aid) from the State. Her Panchayat has conducted classes to teach needle work, food preserving, flower making etc. She has special interest in promoting education and is a Secretary of Assagao Union School. She has also been a staunch social worker. The woman Sarpanch of Anjuna has following schemes implemented through her Panchayat, which are also financed by the Panchayat itself.

- Financial Assistance to widow of Rs. 100/- per month.
- Medical assistance to the needy up to Rs. 1200/-
- Financial assistance to the needy students from the village.
- It has started a tailoring course for girls which is financed by the Gomantak Bhandari Samaj.

This Panchayat has sufficient finances as it gets lot of income due to tourism flourishing in this area. The Panchayat also has its own Paying Guest homes, where they charge Rs. 100/- per day. This has been a good source of finance for the Panchayat.

In spite of these achievements, women leaders felt that they were not able to do all what they had promised to their ward people. They also complained that lack of sufficient finances with the Panchayat has been a major problem.
Future Prospects

The trends shows that women have been able to assert themselves. They have started taking interest in their work. Women who had reluctantly entered politics are now showing greater political maturity and are aware of their role and responsibilities. Even though there are cases of women being only proxy, it will not take time for them to assert themselves as the procedures at the Panchayat level are simple. One cannot expect a miracle to happen immediately. It has to be kept in mind that reservation is not an end in itself but a means for women’s empowerment and development. Certain important observation made about the women panchas are as follows:

- It was observed that large number of women panchas came from the age group of 31-40 years.
- Though, large number of them are housewives, they have been able to blend household work with the Panchayat work.
- Women panchas in Goa are not proxies. A few of them though, are dependent on male members of the family, many of them have been able to tow a line for themselves.
- Catholic women are more assertive than the Hindus. This may be seen from the fact that from the 10 women who have won from general seats in Bardez taluka, seven are Catholic.
- Also women who have won from general category are more assertive than those who have won from reserved seats.
- There are qualitative changes that have come up in the lives of women panchas. The neighbours respect them, and the family members are co-operative. There are no cases of physical assault on women panchas in Goa.
- There are changes on developmental front. Women panchas have an agenda of developmental items like provision of water and electricity, laying drainage, emphasis on health and education etc.

Certain measures needs to be adopted for enabling women to play their role effectively. The major among them are four:

1. Imparting Training
2. Creating General Awareness
3. Setting up of All Women’s Panchayats.
4. Devolving more powers to Panchayats and cleansing Panchayat politics

1. **Imparting Training**

   Intensive training is necessary to orient and train women in the intricacies of the process of decision making and administration. So far training camps have been organised at Quepem, Panaji and Margao. The women members were guided about the new Panchayati Raj, various Government schemes, reservation policy and the active role to be played by them in Panchayat affairs. They were also guided on family welfare, malaria eradication, water sanitation and environment, health and child care etc. However this training has become just marginalized and low priority activity in the scheme of things. The women panchas from Bardez Taluka have attended only one such orientation programme. This training was for three days and was organized in Panaji. The women panchas expressed the need that there should be such training programmes at regular intervals which can assist them in better understanding of the Panchayat functioning. The B.D.O of Bardez Taluka complained that much of her time was consumed by the cases dealing with illegal constructions in the Taluka. Also there was a dearth of faculty for organizing training programmes for women. However the B.D.O has evolved her own strategies to motivate the women panchas which requires mention over here.

   - The B.D.O is accessible to women Panchas without any prior appointment. Thus they can approach her any time, drop into her office, express their doubts, grievances and seek advise. The B.D.O viewed that she being a woman had acted as a positive factor for building up a good rapport between her and the women panchas.

   - Some of the women panchas from Bardez are members of SHG (Self Help Groups). They organize their exhibitions and the B.D.O makes it a point to visit such exhibitions.

   - The B.D.O visits the Panchayats as often as possible.

   - The B.D.O also meet these panchas and discuss the matters when they come to attend the construction committee’s meeting, which is held twice a month.
It was observed that though the women panchas are assertive, the lack of knowledge on various aspects involved in Panchayat functioning is a major hurdle which demands intensive training.

Training must be imparted at four levels:

a) Training for prospective candidates
b) Training for elected members as well as officials
c) Intermittent refresher courses for the Panchayat functionaries
d) Training to women in general as they are going to elect their representatives

Training should consist of gender sensitization to those in power which will help to bring in attitudinal change in them. Political training should emphasize on aspects such as:

- Functions of Panchayat
- Constitutional provisions and the 73rd Amendment
- The role of panchas and Sarpanches
- The various Schemes implemented through the Panchayats
- Knowledge on various disciplines and technical subjects having bearing on development - agriculture, animal husbandry, rural industry, health etc.
- The ability to analyze and critique the system must be communicated.
- They should be trained to locate resources, and must be made aware of various sources of Panchayat finances.

Training should be also imparted to the administrative functionaries like the Secretary and the Talathi and men panchas as well, which will help to change the patriarchal orientation.

When training is imparted certain factors have to considered:

- The convenient time for women panchas. The training should be conducted on public holidays, so that the women do not carry the tension of the household work, and are not worried about their school going children.
- They should be paid cost of travelling and honoraria.
- The training has to be at regular intervals, and scheduled in advance.
- There has to be proper arrangement for the trainers. It should not be 'one day training where the trainer appears and disappears'. The trainer should build a rapport with the respondents and has to be an educator as well catalyst in the process of empowerment. She/he should have the knowledge of the areas, of
need potentials, resources, resource maps, and should be aware of national as well as state goals, plans and schemes. The Central Government has taken the initiative for training of trainers at different nodal organizations such as IIPA - Delhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration- Mussori, and NIRD - Hyderabad. Such intensive training will be of much assistance to the women panchas.

2. Creating General Awareness

Women in rural areas must be made aware of their rights - political, social and economic. They should realize the importance of economic independence. A large number of factors like orthodox conservative attitudes, economic structures, illiteracy, superstitions etc are the major obstacles in the progress of women. Women have to be empowered to break the shackles of these obstacles. The emphasis should be on both the processes, (i) removing this hurdles for better participation, and (ii) promoting greater participation to remove this hurdles. The two processes are not contradictory but are complementary to each other. Women should be made aware of their own self, personal needs, health and legal needs. They have to realize their capabilities and potentials. People in general should be made aware of futility of public-private dichotomy. The institutions like the NGOs, specially the women NGOs, the education centres, the State Commission for Women, the Centre for Women Studies-Goa University, the mass media can contribute tremendously in this area. The NGOs can identify women leaders and assist them in contesting elections. They should provide the women, platform where they can share their experiences. The mass media, audio, video as well as print, can be effective in creating the required consciousness among the people. There can also be a separate Mahila Sabha for adult women in the village as it would help in establishing better coordination among rural women. Such Sabhas would not be a substitute to Gram Sabha but a supplement to it.

3. Setting up of All Women’s Panchayats

There should be establishment of statutory all women’s Panchayats in Goa. Such establishment will result in certain advantages:
It will ensure greater participation by women in the political process. This will provide greater opportunity to more women to gain experience and confidence in managing their own affair.

Their enhanced legal status will have a direct impact on the general status of women in rural society and their increasing experience and responsibility may be expected to improve women's keenness and capacity for greater participation in the political process. It will serve as a springboard for participating in Zilla Panchayats, State Assembly and even at Parliament level.

The existence of such Panchayats will also ensure better coordination of various services and programmes for women at the level of implementation.

The all women's Panchayats have been success stories in other states. The networking and pooling of resources have been better among women. The all women's Panchayats, if successful in Goa, will change the perception of men who are pessimistic about women's role in such bodies.

Such establishment will be of immense help in understanding and analyzing the development priorities of women and making a comparative study of success of such Panchayats and co-Panchayats.

4. Devolving more powers to the Panchayat

The 73rd Amendment is an effort to ensure adequate powers and finances to the Panchayats to implement the economic development programme meant for the people. However the Act requires more teeth to make decentralization more effective. There is general grievance that the state government considers the Panchayats as mere instruments for carrying development objectives. There is a dire need that they are considered as autonomous units with political authority and administrative capacity to formulate their own skills and potentials. In the survey conducted, one of the women Sarpanches lamented that the position of the Sarpanch was degraded to only issuing water connections and income certificates. She felt that even the Secretary of the Panchayat enjoyed more powers than the Sarpanch. She said that if the situation did not change, she would not contest elections again.
One of the major problems faced by most of the Panchayats is inadequate finance. The functions of the Panchayats included in Schedule I of the Goa Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 comprise all the 29 items specified under Schedule XI of the Constitution of India. However, the resources of the Panchayat are too inadequate to carry out the work entrusted to it. The State Legislature enjoys the power to authorize the Panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate local taxes. The state government is neither willing to give more sources of finance to the Panchayat, nor to give aid to the Panchayat. In fact, the R.D.A (Rural Development Agency) has even stopped some of the schemes like TRYSEM implemented through the Panchayat from Jan. 1999. It is necessary that the Panchayats have sufficient finances or they will be 'grass' without 'root'. The Panchayats also suffer from various problems like corruption, lack of transparency, criminality, delays, antagonism between the administrative functionaries and the elected representatives, the political interference from M.L.A and M.P., etc. It is necessary to cleanse these bodies from such defects for their smooth functioning.

Thus, spirit of self-government cannot come with a stroke of law at the centre. It is slow, steady, and a conscious evolution from below. For women to be active participants in this process, what is required is external support for their action, and not external action for their development. The 73rd Amendment has acted as a centripetal force for women. It is heartening to note that one of the women panchas expressed her desire to contest for the legislative assembly, while two others are enthusiastic about contesting for the Zilla Panchayat which will be set up in the state soon. Thus, to conclude with Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA, 'Everywhere in the country we found the women were the most committed proponents of our future. So the Future of the Nation lies in the hands of these women.'

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