Chapter I

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Women constitute about half of India's population. Women have been an integral part of social structure not only because of their importance in the perpetuation of human race but also by virtue of their significant contribution to socio-economic progress, virtually. Despite this, women have been subjected to discrimination because of the gender-bias in the social outlook and social practices resulting in denial of equality of status and opportunities in social economic and political spheres.

The place of women in rural India in social, economic and political spheres is more depressed than that of their urban counterparts, although these women have been contributing significantly to the social and economic progress of country, their participation in development programmes have not been appreciated hence little place is there for women in development programmes and they are treated only as passive beneficiaries rather than active contributors. Politically speaking women remain largely inactive and indifferent due to various socio-economic constraints and also due to the absence of serious political and social motivation, political participation of women except for some election positions, as campaigners and as voters, have been very negligible. Therefore, women remain at the periphery of political and development issues.
Realizing such a disappointing state of women the Balwantrai Mehta (1957) and Ashok Mehta (1978) committee, considered the need for involving women in the political and developmental processes through Panchayat Raj institutions by means of co-option. This according to the said committees may provide a channel to integrate women into the developmental and political processes. Accordingly, women have been inducted into the Panchayat Raj Institutions in almost all the states in India. But their representation has been nominal and whoever was being inducted, mostly turned out to be passive members. The co-option was done only in letter and not in the spirit of getting women involved meaningfully in the political and development activities of the Panchayat Raj bodies, therefore, co-option did not bring any perceptible impact on women’s participation in Panchayat Raj institutions. As a result, women did not gain much from the political and development processes at grass root level.

Of late, it has been realized that unless women are involved in the development process, the overall socio-economic development of the country cannot be fully realized. Further, the participation of women in political sphere has been felt essential because they could only represent women’s opinions adequately and deal effectively with the problems affecting women and children. Further they can be effective link between women and the development functionaries and ensure as many development benefits as possible for women and children. Hence reservation of seats for women has been introduced in Panchayat Raj bodies in accordance with the constitutional provisions (73
Amendment). In this regard, Karnataka State became model to the other states by giving a relatively better statutory representation (25 percent) for women on its Panchayat Raj bodies by the Panchayat Raj Act of 1983 even before the recent constitutional amendment came into force. Thus women in Karnataka got adequate scope to participate effectively in the political and development processes on an equal plane with male members.

There has been very few studies Campbell (1960) and his associates conducted survey on women's participation in Panchayat Raj Institution note that female involvement in politics is lower than that of males. However, lower voting rates are not associated with weaker party identification or with the lack of a sense of civic obligation. But with a weak sense of political efficacy “Men are more likely than women to feel that they can cope with complexities of politics and to believe that their participation carries some weight are in the political process.

A.R.Gupta (1976) observed that, political status of women in a nation is reflected in the extent of freedom granted to women in regard to their participation in the political activity. But it has failed to make any profound impact on women's participation in the actual decision making process to analyse role of women in Panchayat Raj institutions. Hence the present study has been undertaken as an attempt to fill this void. This study has the aim to understand the role of women in Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayats, in the light of their Socio-economic background and political status.
Muzumdar (1979) reported that, the populations covered by these studies are generally from urban areas with a sprinkling of rural women. The general view is that women in India are showing signs of political awakening but that their progress is hindered by social handicaps such as illiteracy, cultural norms, domestic pressures, dependency on men, etc. By and large, the few women who have emerged significantly into political prominence are those who are "economically well off" and who belong to the upper strata of society.

Gabriele Dietrich (1984) points out that the politico-legal framework in India is much favourable as far as women's opportunities are concerned. However, women's participation in the parliamentary process does not contribute significantly to improve the position of women in society.

Some of the studies on leadership Ray and Jayalakshmi (1987) show that owing to reservation polity, women belonging to SCs and STs enjoyed access to Panchayat Raj Institutions. Yet, they didn’t occupy seats of power such as the positions of Pradhan in Mandal Panchayats and President in Zilla Panchayat as members of the dominant communities had wrested these positions by their sheer dominance in the rural society.

**BALWANTRAY MEHTA COMMITTEE (1957)**

Balwantray Mehta committee Report recommended inclusion of two women members in Panchayats in order to carry on the specific programmes for women and children. Those two women members
were to be co-opted in case they did not get themselves elected. Following the recommendation of the committee, women joined Panchayat Raj institutions in many states as co-opted members rather than as elected ones. But they were neither aware of their roles, their rights and duties, nor did they know much about the functioning of Panchayat Raj Institutions. They had virtually no practical experience to actively participate in the proceedings of Panchayat Raj Institutions or taking up issues or specific problems of women and children. Thus, their contribution in decision-making process has been inconspicuous.

ASHOK MEHTA COMMITTEE (1978)

It was in this context that the Ashok Mehta Committee was set up to examine the entire issue afresh. The committee's report reemphasized the importance of Panchayat Raj but in a significant departure from the Balwantray Mehta Committee's suggestions. Recommended two-tier structure-Zilla Parishad at the district level and Mandal Panchayat for groups of villages with a population of 20,000 to 30,000 below the taluk level with the Zilla Parishad as the key level. It also recommended that the district should be the first point for decentralization under popular supervision below the state level and favoured the official participation of political parties at all levels of Panchayat elections of the Ashok Mehta Committee at the central level. Three states West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka took steps to revitalize Panchayat Raj keeping the Zilla Parishad as the most important level and delegating substantial powers and functions to the Panchayat Raj Institutions.
PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM IN KARNATAKA

The representative Assembly was established in 1881. However the development of local bodies had engaged the attention of the princely Government from 1862 itself. In the initial period the emphasis was on urban local bodies. As a first step in local self-government institution the District committees were established in 1874 to help the officials in local administration the Draft local Boards Resolution was prepared in 1883, but it got approval only in 1892. These local institutions were purely nominated bodies dominated by officialdom with less of popular element in them.

In order to liberalise the power and functions of local bodies the Government constituted two committees, the first one was the local self-government committee presided by Sardar Kantaraj Urs established in February 1914 and the other committee was known as the local Finance committee formed on 15th May 1914 under the chairmanship of K.R. Srinivas Iyengar (M. Umapathy 1985, p-62) on the recommendations of these committees a new local Boards and village Panchayat Act, 1918 was passed by the Representative Assembly. This Act provided the scope for the creation of a new three-tier rural government with District Boards, taluk boards and village Panchayats for first time these local bodies were given independent powers functions and resources. These bodies were constituted by popular elections. In spite of its liberal provisions, the 1918 regulation was in existence for a short time, 1923. The Government of Mysore abolished taluk Boards in December, 1924, which went a long way in strengthening the District Boards.
Nevertheless in 1926, two separate legislations were enacted with regard to local self-government, these new regulations abolished all District Boards, taluk boards and village Panchayats (Ibid, pp-92-93), the new experiment of 1926 was in operation for a decade but in the light of the experience gained, the government wanted to tone up the village Panchayat administration. In order to achieve this objective, the Government introduced the concentrated propaganda scheme with a view to increase the scope of village Panchayat administration in 1936. The main objective of this scheme was to create model villages which would act as stimulus to other villages, this was expected to bring about rapid socio-economic development at the level of villages, this was followed in 1942 by the hobli drive scheme with a view to tone up rural development, like wise in year 1948 a comprehensive scheme known as the rural development scheme become operational. It consisted of full-fledged taluk, district and state level development committees were given specific powers in administering a new rural development fund. These committees were charged with the responsibility of all-round rural development.

In course of time these committees suffered from lack of independent resources, these was crippling official control over local bodies and lack of integral relationship among of the district boards, village Panchayat and other development committees. (Ibid, p-106-107). The government policy over the years was one of adlhocism and experimentation; they followed what could be called a trail and error
method policy. What was needed was a comprehensive policy of rural development and that was lacking to a large measure.

The dawn of independence brought new changes in local self-government institutions, the government of Mysore took a number of steps to reform local government institutions. Firstly, it appointed a committee under Venkatappa to study and reform local self-government institutions in 1949. Secondly, based on the recommendations of the Venkatappa committee, the village Panchayat and made operational.

The Venkatappa committee known as the committee for Integration and co-ordination of local bodies submitted its report in June, 1950, the committee’s recommendations were as follows (Ibid p-116-117)

1. It rejected the establishment of a taluk level body.
2. It recommended the establishment of statutory local bodies at village and district level only.
3. At the taluk level it recommended the establishment of a non-statutory co-ordination committee consisting of the chairman of village Panchayats of the concerned taluk, such a committee was to be presided over by an officer of the rank of Assistant commissioner for local bodies. This taluk organization was supposed to be only an advisory body.

The Government of Mysore having adopted the recommendations of the Venkatappa committee enacted the Mysore
village Panchayat and district board Act of 1952, this Act provided for the establishment of village Panchayats and district boards with a view to provide substance and strength to the local self-government institutions at the grass roots level. The 1952 Act created major problems for the people at the rural level and the government. Subsequently, it was amended to remove the lacuna inherent there in but eventually it was deemed fit to allow this Act to lapse. Thus the 1952 Act was in force for a short period. In due course, the Government under popular pressure established another committee in 1953 known as the local Boards Enquiry committee under the chairmanship of D.H. Chandrashekhariah, the main recommendations of the committee was as follows (Ibid pp-126-128)

1. The committee recommended for the continuation of taluk Boards along with Village Panchayats and District Boards.
2. The committee also suggested the establishment of taluk Boards to provide an organic link between Village Panchayats and District Boards.

The committee submitted its report on 28th August 1954. However by this time there was a popular up surge for the formation of a unified state of Karnataka on a linguistic basis, in view of the momentuous political changes. The government did not proceed further in this direction. The political climate in the country had undergone a major transformation and the government’s intention to come up with a comprehensive Act on rural local government institutions could not take a concrete shape.
PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN REORGANISED KARNATAKA STATE

The reorganized Karnataka state in heriter four district patterns of local self-government in operation in different parts of the state. The Bombay-Karnataka region was covered by the Bombay District local Boards Act of 1923 and Bombay village Panchayat Act of 1933 and Madras-Karnataka region had the Madras Boards Act of 1920 and the Madras village Panchayats Act of 1950, the Hyderabad-Karnataka region was under the Hyderabad District Board Act of 1956 and the Hyderabad village Panchayat Act 1951 and lastly Coorg was under the Coorg Panchayat Raj Act of 1956. The immediate necessity was to consolidate these different legislations and provide an uniform pattern for the whole state. At the same time the Government of India was thinking in terms of new people's institutions at the grass roots level. The Government of India's thinking resulted in the appointment of the Balwantray Mehta committee. Which recommended a three-tier of organically linked Panchayat Raj Institutions. This was indeed a major innovation and a new and bold experiment in the rural areas. In Karnataka the Mysore Village Panchayats and local Boards Act of 1959 was enacted and come into force on 21st December 1960 (the Karnataka village Panchayats and local Boards Act of 1959).

The 1959 Act provided for a three-tier Panchayat Raj system for Karnataka. At the village level the village Panchayat occupied the Prime place. The Taluk Development Board for the taluk become the middle rung of the three-tier Panchayat Raj Institutional structure. At the apex
level the District Development council was a body with wide powers at its command. The village panchayats and taluk Boards were popularly constituted keeping in view the requirements of the democratic process. They had both obligatory and discretionary powers in civic and developmental spheres respectively. They were given powers to mobilize their resources through various kinds of taxes, they were also provided grant-in-aid facilities for various kinds of activities; the District Development Council was mainly a nominated body with the Deputy Commissioner as the Chairman. It was dominated by bureaucratic functionaries since it was not popularly constituted democratic body. It was in essence a supervisory and guiding body. In 1962 the committee on Panchayat Raj was appointed by the Government of Karnataka under the chairmanship of Kondaji Basappa. This committee recommended for the replacement of the District Development Council with a directly elected powerful Zilla Parishad, establishment of Nyaya Panchayts and strengthening of Gram Sabha, Village Panchayats and taluk Boards (see Report of the committee on Panchayat Raj 1963). Based on the recommendations of Kondaji Basappa committee a bill entitled the Mysore Panchayti Raj Bill, (1964) was introduced in the state legislature. After the select committee stage this bill was allowed to lapse by the Government because of serious disagreement over it within the congress legislative party which was in power at that time.

The non-congress (Janata) Government under the Chief Ministership of Ramakrishna Hegde came to power in the year 1983.
The Janata Government took keen interest in reorganizing local self-government in a comprehensive manner. In this direction it first drafted the Bill entitled ‘The Karnataka Zilla Parishad’ Taluk Panchayat Samithis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayat Samithi bill 1983 and submitted the 10th day of July 1985 with the assent of the same to the Assembly and the public for public scrutiny security and opinion the same was passed in the President of India. The new Panchayat Raj Institutions were constituted through elections to these bodies in January 1987; the basic framework provided for in this Act is mainly derived from the Ashok Mehta committee recommendations (B.K. Chandrashekhar 1984 p-683). This Act provided for popularly elected Zilla Parishads at district level with wide ranging development functions and generous funding. For each taluk, a Taluk Panchayat Samithi is provided under this Act for co-ordinating and supervising the Mandal Panchayats within the taluk, the Mandal Panchayats body (under this Panchayat Raj model) also a popularly elected body made-up of the entire rural social strata. It gives representation to various sections of the rural polity. Further it has provision to invite women in the functioning of rural institutions. It is for this reason 25% of the seats are reserved for women, the weaker sections are provided adequate representation the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have 18% reservation and nominated members of the Backward classes on the basis of 2 members for each Mandal Panchayat the Mandal Panchayat has also been vested with wide-ranging developmental functions along with civic functions, the Grama-Sabha comprising all adult villagers is formed as a base for this whole edifice.
**73rd AMENDMENT**

The 73rd Amendment Act 1992 came into effect from the April 24, 1993. All states enacted legislation by 23rd April 1994. The Panchayats previously were a mere suggestions in the directive principles of state policy where as the 73rd Amendment resulted in the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) being conferred constitutional sanction. This means that all activities of PRIs as stipulated by the Act have now legal and continual status and any violation of this by anybody and at any time, would be punishable by law, constitutional status vide Article 243 of part IX of the constitution which come to in effect from April 24, 1993 made it mandatory for all states to promulgate their own new acts consequent to the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act or amend their old ones by April 1994.

All states have done so by keeping in view the Provisions of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act now. State Panchayat Raj acts have been constituted which incorporate a three-tier system of Panchayat Raj, consisting of Zilla Panchayats at the District level, Panchayat Samithis or Kshetra panchayats at the intermediate level and Gram Panchayats at the village level.

By virtue of the constitutional status bestowed upon the Panchayat Raj Institutions, it now has the potential to revolutionalize the way we have been seeing functioning of local self-governance. It is not only a system of participative self-governance but it ensures political empowerment to the poor marginalized and the oppressed,
which, traditionally in our country, have been the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and the women. These features activate the Panchayat Raj Institutions today to contribute to the process of development.

MAIN FEATURES OF THE 73rd AMENDMENT:

1. **Constitutional Status**: Constitutional status has been accorded to the Panchayat Raj Institutions, which becomes an inherent check on the state not to tamper with the life of these institutions as has been the case so far. This will facilitate their functioning as instruments of vibrant, viable and morally effective Governments with the capacity to learn, respond change and to better mobilize people's participation in the management of their own affairs. The "Gram Sabha" consisting of all eligible voters has been made the soul of the Panchayat Institutions to discuss and decide their own problems and to further people's participation in various development Programmes in a democratic way. This will foster maximum accountability and transparency of administration and public awareness.

2. **Uniform Structure**: The provision of a three-tier structure, expect in states with less than a population of twenty lack, will bring uniformity in the structure and pattern through out the country which, in time, will strengthen planning processes at the grass root level.

3. **Direct Election**: The provision for electing all members of Panchayats at every level directly by the people will also contribute
for of accelerating democratic processes at the grass root levels. Thus it will boost local people's initiative and enhance their involvement in the system through the electoral process.

4. Powers and Functions: The Panchayats have been empowered with such powers and authorities as are necessary to enable them to function as Institutions and of self-governance, such law may also contain Provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities to Panchayats for preparing plans and to implement schemes for economic development and social justice on various subjects including those in the XI schedule.

5. Period of Elections: Fixing the tenure of every Panchayat for a period of 5 years will ensure durability of and building up confidence in Panchayat Raj Institutions and the tendency for long suppressions and dissolution of these bodies on some ground or other will also be curbed.

6. Recognition of the need for Women and Members of the Scheduled Caste to contribute to Governance: Representation for women and SCs and STs is ensured through reservation of a minimum of 1/3rd of the total seats at all the three levels. The political empowerment of women by providing this reservation means that about 7 to 8 lack women will be participating in and contributing directly to the development process about 15 to 20 lack women will be office bearers at all levels of Panchayats. Similarly the other disadvantaged group of SCs and STs will get the opportunity to enter into the system through reservations in these bodies.
7. **Opportunity for the Emergence of new Leadership**: Allowing persons who have attained the age of 21 years to be eligible for contesting elections in Panchayat bodies will provide opportunities for the younger generation to participate actively in the development process and share power. A new leadership will emerge which will be more energetic and enthusiastic in the task of Nation building.

8. **Financial Matters**: The amendment has empowered Panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate such taxes, duties, tolls and fees as may be laid down by the state Government. To review the Financial Position of the Panchayats, the Act provides that the Governor of a state shall constitute a finance commission of the state and there is provision to provide measures needed to arrange the consolidated fund of a state to supplement the resource of the Panchayats in the state (Amendment of Article 280 of the constitution).

9. **Provisions of a State Election Commission and bar to interference or Courts in Electoral Matters**: The provision to vest powers relating to all matters relating to election Tribunal will solve much of the problems relating to it. Restricting interference of courts in electoral matters will reduce frequent litigation on flimsy grounds and will avoid unnecessary delay in the electoral process. This will ensure regular and fair elections to the Panchayat bodies.

**WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTION:**

Women's participation in Panchayat Raj has immediate as well as long-term implications in as much as their leadership in quantitative
term in just too much below their own potent reason why social evils affecting our women folk could not be banished despite some legislation is enacted against them. Numbers do matter in every walk of life. Even in some countries of South-East Asia like China, Thailand etc., there is no work in urban or rural areas which is the sole preserve of men folk. Both work together in unison with no discrimination of any sort and as such both are equally important to contribute their mite in governmental dispensation as also in political activities.

Hence, in the immediate future the rural women have to take up the cudgels and reap the full advantage of the opportunities now given to them to participate in rural affairs through the medium of Panchayat Raj Institutions. If they do not, their case would go by default for ever and it would then not lie in their mouth to say that they are being discriminated against. As far as knowledge or understanding of affairs is concerned both male and female population in rural areas stand on the same footing with just a marginal difference here and there. But in any case, where illiteracy amongst women is rampant they can take effective steps to spread school education for girls on a compulsory basis in the long-run surely female residents of villages will not be behind the males, Joshi (1994 20-21).

NEED FOR THE STUDY:

The present study is carried out for knowing the Role of Women in Panchayat Raj Institution. So in this connection, an attempt has been made to focus representation of women in Panchayat Raj Institution
further to know the political awareness, political participation of such women. This present study makes an attempt to understand the problems faced by the respondents (women) with reference to their participation in Panchayat Raj Institution.

The main intention of the present study is to understand women’s political participation in the present political scenario with the help decentralized political system.

Hence the study includes Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat members of Athani and Chikodi taluka of Belgaum district in Karnataka.