CHAPTER - I

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The development of any country depends on the maximum utilization of human beings without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, religion or sex. The country which keeps half of its human beings backward is not going to progress well. But the bitter reality is that women who constitute about half of the population of the world have been discriminated against socially, economically, and politically. How can any nation make a claim of development if fifty per cent of its population is lagging behind in every sphere of life. In this context, Abraham Lincoln aptly said that "No nation can move forward if it is half free and half slave". "Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing only, a nation will not march forward if the women are left behind" (Swami Vivekananda).

Stressing the same, Das (1997:378) points out that real development cannot take root if it bypasses women, who not only represent nearly half of the country's total population, but represent the very kernel around which societal reorientation takes place.
Further, Mehendale also said (2000: 22) a nation or society goes ahead only through the contribution of all its members. Push the women into the backyards, and the society itself will be dragged behind.

Thus it is important to note that, women are the vital human infrastructure and their empowerment-economic, educational, social and political- would encourage the pace of social development. Investing in women's "capabilities" and empowering them to achieve their "choices" and "opportunities" is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development (Pattanaik, 2000 :27).

In the view of Subramanyam (2002 :28 ) the pace of development in any civil society would be slow if women who constitute about 50 percent of the population are not facilitated to participate in the development process.

In this regard, one theme on which Gandhiji wrote repeatedly was the need to improve the status of women. Pandit Nehru also believed in improving the status of women and involving them in the process of development. Nehru once said "To awaken people it is the woman who must be awakened. Once she is on move the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves" ( Quoted in Laxmi Devi, 1988). " Women's
role in the various walks of life has contributed to the evolution of values which have counted for what may be described as all-round progress. Her status is the measuring-rod in assessing the standard of culture of any age” (Sengupta 1969: 6).

Asthana (1974: 1) also supports this view when she says, “The position of women in society is the true index of its cultural and spiritual attainment”. Status of women is the best indicator of a nation’s progress (Azim, 1997: 1).

Even though most of the scholars considered the importance of woman’s role in the overall development of a country, no society so far has treated women on par with men. In all the societies women have been given secondary status in almost all fields of social life. As the Human Development Report of UNDP (1995: 29) mentions, in no society today do women enjoy the same opportunities as men. Women still constitute 70% of the world’s poor and two-thirds of the world’s illiterates. They occupy only 14% of managerial and administrative jobs, 10% of parliamentary seats and 6% of cabinet positions. In many legal systems, they are still unequal. They often work longer hours than men, but much of their work remains unvalued, unrecognised and unappreciated. And the threat of violence stalks their lives from the cradle to the grave (ibid: iii).
Dreze and Sen (1995:140) also remarked that "Inequality between men and women is one of the most crucial disparities in many societies, and this is particularly so in India". They further regard that in much of the country, women tend to be quite badly in relative terms compared with men, even within the same families. This is reflected not only in such matters as education and opportunity to develop talents, but also in the more elementary fields of nutrition, health, and survival.

Unfortunately due to the centuries of ignorance and conservatism, Indian society has ignored the role that woman can play in society.

It is very strange that women who are contributing effectively in the growth and development of nations, sharing variety of responsibilities, playing a vital role in socialization of their children are being discriminated at every level. There is gender disparity in respect of education, employment, nutrition and decision making power (Siddiqi, 1999:39).

Unless the status and role of women is improved, the country will lag behind in almost all spheres of social life. Without adequately investing and developing the capabilities of women and encouraging the empowerment of women, no country can achieve its potential.
However, several question arises in our mind, when we discuss the status of women and its importance. Why even today do women enjoy low status in most of the spheres of social life? What are the reasons for their inferior status? What are the measures taken to enhance the status of women?

In this context, Seth (2001:16) opined that the social, economic and political status of the Indian woman is governed by her past. Therefore a glimpse into the woman’s status in the past would be helpful to understand the present status and empowerment of woman.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PAST

Since times immemorial, in almost all societies of the world, woman has been the victim of male domination and oppression and has never been considered to equal of man. Many scholars, for example- Bonard (1962), Murray (1949), Hitti (1966), Stobart (1925) - were of the view that women's position in the past was very low. Women had been subjected to discrimination, harassment and exploitation. For example in ancient Greece, women were regarded as sub-human creatures. According to Gustav Leban, the Greeks generally regarded woman as inferior creature. If a woman gave birth to a child illegitimately, they used to put her to
death (cited in Maududi, 1974:4). Dickinson (1947) also shares the same view.

The status of women in ancient Rome was inferior and they were discriminated against in many spheres of social life. *Encyclopedia Britannica* summarised the legal status to woman in Roman civilization as follows. "In Roman law a woman was even in historic times completely dependent. A woman could not exercise any civil or public office ....... she could not adopt or be adopted or make will or contract" (Quoted by Shams, 1991:6). Similar is the story of women in Ancient Athens, Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Arabia and other countries. Menon (1981:16) states that "through-out the middle ages and a major part of early modern period, Europe continued to be dominated by men". Women in Ancient Arabia virtually had no legal status. They were sold into marriage by their guardians for a price paid to the guardian ....... " (Coulson and Hinchliffe, 1978:37).

However, when we analyse her situation in the earliest Indian historic phase, we find that in the Vedic age woman had perhaps the most honoured position in the contemporary world (Seth, 2001:16). The woman enjoyed full freedom for her spiritual progress and intellectual development.
References are available in the Vedic literature of a ritual that ensures the birth of a scholarly daughter. Daughters like sons, were initiated into Vedic studies and had to lead a life of studentship (Brahmacharya) devoted to learning, self-control and discipline. Many women rose to become philosophers, well-versed in the sacred texts (Mantradrastin), poetess and teachers and participated in scholarly debates. Some of them composed the hymns of Rig Veda. In the Upanishadic period, some remained unmarried for a life-long in pursuit of knowledge and were known as Brahmavadini. This speaks that in so far as education was concerned, the position of woman was high. She displayed temerity and talent in participating in metaphysical discussions like man and with man, and practiced penances. This reflects inter alia her better social life, the height of intellectual attainment, and the pursuance of the academic career in the early Vedic period (Upadhyay and Pandey, 1990 : 4-5).

Being grown up and educated, the Vedic women were married at a mature age and had a voice in the selection of their life partners. The solemn affirmations and promises made by the bride and bridegroom to each other during the course of marriage ceremony reflected the freedom for women and monogamy. A wife was the husband’s companion in weal and woe, mistress of the household, and partner in all activities-temporal
or spiritual (Shastri, 1960: 20). The woman was free to attend and visit
g public places and social gatherings. She actively participated in the
production of bows, arrows, clothes and other goods of public utility. The
woman was considered as an equal sharer with man, of the responsibilities
and duties in home (Maxmuller, 1940).

However, with sudden changes in the political, social and economic
pattern of the country, the position and status of women started gradually
deteriorating mainly during the post-Vedic period. The concessional and
religious parity was denied to women and re-marriage of widows was
forbidden to those of high strata families. Gradually, changed social system
also deprived them in availing the opportunities of education, participation
in outdoor social and cultural activities. Discrimination against women
also started in the distribution of parental property and wealth, though
they had equal rights in the property of their father in the absence of any
son in the family. Again, with the emergence of some hard-core priests in
social and cultural matters the women had not only started receiving bad
treatment but they were denied the rights to the property of their father
and husband (Sahai, 1992). A widow's right of property was also not
accepted. However, the women had the sole right to the property, which
they received at the time of marriage from their parents, but they were not
given any rights over the spending of this wealth and property (Mehta, 2002). Orther (1974) pointed out that the women were everywhere devaluated in relation to men and such devaluation was linked to an universal association of women with inferior nature in contrast to the association of men with superior culture.

During the medieval period the women were deprived of different social and economic rights and were brought out under the overall control of their male family members. They became the victims of various social evils such as Sati Pratha, Child marriage, Purdhah Pratha, Prostitution, girl killings etc. Discrimination against the participation of women, particularly among higher castes, in social functions and economic activities had reached an alarming stage. Therefore, the economic dependency of women on their father and brother increased largely. This was the period during 712 A.D. when Turks entered in India. The indigenous socio-economic structure started adversely affecting and women were prevented from availing the opportunities of education, participating in economic activities and realising their property rights. This further strengthened the economic and survival dependency of women over the men (Mehta, 2002).
During the Muslim period many evil social customs and practices such as keeping women in seclusion, *Purdah* system and to keep women out of the site of Muslims traitors was also more deeply strengthened. A clear cut division of women according to caste and socio-economic status came into existence with developing of *Purdah* system as a custom for higher classes. The low caste women who did not observe *Purdah*, had to expose themselves before the exterior hazard of the society. Also the evil custom of early marriage started for both Hindu as well as Muslim community girls (Upadhyay and Pandey, 1990).

Thus, the position of women which was seen very honoured in the existing social and cultural system during the period of Vedic had steadily declined in the initial period of post Vedic and after with the appearance of foreign rulers in India, particularly Mugals. They became the victims of various social evils and treated very badly in every field of social life.

However, during the Middle Ages-thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, women expected little hope about the possibility of auspicious changes in their socio-economic status, when the saints in different parts of India had organised a movement against the unjust social systems which were practiced by the Muslims over the women. The movement lay
stress on providing uniformity between man and man, and between man and woman in particular matters. With the effective participation of people of different castes and religions the movement got considerable popularity all over the country. But due to the rise of asceticism, the movement lost its popularity and injustice reigned again.

Further, during the early period of the British rule in India the women were also denied the benefits of education, and were brought out under the authorisation of atmosphere having no opportunities to develop their natural capabilities, became helpless, illiterate, narrow-minded and peevish (Altekar, 1953). Similarly, Shastry (1959) pointed out that during this period the women were still forced to child marriage, the exposure to female children by throwing them at the junction of the Ganga and Sea, and women had to follow the Sati Rule. Even the poorly developed social and cultural elements were restricting the high caste women to participate in their family business and agricultural activities in rural areas. They were restricted to perform only household-related indoor activities such as cooking food, washing clothes and to look after their children, old family members and animals. The condition of widows was very poor. They were restricted to participate in social functions and ceremonies. Even in a situation of non-availability of any earning male member in the family,
they were lacking the opportunity to engage with any economic activity and to earn for their livings. The widows were still deprived of property rights throughout the British rule. In fact the British Government had introduced an important Act in 1937 providing the property rights to widows over the property of their husband. But the overall prevailing social system and conservative religious outlook of people during the British rule has always been biased against women and favoured men in availing certain facilities and opportunities. As a result, to a certain extent the men were also responsible in deteriorating the socio-economic status of women. All social evils and cultural backwardness developed during the post Vedic period against women were later strengthened during the British rule in India which had further deteriorated the socio-economic status and original positions of women (Sengupta, 1960).

However, the nineteenth century was to be a watershed for women's history. There were both political and social movements which had an impact on their situation (Seth, 2001 : 38). The major significant event that had far-reaching impact on the women's cause was the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885. The Congress drew a certain number of women into the vortex of the country's political life (Upadhyay and Pandey, 1990 : 32).
The national movement brought women from their homes to face lathis and bullets and gave them not only a consciousness of their own strength but a new vision of their true place in society. This has several implications for women. First, in the wake of national movement, it became easier for women to leave their homes to involve in the national cause as the movement was supported by their husbands and guardians. Secondly, women themselves became aware of their capacity for work, suffering, and leadership and organised themselves to fight for their due place both in the home and in the society. Thirdly, the nationalist movement further provided a suitable forum for women to assess their own work which began in the earlier part of the century with the creation of several women's organisations (ibid : 35).

But, in the twentieth century, the voices of women rose with the demand to ensure equal sharing with men in both private and public spheres of life. Thus, the women's movement was the expression of the instinctive desire to rise to full liberty of sour, to the fullest development as human beings (Kaur, 1946).

EFFORTS DURING POST-INDEPENDENCE

After Independence, the Government of India has taken numerous measures and made honest endeavours to enhance the status of women
and establish gender equality. The constitutional obligations as well as different plans, programmes and policies have laid emphasis on women empowerment in order to bring them to the mainstream of development (Pattanaik, 2000: 24). The Constitution of India guaranteed both rights and privileges to women through Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles. Article 14 confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc., Article 15 (3) makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women. Similarly, Article 39 (a) mentions that the State shall direct its policy towards securing for both men and women, equally, the right to a means of livelihood, Article 39 (c) ensures equal pay for equal work. Article 42 directs the state to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Above all, the Constitution imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen through Article 51 (A) (e) to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Das, 1997: 378).

In order to safeguard the various Constitutional rights, the State has enacted many women-specific and women-related legislations—such as the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 as
amended in 1976, The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 as amended and renamed in 1986. An amendment brought in 1984 to the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 made women's subjection to cruelty a cognisable offence. The second amendment brought in 1986 makes the husband or in-laws punishable, if a woman commits suicide within seven years of her marriage and it has been proved that she has been subjected to cruelty. Also, a new criminal offence of 'Dowry Death' has been incorporated in the Indian Penal Code. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976 raises the age for marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and that of a boy to 21 years and makes offences under this Act cognisable. The Factories Act of 1948 (amended in 1976) provides for establishment of a creche where 30 women are employed (including casual and contract labourers). The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 legalises abortion by qualified professional on humanitarian or medical grounds. Amendments to Criminal law 1983 provide for a punishment of seven years in ordinary cases of rape and ten years for custodial rape cases. The maximum punishment may go upto life imprisonment. The enactments of (prevention) Act, 1987 have been passed to protect the dignity of women and prevent violence against them as well as their exploitation. The National Commission for Women Act, 1990 was passed to set up the
National commission for Women (NCW), a national apex statutory body to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women and recommend remedial legislation (ibid : 378-379).

Further, in view of providing a concrete and actual shape to the initiatives and measures underlined in the constitutional provisions for social and economic upliftment of women, the economic development planning introduced in 1951. This also initiated several schemes and programmes for the development and improving the socio-economic status of women. Since the very beginning of the introduction of First Five Plan in India greater emphasis has also been provided towards the expansion of various social services, such as the facilities of health, education and certain basic amenities of life at accessible distances for the people living in different backward and remote areas, with the expectations that different communities and groups of people would be in a position to avail these facilities at equitable manner (Mehta, 2002 : 8).

Further, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) was a watershed for women's development, as for the first time a separate chapter on women and development was included in the Plan document. It reviewed the status and situation of women in general and came to the conclusion that in spite of legal and constitutional guarantees, women had lagged behind
than men in almost all sectors. It stressed that the main strategy for
women’s development was three-fold-education, employment and health
(Seth, 2001: 61-62). In the Seventh Plan (1985-90) the developmental
programmes for women continued with the major objective of raising their
economic and social status to bring them into the mainstream of national
development. A significant step in this direction was to identify/promote
the ‘beneficiary-oriented programmes’ for women in different
developmental sectors which extend direct benefits to women (Das, 1997
: 379).

OUTCOME OF THE PAST EFFORTS

Various development plans, programmes and measures for
enhancing the socio-economic status of women have certainly benefited
the women. However, these efforts have not uniformly benefited to all the
women in India. The participation of rural women in getting different
opportunities such as education, better health facilities, better occupations
and political activities has been noticed as lower compared to urban
women.

It is against this backdrop, to ensure that they get their rightful share
in the development and rightful role in the society in the present socio-
economic and political milieu of the country, our policy makers have decided to assign positive roles to women in PRIs. Hence, the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) proclaimed as the vehicle of socio-economic transformations in rural India (Paricha, 2002: 6).

In fact, Article 40 in part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) of the Constitution states that the State shall take steps to organise Village Panchayats and endow them with powers and authority necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. The emergence of Panchayat Raj Institutions offers a unique and remarkable opportunity to empower local communities to accomplish major goals set out in the Constitution of India, and to demonstrate the power of democracy. Successive governments have endeavoured to streamline Panchayat Raj institutions and several committees have gone into this subject in detail but at last Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of Gram swaraja is realised with the adoption of the New Panchayat Raj Act Known as the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 (Jeyapal and Dravidamani, 1997: 29-30).

One of the salient features of the New Panchayat Raj Act 1992 is the Reservation of seats for women. Article 243-D says, “Not less than one-
third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. As a result of this, women have been brought to the center-stage in the nation’s efforts to strengthen democratic institutions at the grassroot levels. About 0.8 million women have emerged as leaders/decision-makers at grassroot levels and entered into public life through the existing 0.23 million local bodies all over the country (Das, 1997: 392).

However, a few social scientists, academics and administrators raised doubts about the effective participation of women in the panchayat Raj institutions and also raised some questions such as, Will this statutory provision really help in empowering women in a meaningful way? Would they be able to take part effectively in the decision-making process at the Panchayat level where various social and economic constraints operate? How do women overcome these constraints? Do they receive the necessary co-operation from the people? How do they deal with indifferent officials and disobedient panchayat staff?
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While making a survey of the literature on Panchayat Raj institutions in India a researcher will find extensive material on different aspects of the subject. So much work has been done and is being done. Most of the literature on women in PRIs is available in the form of articles and write-ups in leading Indian journals, periodicals etc. Scientific research works on women in PRIs are scanty.


However, most of these articles and write-ups throw light on only the structure and evolution of PRIs in India, various committees’ reports and their timely recommendations regarding the enhancement of the participation of women in these institutions. These articles also highlight the various constitutional provisions which ensure the representation of women in PR institutions either as members or as functionaries without covering specific research study in particular area.

So, let us analyse some of the specific research studies on women in Panchayat Raj institutions which have been conducted in particular areas.

Hazel D’ Lima (1983) conducted a study in Maharashtra on the role of women in PRIs, particularly in local bodies of Maharashtra. The study covers 4 divisions i.e., Vidarbha, Marathwada, Pune and Bombay. Priority has been given to the role of women in the upper tiers namely, Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti. Her study reveals the social emergence of women in the country, a movement which follows the ebb and flow of socio-political events, socio-economic and political background of women
members in the Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads, social outlook and participatory pattern of women members. However, D'Lima has studied only the social background, social awareness and outlook of women members.

C. K. Shyamala and Pinjar (2000) made an attempt to study the socio-economic profile of women members of Zilla Panchayats in Karnataka. Data for this study were collected from 250 women Zilla Panchayat members belonging to all sections of community from all districts (20) of Karnataka who came to the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore for training during 1995-96. The study reveals that the younger generation has shown keen interest in participating in local institutions of governance. This study also reveals that a majority of women members are inexperienced and are not exposed to politics.

Jeyapal and Dravidamani (1997) studied the newly elected women Panchayat Presidents in Lalgudi Panchayat Union, Tiruchirapalli Perumbidugu District, Tamil Nadu. But their study sample covers very small proportion i.e. only 15 women Panchayat Presidents who are elected under reservation category. It reveals that most of the women Panchayat
Presidents do not have previous experience in politics and have only low level awareness of Panchayat Raj system and depend upon their husbands or others for planning and executing the Panchayat Raj activities. In order to accomplish the main goal of one-third reservation for women in Panchayat Raj, the authors suggested that there was need to provide proper education and intensive training to the newly elected women Panchayat Presidents at least for a period of one month which would help them in independent and proper execution of Panchayat activities.

Pattaniak (1996) conducted the study in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh to assess the relationship between women political participation and their attitude towards village development. This study reveals that the women political participation at the village level has broadend their attitude towards various developmental activities and programmes. The author concluded that the 73rd constitutional amendment bill was one of the great "Political Revolutions", in the country. With adequate training and confidence building, women can prove to be effective co-partner of development along with men.

The study by Gokilvani (1997) is an attempt to analyse the present status of women's entry into governance at the grassroot level consequent
on reservation of one third of the seats for women. The findings are based on the coverage of a very small sample of 19 participants, elected recently in PMT District, Karaikudi. The study reveals that over three-fourth of the elected women were under 40 years of age and entered into the arena without any previous exposure to public life/activities. While emphasizing the effective achievements of the elected representatives, the study points out that politicians are the major hurdle to their active involvement in public affairs and activities.

Singh and Malik (1998) in their study made an attempt to evaluate whether the 73rd Constitutional Amendment really enhanced the participation of women. For this, they conducted a study in the ten panchayats of Kurukshetra district of Haryana. The study sample covers all the ten panchayat women members. It reveals that, the affairs of panchayat have been left to male members. Women's participation in the PRIs has largely remained confined to casting their votes or to be co-opted as the members of the PRIs. It also reveals that women members are not properly aware of their rights and responsibilities in the PRIs, nor do they possess enough knowledge about their surroundings. This study also points out the factors that hinders the non-participation of women members and gives suggestions to enhance the participation of women members.
Gowda and Dhadave's (1999) study gives us vital information on the socio-economic background of women leaders of Mandal Panchayats in three selected taluks of the Bangalore Rural District. The study sample covers a large proportion i.e., 250 women leaders. 130 members from the developed taluks (Nelamangala and Doddaballapura) and 120 members from the backward taluk (Kanakapura). The study findings indicate that a large number of leaders are drawn from numerically dominant intermediate castes and families cultivating their own lands. Contrary to the popular notion that women panchayat leaders are generally drawn from families with a political clout, the study under reference found that not even a single respondent's family had a history of socio-political participation. It also indicates that the socio-economic background of women leaders of the developed taluk was relatively better than those in the backward taluks.

A study conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences (1992) between 1987 and 1990 of the women elected representatives to Karnataka Panchayat Raj Institutions gives an insight into women's present position in the Panchayats as elected members and the possibilities this holds for the future. The study also gives an insight into the nature of their participation, and their leadership role in society.
The findings of this study show that women have social handicaps of various kinds in functioning effectively but with experience their effectiveness improves. Moreover, as more and more regular elections take place, the independence of women will increase, they will not be depending on their male family members for support.

Vyasulu and Vyasulu (1999) in their study discuss the structure of Panchayat Raj system in Karnataka and the experiences of women in it. Their study identities the barriers or impediments in the full participation of women in the political process. This study reveals that women in Karnataka have gained valuable political experience. Between the two rounds of (different) local government systems, i.e., after the enactment of 73rd Amendment Act thousands have stood for elections. Hundreds have held elective office because of reservations of important positions. Authors concluded that for fundamental changes in society, much more than PRIs are required, but that does not mean PRIs are not important. If gender justice is to become the norm, much more will be needed and it will take time.

Mehta (2002) in his study made an attempt to examine various issues related to the implementation pattern of reservation policy and its
awareness among rural women in the selected Block Panchayats and Village Panchayats of districts Gorakhpur and Saharanpur of Uttar Pradesh.

His study revealed that the reservation policy which was introduced for maximizing the participation of women in the Panchayat Raj has been well implemented. A significant proportion of members (both Pradhans as well as members) were illiterates, lacking social reform outlook and leadership qualities. They were hardly taking any interest in participating in the activities of Village Panchayats and Block Panchayats and in initiating any developmental programmes and welfare activities in the concerned Village Panchayats.

A study conducted by Manikyamba (1989) is an examination of the working of Panchayat Raj and the role of women as beneficiaries and benefactor in the socio-economic and political process of development. The study revealed that education and participation are inter-related. Economic status gives a sense of confidence and encouragement to participate. Caste plays an important role in selecting members. The study covers a long period i.e., from 1956 to 1989, leaving many other important researchable aspects untouched.
Stephen and Sekaran (2001) in their study analysed the impact of women's reservation in PRIs in Karnataka. According to them, though Karnataka has been the pioneering State to introduce reservation for women much prior to the 73rd Amendment, the women members remain in the Panchayats as sheep and lambs without the minimum co-operation and external support needed to carry out their political responsibilities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women empowerment is emerging as one of the major challenges in the area of human development at the national and international level. Discrimination against women has been identified as one of the most severe forms of institutionalized deprivation. Various programmes and action plans have been undertaken to combat these kinds of institutionalised deprivations. The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 A.D.), the National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000 A. D.), with a substantial focus on the adolescent girl and the National Nutrition Policy (1993) to improve the nutritional status of the women and children, are some of the key initiatives taken by the Government of India in this direction.
Following these programmes, the next step is to enhance the participation of women in the decision making process itself. As they constitute about half the population, participation of women must be an integral part of the social process, which would strengthen the quality of civic life. It is significant to note that decentralization has been recognised as a means to ensure democratic functioning and decision-making. Therefore in the country like India, with the bulk of its population still living in rural areas, empowerment of women through Panchayat Raj assumes importance. In this context the recent Constitutional Amendment prescribing a structured form of decentralised governance and decision-making rightly emphasizes statutory participation of women in the grass root level organisation.

However, leading to Women’s Empowerment in the social structure in India has never been given considerable opportunities in this direction. Any how in this positive aspect many important works have added to our knowledge. But it is important to note that very little interest has been shown in issues pertaining to Panchayat Raj and Women’s Empowerment specially in backward and rural areas. Even though panchayat raj is a political issue, women participation in political life depends on social
aspects/factors like education, family background, parents/husbands attitude, and the like. A sociological study of women’s political participation is very much needed. Why empowerment is required for women? What is the real purpose of 73rd Constitutional Amendment? To what extent does participation in grassroots level help women to achieve empowerment? What are the constraints they had to face? What is the general attitude of society towards women’s political participation? Keeping these questions in view an attempt has been made to study the Panchayat Raj and the Empowerment of Women in political and social aspect as a whole.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To know the socio-economic and political conditions of women in panchayat raj institutions.

2. To examine the level of political participation of women representatives.

3. To identify the constraints in the effective political participation of women representatives.
4. To analyse the role transformation and empowerment at different levels as a result of political leadership in grassroots political institution.

5. To suggest measures for the active participation and strengthen the empowerment of women.

PROFILE OF THE SETTING

The present study has been conducted in the Uttarakhand District of Karnataka state. The Uttarakhand district is one of the 27 districts in Karnataka. It is one of the 3 coastal districts of State and stretches itself along the coastline of the Arabian sea. The Western Ghats divide the district into two parts, and five of its taluks i.e., Karwar, Honnavar, Kumta, Ankola and Bhatkal are in the coastal plain and six taluks i.e., Siddapur, Sirsi, Supa, Mundgod, Yellapur and Haliyal are above the ghats, with parts of their territory stretching itself on the fringe of the Deccan Plateau. Uttarakhand with its long silver white beaches, fertile green paddy fields, cool palm groves, picturesque river valleys and rich hilly forest tracts, is one of the most beautiful regions in India, endowed with the most captivating land-sapes. Its waterfalls have attracted people from far and near. It is the richest forest districts of Karnataka, endowed with a bountiful
variety of fauna and flora. Its coastline is dotted with some ports of inter-
continental celebrity, humming with life by the movements of the hardly 
fisher folk and industrious traders (Gazetteer of India, 1985 :1).

ORIGIN OF NAME

The district is known as Uttar Kannada, and there is also another 
district in the state, known as Dakshin Kannada, which the Portuguese 
called this as Canara, derived from Karnataka. Portuguese historian Faria 
Y Souza called this region 'Charnataka' (Karnataka) or Canara which is 
corrupted from made to shorten the name”. This Portuguese and the 
English continued to use the same name. Earlier, Dutch visitor, Von 
Linschoten (1583) also calles the people here as the ‘Canarins’. The 
British named their new district as Canara when they acquired it from 
Tipu in 1799, and they divided it into two in 1800, and called northern part 
of North Kanara. In the Kannada language, the districts were called Uttar 
(north) Kannada and Dakshin (south) Kannada. Of late, the State 
Government discontinued the English nomenclature and named the district 
as Uttar Kannada from 31-1-1977. But in modern times, the name Uttar 
Kannada (or North Kanara) has been hardly used. In popular parlance the 
district is even referred to as ‘Karwar’ district (Ibid : 1-2).
LOCATION

The district is located in the mid-eastern part of the State. It lies between 74° 9' to 75° 10' east longitude and 13° 55' to 15° 31' north latitude and extends over an area of 10,291 sq km, which is 5.37 percent of the total area of the State and ranks 5th in the State. It extends to about 328 km north south and about 160 km east west. Most of the district is hilly and thickly wooded. The coast stretches in a long nearly straight line to the south east except the shallow Karwar and Belekeri bays. The district can be approached by land through all-weather roads and also sea during navigable period of the year. Though the coast is unbroken by deep or wide mouthed estuaries, it is varied and picturesque, with rocky islands and capes, stretches of palm-fringed sand beaches, low narrow mouths and rough bluffs and headlands. The deep winding valleys, waving wooded hills and wild background of high peaks stretch behind the coastline boundaries (Ibid :2).

The district which is a long and narrow strip of territory is surrounded by Belgaum district and Goa territory in the north, Dharwad district in the east, Udupi and Shimoga districts in the South and Arabian Sea in the West.
AREA AND POPULATION

The area of the district is 10,291 sq km as per the 2001 census report. The Supa taluk is the biggest taluk with an area of 1,890 sq km and the Bhatkal taluk is the smallest taluk in the district with an area of 349 sq km in 2001. The population of the district according to the 2001 census was 13,53,299 out of whom 9,65,345 persons living in the rural areas and 3,87,954 persons living in the urban areas. Out of the total population of 13,53,299 in 2001, 6,87,026 were males and 6,66,273 were females. The Table 1.1 gives the details about the area and population in each taluk.
Table 1.1

Area and Population of the Uttar Kannada District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Taluk</th>
<th>Area (sq. km)</th>
<th>Population of U.K District 2001</th>
<th>S.Cs Population</th>
<th>S.Ts Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ankola</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>51438</td>
<td>50102</td>
<td>101540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bhatkal</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>73795</td>
<td>75516</td>
<td>149311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Haliyal</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>53894</td>
<td>51922</td>
<td>105816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Honnavar</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>80031</td>
<td>80268</td>
<td>160299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Karwar</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>75172</td>
<td>72670</td>
<td>147842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kumta</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>73964</td>
<td>71808</td>
<td>145772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mundgod</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>48887</td>
<td>41820</td>
<td>90707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Siddapur</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>51081</td>
<td>49693</td>
<td>100774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sirsi</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>89291</td>
<td>86255</td>
<td>175546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Supa</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>24594</td>
<td>24307</td>
<td>48901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yellapur</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>37630</td>
<td>35874</td>
<td>73504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dandeli CMC</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27249</td>
<td>26038</td>
<td>53287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>10291</td>
<td>687026</td>
<td>666273</td>
<td>1353299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dandeli CMC has been distributed into Supa and Haliyal taluks. Therefore, 53,287 population of Dandeli City has been shown separately.

STRUCTURE OF ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT

For administrative purpose the district has been divided into 11 taluks. There are 14 towns and 1,264 inhabited and 53 uninhabited villages in the district. Table 1.2 gives the details about number of towns, number of inhabited and uninhabited villages and number of seats in Taluk Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats in each taluk. The Table 1.3 gives the details about number of Gram Panchayats and reservations of seats in Uttar Kannada District. Further, Table 1.3 shows that there is total 204 Gram Panchayats and 2332 total Gram Panchayat elected representatives (seats) in Uttar Kannada District. Out of the total 2332 seats, 1170 were men and 1162 were women elected representatives. The details about the reservation of seats shows that, there is total 1250 reserved seats. Among the total 1250 seats, 738 were women and 512 were men reserved seats. Out of the total 738 women reserved seats, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Castes Minority ‘A’ Group (B.C.M.A) and Backward Castes Minority ‘B’ Group (B.C.M.B) constitute 211, 205, 311 and 11 respectively and out of the total 512 men reserved seats, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Castes Minority ‘A’ Group (B.C.M.A) and Backward Castes Minority ‘B’ Group (B.C.M.B) constitute 46, 8, 270 and 168 respectively. The details about reservation of GP seats reiterate that, more than half of the GP representatives were elected under reservation category. Only 424 women were elected under general category which shows reservation has created a very large space for women in Gram Panchayats of Uttar Kannada District.
Table 1.2
Number of Towns, Villages and Number of Seats in Taluk Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats in Each Taluk of Uttar Kannada District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Taluk</th>
<th>No. of Inhabited Villages</th>
<th>No. of Unin-habited Villages</th>
<th>No. of Towns</th>
<th>No. of Taluk Panchayat Seats</th>
<th>No. of Zilla Panchayat seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ankola</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bhatkal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Haliyal</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Honnavar</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Karwar</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kumta</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mundgod</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Siddapur</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sirsi</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Supa</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yellapur</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1264</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>123</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: District Statistical Dept., Karwar, Uttar Kannada District.
### Table 1.3

Number of Gram Panchayats and Reservation of Seats in Uttar Kannada District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL No</th>
<th>Taluk</th>
<th>No. of GPs</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
<th>S.C</th>
<th>Reserved Seats</th>
<th>B.C.M.A</th>
<th>B.C.M.B</th>
<th>General Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Karwar</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>89 88 177</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joida</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55 71 126</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Haliyal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>98 104 202</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ankola</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>101 103 204</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kumta</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>145 134 279</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Honnavar</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>175 160 335</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bhatkal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>137 113 250</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sirsi</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>133 140 273</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Siddapur</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100 109 209</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yellapur</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63 70 135</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mundgod</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72 70 142</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>204</td>
<td>1170 1162 2332</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zilla Panchayat, Karwar, Uttar Kannada District.
METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Sampling Procedure and the Sample

The sample district Uttar Kannada consists of 11 taluks. These taluks are distributed in two regions namely upghat region and coastal region. The Uttar Kannada upghat region consists of 6 taluks and the coastal region consists of 5 taluks. It was decided to select two taluks from each region. Therefore 4 taluks have been selected by lottery method.

Selection of the Respondents /Sample

Selected 4 taluks, consists of 459 elected women GP representatives. For the present study, it was decided to select 50 per cent of the sample from four taluks. Therefore the total sample came upto 230. The details about the universe and the sample selected are shown in Table 1.4. These respondents had elected in the election which was held in February 2000 in Uttar Kannada District. Further it is also important to note that these women Gram Panchayat representatives already completed three and half years in their respected GPs when the researcher interviewed them.
Table 1.4

Selected Taluks and Sample Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Selected taluks</th>
<th>Total women elected representatives (100%)</th>
<th>Selected sample respondents (50%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Karwar</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joida</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Honnavar</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sirsi</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>459</td>
<td>230 (The sample) (Total Universe)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of Data

The study is based on both, primary data as well as secondary data. A detailed interview schedule was prepared to collect the primary data from women GP representatives. The schedule contained both closed-end and open-end questions. For the present study information also
collected from secondary sources like census reports, official records, statistical publications, research publications, articles, newspapers, periodicals, books and the Gazetteers of the Governments and etc., Percentages, averages and cross tabulations were used for the analysis and interpretation of the data. Interviews were conducted by the researcher herself. Most of the respondents were interviewed at their residence and except in the some cases at their place of work. On an average each interview took about one and half to two hours. After completion of each interview the data were checked for their completeness and accuracy and edited carefully. After editing, the data were transferred to the code sheets with the help of a code design prepared for the purpose and tabulation was done manually directly from the code sheets.

The researcher encountered many difficulties at the time of interview. One of the major problems was the study area itself. The major part of Uttar Kannada district consist of dense forest and hilly regions. People live in remote villages and are not easily accessible. Most of these villages lack basic infrastructural facilities like roads and communication. A city dweller may find it very difficult to cope with these conditions.

Secondly, the problem of respondents. Most of the women respondents were not available easily to the researcher. As most of them were coolies,
they used to leave their homes early in the morning and return late in the evening. To find out the respondents, the researcher had to make two or three attempts. Some of them were working in plantations, some were in paddy fields, which used to be far away from their homes. The researcher had to walk down on an average 3-4 kms to meet the women respondents.

Another problem was the inability of the women respondents to give reply to the questions by the researcher. It was very difficult to extract information from these first generation women GP members as most of them were illiterates, ignorant and forced into grassroot politics by others.

Another difficulty was from men. Most of the men used to interfere in giving answers to the questions. Women respondents were not allowed to answer by their husbands. In some villages, the people hardly knew about that women representatives. As the research area is consisted of dense forests, valleys, researcher had to take the help of others to visit these places.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

For the last two decades women empowerment has been the topic of discussion for social scientists, women activists, politicians, media not only in India but throughout the world. Various measures have been
implemented to empower the women. In India, 73rd Constitutional Amendment is one of those attempts in this direction. It makes provision of one-third reservation for women in panchayat and municipal bodies mandatory. To what extent this provision helped women to achieve success in political participation? To examine the success and failure of women in panchayat raj institutions several studies have been conducted at national, state and regional level. However most of these studies are popular articles appeared in magazines, periodicals, news papers. Only few scientific research studies have been conducted on the participation of women in panchayat raj. Even in the State there have been a significant number of studies conducted on the overall impact of panchayat raj. Most of these studies have been conducted by political scientists. Sociological study of women's political participation is very small in number. Not only that, an exclusive social research on women in Gram panchayat level is very rare to be seen. The present study makes a modest attempt in this direction. In this context the present study gained more importance.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study makes a modest attempt to study the problems of women GP representatives. It only gives a description of the problem.
Hence, this study may be called descriptive study rather than diagnostic or exploratory study.

**SCHEME OF THE STUDY**

The study has been divided into eight chapters.

Chapter I outlines the introduction, statement of the problem, importance and objectives of the study. It also presents the review of literature, profile of setting, sample, tools and techniques adopted in the present study.

Chapter II analyses briefly the historical evolution of panchayat raj institutions in India, present panchayat raj structure in Karnataka and women's entry into panchayat raj institutions in India as a whole.

Chapter III examines the different versions of empowerment, empowerment of women and its adaptation in the present study.

Chapter IV describes the socio-economic profile of the sample respondents viz., age, marital status, religion, caste, education, income, family type, size of landholdings and also about the educational and occupational background of the respondents' parents/husbands.
Chapter V throws light on the respondents level of participation in meetings, discussion/decision-making in meetings, reasons for inappropriate participation in meetings, participation in development programmes and welfare activities, reasons for inappropriate participation in these programmes and activities, participation in training, its utility and impact on representatives.

Chapter VI catalogues the series of stumbling blocks encountered by the women GP members in their way of achievements/political participation.

Chapter VII presents the empowerment of women GP representatives in the household, personal, economic, psychological and at community level. It also examines the respondents' views/opinions with regard to improve the status and strengthening the empowerment of GP women representatives in future.

Chapter VIII highlights the major findings and give suggestions.