Political Empowerment of Women Surpunches in Panchayat Raj Institutions - A Study in Ananthapuramu District of A.P.

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> "In the true democracy of India, the unit is the village. Every village has to become a self sufficient republic."
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> - Mahatma Gandhi
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> "Go from village to village, do good to humanity and to the world at large."
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> - Swami Vivekananda

Introduction

For the last three years the success story of women's political representation could well be scripted in India's rural hinterland. The adoption of the 73rd amendment by the Parliament in 1992 had a great revolutionary potential to create genuine democracy at the grassroots village level. It represented a historic opportunity to change the face of rural India.

In April 1993, the Government of India passed the, the Constitutional (73rd Amendment). The amendment mandates that resources, responsibility and decision making power be devolved from central Government to rural grassroots people through Panchayati Raj Institutions. That there should be at 33 per cent reservation for women in panchayati raj institutions (PRIs). In 2009, the Union Cabinet of the Government of India, approved 50 per cent reservation for women in PRIs. Today there are nearly 1.5 million women in these bodies. It is against this background and in order to mark 20 years of this journey, that Women's Feature Service (WFS) puts forward its proposal, '20 years of Empowerment: Women and Panchayati Raj In India'. This series will trace the evolution of Women's Representation in Panchayati Raj over the last two decades, highlight the challenges and triumphs of this process of representation, and report on present best practices on the ground in terms of women's empowerment. Their main objective was to realize Mahatma Gandhi's dream of reaching power to the people through Panchayats.

ll over the world the gender problem has loomed large during the recent years. The gender issue has become a crucial point of argument. The United Nations, in its various declarations, have made it clear that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more time. Their sufferings are historical. In the context of new forces of development, the gender problem has assumed vital importance. The best solution to their problems lies in their empowerment in almost all the

walks of life. The plea underlying the issue of empowerment of women is that the male and the female will have to equally share the responsibilities in the context of development. The United Nations declaration of 1975 compelled national governments to shift their emphasis on women's programmes from welfare to development. Therefore, empowerment of women is now not only a matter of concern for few nations, but for the whole world.

In Indian society, women were traditionally considered as weaker sex. The status of women has been subservient to man, subjugated, exploited and oppressed. There are many social sayings, which reflect her position. She has been discriminated from womb to tomb. She is protected by the father in her childhood, by the husband in her adulthood and by the son in her old age. She has been given the status of a secondary member of the family. Rural women in particular did not have any voice in the family as well as in the society. They have been constantly denied the right to take active part in the decision making process at various levels. Since most of them are illiterate, they do not demand the enforcement of their rights within the family and in the society at large. This neglect of women power has been one of the most important causes of the backwardness of rural India.

In the rural areas about 1 million women are going to emerge as leaders at the grass-roots level and enter in to public life through the existing 0.25 million bodies. Of these, about 75,000 will be heading the administrative organizations at the village, block and district level.

A massive country-wide training programme has been launched since 1993 to give leadership training to the women elected representatives. To what extent, the women leadership in Panchayati Raj would influence to the society, needs to be studied by observing their role in

Gram Panchayats.

One of the issues of concern in the empowerment of women is their active participation. Here women's participation includes voting, contesting of elections, going for canvassing, delivering lectures, and involvement in the decision-making, development activities, and participation at the grassroots level through the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Unlike men who normally have a unitary function, the role of a woman is generally multi-dimensional. It is seen from the earliest socialization experiences that women find it difficult to assume power positions and responsibilities in politics. It has now been accepted that the women's right to vote and to occupy positions in various socio-political spheres is fundamental to the upliftment of women's status. Elected women might become role models for other women and for the adolescent girls. Even in a country as large as India, there is a significant number and cannot, but revolutionise and transform things in what was till recently a static rural society. It is not that women have succeeded in every PRIs but a large majority could do it and that is what makes it exhilarating. Documenting the changes that have occurred, several researchers, political analysts, NGOs, journalists, both Indian and foreign, have observed that within the village the funds are better utilised, and the focus of the PRIs has shifted from political power games practicality to making

arrangements for drinking water, school education, health care and dealing with problems relating to sanitation and fuel. Sadly, there were some other problems too that were never addressed or discussed by PRIs, in which women were absent. In this context, a very large number of Indian rural women and children suffer from malnutrition caused by imbalanced diet, non-availability of safe drinking water and sanitation, and ultimately the tangible impact of this shift of focus can hardly be over emphasised. In general, the disabilities against which women at the PRIs level take a battle are astonishing. Leadership (Political empowerment) has undoubtly begun and will logically reach its fullness and this will definitely help in the abolition of inequitable and unjust laws and social practices.

The present study focuses on emerging patterns of women leadership in Panchayati Raj. Reservation has provided women an opportunity to influence the decision-making process. Through Panchayats they can raise their grievance, and other related social and economic problems in a formal manner. This is necessary in order to ensure better position for women in all the spheres of life. In the proposed study an attempt has been made to examine the empowerment of rural women in Panchayati Raj Institution, in particular and in the larger social milieu in general.

History of Panchayati Raj
In view of the research objectives of the proposed study a review of the history of Panchayats in India will give us a deep insight. Panchayati Raj is a system of Local Self-Government where in, the people take upon themselves the responsibility for development. It is also a system of institutional arrangement of achieving rural development through people's initiative and participation. Panchayati Raj involves a three-tier structure of democratic institutions at district, block and village levels namely, Zila Prishad, Panchayat Samiti and Village Panchayats respectively.

The concept of Panchayati Raj is relatively a new. Earlier, it was termed as Village Panchayat or District Board. It was used for Rural Self-Government. Actually, the Village Panchayats were meant for rural administration and particularly administration in the fields of

social service and rural reconstruction. The Village Panchayats are a link between the people and the bureaucracy at the state level. In our country, the system of Village Panchayats is very old, though its structure varied from time to time. There were Village Panchayats in ancient and medieval periods.

1. Panchayats in Ancient Period
The system of Panchayati Raj has deep roots in Indian history. It had in existence since ancient period having an effective control over the administrative, civic, and judicial matters of the village community. Some experts are of the opinion that in ancient India Panchayats were far more widespread, more real and more successful than in the days of British rule or even after that. The Rigveda, Manusamhita, Dharmashashtras, Upanishad and Jatakas etc., have referred

extensively about the auto local administration i.e., a Panchayat type system of administration. It is important to be noted that King Prithu first introduced this system while colonizing the Doab between the rivers Ganges and yamuna. In the Manusmriti and the 'Shanti Parva' of the Mahabharat, one may find many references to the existence of Gram Sanghas or Rural Communities. A description of these Rural Communities has also been found in the Arthasashtra of Kautilya who lived in 400 B.C. Arthasashtra has given a comprehensive account of the system of village administration prevailing in that time. During that period, the village administration was carried under the supervision and control of 'Adhyaksh' (headman). The other officials helping in local administration were such as 'Samkhyaka' (Accountant), 'Anikitsaka' (Veterinary doctor), 'Jamgh Karika' (Village Couriers), and 'Chikitsaka' (Physician). The village headman was responsible for ensuring the collection of State dues and reporting and controlling the activities of the offenders. In the Ramayana of Valmiki, the mention of the 'Ganapada' has been made, which was a kind of the federation of village republics. In ancient period and particularly in the Vedic period, the village was the 'pivot' of administration. The Vedic State was essentially a Country State with village as the basic unit of administration. The village Government was usually carried in the supervision and direct control of the village 'head-man' who was called 'Gramini'. Gramini was assisted by an 'informal council' constituted by the elders of the village.

In Mauryan Period, also, the villages were the basic unit of administration and there was the existence of village Panchayats in the form of Village Councils. These Village Councils used to organize the works of public utility and recreation, settling disputes between their residents and acted as 'trustees' for the property of minors. In Gupta period, the Village Councils evolved into regular bodies in some parts of India. They became the permanent feature of local administration and gained further importance. Village Councils acted as guardians of the village population. They worked for negotiating and mediating with the Government for concessions in the case of famine, floods and other similar calamities. The settlement of the village disputes was one of the most important functions of the Village Councils. There were separate Law Courts for different communities.

Prof. Dikshita (1932) has described that the provincial administration under the Mauryas was fairly well developed and the units of administration were villages and districts. The autonomy of the village was more or less complete. The central administration did not interfere with the rural administration which was in the hands of the Village Communities. Village Communities were economically self-dependent and had almost complete autonomy. In Chola period also there was the existence of well-organized Village Panchayat System i.e., Local Self-Government. This can be compared with the modern Panchayat System. During this period, villages enjoyed the complete economic and administrative freedom. The elected representatives forming Village Council carried out the village administration. The functions of the Village Council were to control the village land, conduct the survey and measurement of agricultural land, collect revenues, and settle the disputes and managing education.

2. Panchayats in Medieval Period

In Sultanate Period also, there was Panchayat System, in the villages. The people of the villages constituted a small 'commonwealth' and through which looked after their affairs and arranged security, elementary education and sanitation. Panchayats also acted as a 'Judicial body'— to settle disputes. In Mughal period, particularly in the regime of Sher Shah Suri, the villages were governed by their own 'Panchayats'. The Panchayati Raj was treated as the law of the land and was given due legal recognition. Each Panchayat was composed of the elders of the village who looked after the interests of the people, and administered justice and inflicted punishments on the defaulters according to the traditional customs of the place or the community. The headman of the village, a semigovernment Official, acted as a Co-coordinator between the village Panchayat and the higher administrative hierarchy. Normally, there was no interference of Centre or Provincial administration in the administration of villages. In case of emergency, the villages Panchayat were asked to discharge their duties with complete independence.

Emperor Akbar inherited an excellent system of Panchayat from Sher Shah. He accepted this system and made it indispensable part of the civil administration. In his period, each village, which had substantial population, had its own Panchayat of the elders, headed by a 'Lambardar' or a 'headman.' He had given 'legal' recognition to the Panchayati Raj. Each Panchayat was 'autonomous' in its own sphere and exercised powers of local taxation, administrative control, justice, and punishment. The Mughal Panchayat System continued till 1750,when the Mughal rule started collapsing.

3. Panchayats in British Period:

It is a historical fact that Local Self-Government in India, in the sense of a representative institution, was the creation of the British. It may be noted here that village Panchayats were not the first priority of the British rulers in India. In India during the colonial period, the question of representation of different population groups in Panchayats was not considered. The stress was given only on introducing or increasing the number of elected members. The question of even getting the request from local areas for setting up village Panchayats was limited to resident males. This reflected the prevalent ideology which did not accepted females as voters or as elected representatives.

A beginning of local government had been made in 1687 when, for the first time, a local governing body a Municipal Corporation was set up for the city of Madras. Set up on the British model of a town council, this body was empowered to levy taxes for building a guild hall and school. With the passage of time, similar bodies were set up in other major towns with wider taxation powers.

It was is 1870 that the Viceroy Lord Mayo, got a resolution passed by his Council for decentralization of power to bring about administrative efficiency in meeting the demands of the people and to add to the finances of the existing imperial resources which were not

sufficient for the growing needs of the country. The progress of local self-government on the lines of the Ripon resolution of 1882 was very slow with only some half-hearted steps taken in setting up Municipal bodies and boards at the district level. In 1907, the government constituted a Royal Commission on Decentralization, which, in its report released in 1909, elaborated further, the principles enunciated in the Ripon resolution. In the same year 1909, the twenty-fourth session of the Congress at Lahore adopted a resolution urging the government to take early steps to make all the local bodies from village Panchayats upwards elective with elected non-official chairmen and to support them with adequate financial aid.

By 1925, eight provinces in British India had passed such acts. These provinces were: Madras (Panchayat Act of 1920), Bombay (Village Panchayat Act of 1920), Bengal (Self-Government Act of 1919), Bihar (Self-Government Act of 1920), Central Provinces (Panchayat Act of 1920), Uttar Pradesh (Village Panchayat Act of 1920), Punjab (Panchayat Act of 1922), Assam (Self-Government Act of 1925).

By 1926, six native states had also adopted village Panchayat laws. These states were Cochin, Indore, Travancore, Baroda, Kolhapur and Mysore. In subsequent years, similar laws were adopted by some other states. These were: Bikaner, Karauli, Hyderabad, Mewar, Jasdan, Bhavnagar, Porbandar, Bharatpur, Marwar, Wadia, Dharangadhra, Morvi, Sirohi and Jaipur. However, these statutory Panchayats covered only a limited number of villages and generally had a limited number of functions.

The Government of India Act 1935 and the inauguration of provincial autonomy under it also contributed in the evolution of Panchayats in the country. The central provinces had set up an enquiry committee in 1935, the United Province in 1938 and Bombay in 1939.

These committees revealed that although the recommendations of the municipal committees were unevenly carried out in various provinces, but there was a definite trend towards democratization and by separation of deliberative functions from executive ones. In this continuation of development of local government with the advent of independences the new government of the United Province began to work on legislation and hoped to revitalize the corporate life of the village communities and transform them into an effective instrument for rural improvement. The local self-governing provided in the United Self-Governing was different from the United Province Panchayati Act 1947.

The difference may be seen in several significant respects as follows:

(1) the judicial and administrative functions of the Panchayats were separated.

(2) The powers, duties and financial resources of each of these bodies were significantly enhanced.

(3) The system of selection of their members was drastically revised as nomination was rejected and direct election with complete adult suffrage was adopted.

(4) The powers of village administrative bodies increased due to the passage of two pieces of land reform legislation by the State Government.

(5) The creation of two types of village government bodies i.e. the Gaon Panchayat and Administrative Panchayat.

The Adalat Panchayat was renamed as the Nyay Panchayat. To examine the impact of the evolution of Panchayati Raj Act 1947 one may consult the study of Retzlaff (1962). The study reveals that village elections created more problems than they solved. For example the elections of Panchayat led to factionalism in the village. He mentioned that village Panchayat was significant for the economic and social development.

4. Panchayats in Independent India:

The constitution of independent India proclaimed its objectives of achieving liberty, equality, fraternity and justice social, economic and political. The foundation of a welfare state was laid down by the constitution. As far as the Panchayats are concerned, the constitution only provided in Article 40 that the state should endeavor to organize village Panchayats and endow them with powers and authority as may be necessary for them to function as units of self-government. After Independence, Indian Government realized the importance of economic and social planning to achieve better standard of living for Indian people. To achieve this objective the government sponsored programme of community development.

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:

A committee for the review of the Community Development Programme was constituted in 1957. Balwant Rai Mehta, a Member of Parliament, headed the committee. The Committee submitted its report in 1957. The Committee's view was that without an agency at the village level real progress in rural development could not be achieved. The recommendations of the Committee favored democratic decentralization through the setting up of Panchayati Raj Institutions. These recommendations of the Committee accelerated the pace of constituting Panchayati Raj Institutions in all the states. The Committee recommended the setting up of elected and organically linked democratic bodies at the village, Block & district levels. The bodies should be entrusted for all planning and development activities.

The Committee mentioned that the CDPs when came at the Gram Panchayat level were considered as programmes of the government and not the programmes of the village people. The Committee, therefore, suggested that the villagers should be given power to decide about their own felt needs and to do planning and implementation of the programmes accordingly. The village selfsufficiency could not be attained without the active involvement of the village people.

The Mehta Committee suggested a three-tier structure for Panchayati Raj. These tiers consisted of Gram Sabha, which was constituted on the basis of population size. Sometimes it included a

big village but generally two or three villages on the strength of their population size constituted a Gram Sabha. This was the lowest rung of Panchayati Raj. The second tier was constituted at the tehsil or taluka level. The third tier was at the district level. The three-tier structure thus consisted of the elected non-officials who implemented the programmes of development on the technical and bureaucratic guidance of the officials. The pattern of Panchayati Raj was thus developed on the co-ordination between the officials and the nonofficials. The Panchayati Raj, which came in to existence following the recommendations of Mehta Committee, had the following major

Ashok Mehta Committee:

Ashok Mehta, an economist, headed over the committee to suggest changes in the pattern of Panchayati Raj recommended by Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. In 1977, the Ashok Mehta Committee recommended a fundamental change in the Panchayati Raj System. It asked for transformation of the Panchayat from an implementing agency to a political institution. The Committee's report (1978) is a seminal document, which seeks to make Panchayats an organic and integral part of our democratic process.

The Committee recommended a two-tier set up i.e. District level and Mandal level covering the population of 15000 to 20000 and suggested the abolition of block as the unit of administration. The Committee also suggested holding of regular election, compulsory items of taxation in their jurisdiction and transfer of land revenues collection to them. It was also felt that a constitutional provision was necessary to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The main recommendations of the Committee were considered at the conference of chief ministers in 1979, which advocated for the continuance of the existing three-tier system. A model bill was adopted which authorized the states to make such modifications as considered necessary to suit the local needs.

The need for constitutional amendment was felt in order to implement the recommendations of Ashok Mehta Committee. For this purpose a sub-committee of the consultative committee of parliament under the chairmanship of P.K. Thungon was constituted and given the responsibility to make suggestions in this regard. By the end of 1988 the Committee made recommendations for strengthening the Panchayati Raj System. One of its important recommendations was that Panchayati Raj bodies should be constitutionally recognized.

64th Constitutional Amendment Bill of 1989:

On 15th May1989 the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill was drafted and introduced in Parliament. The bill provided for constitution of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels in every state. The only exceptions were those states, which had a population not exceeding 20 lakhs where states could not constitute the intermediate level. It also proposed that the legislature of a state may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of selfgovernment. The

Bill also provided for appointment of finance commission to review financial position. However, the Bill was later on defeated in Rajya Sabha.

Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao decided to draw up a fresh Constitutional Amendment Bill for Panchayat Raj institutions. The Seventy Second Amendment Bill, 1991 came into existence. The Bill was later on referred to a Joint Committee, of Parliament consisting of 30 members of Parliament drawn from both the houses.

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act:

The 73rd Constitutional amendment Act is a landmark in the history of Panchayati Raj. The Act differs from the Balwant Rai Pattern in two respects. Firstly, Panchayati Raj was not earlier considered as a political institution but only an implementing body. In this pattern there was no role of political parties. Elections to Panchayat bodies were held on individual basis. Contrary to it, the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act allowed political parties to enter into election fray. Therefore, elections of Panchayati Raj are now contested on party basis. Secondly, a very conspicuous aspect of the present Panchayati Raj is that it empowered the women and weaker sections of the village in the sharing of power. The 73rd Amendment Act made provisions for the reservation of seats for OBC, SC and women. The present Panchayati Raj is not only an implementing body to the developmental programmes but also a decision making body of the village.

The present Panchayati Raj is constituted by the 73rd Constitutional Act and therefore, it is mandatory for all the states to adopt it in their constitution.

Important Features of the 73rd Constitutional Act:

1. Panchayats will be institution of self-government.

2. The State shall have a three-tier system- Village Panchayat at the lowest level, Kshettra Panchayat at the intermediate level and District Panchayat at the top level. The tenure of the Panchayats shall be five years and in case a Panchayat is dissolved earlier for any reason, the

3. elections should be conducted within six months and the reconstituted Panchayat shall continue for the remaining period only.

4. A Gram Sabha shall be constituted for a village or a group of villages having a population of 1,000 or more. In case a Gram Sabha consists of more than one village, the name of the village having the largest population shall be specified as the name of the Gram Sabha.

5. Every Gram Sabha shall have a Gram Panchayat and the number of members in a Gram Panchayat shall be between 9 and 15 depending upon the population of the Gram Sabha.

6. Seats shall be reserved in the Panchayats at all levels for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population in the concerned Panchayat area and

one-third of the seats so reserved shall be reserved for women belonging to the concerned category.

7. Seats shall be reserved for Backward Classes in the Panchayats at all levels in proportion to their population subject to a maximum of 27 per cent in the concerned Panchayat area and one-third of the seats so reserved shall be reserved for women belonging to the Backward Class.

8. In case of general category also one-third of the seats shall be reserved for women belonging to any class or category.

9. The chairperson of the village Panchayat shall be elected directly by the voters in the Gram Panchayat area and he can be removed through a no confidence motion carried by 2/3rd members of the Panchayat.

10. Offices of the chairpersons of the Panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population in the State and one-third of them shall be reserved for women belonging to the concerned category.

11. Offices of chairpersons of the Panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for the Backward class in proportion to their population in the State subject to a maximum of 27 per cent and one-third of the seats so reserved shall be reserved for women belonging to Backward Class.

12. In case of general category also one-third of the number of offices of the chairpersons in the State shall be reserved for women belonging to any class or category.

13. All reservations shall be done on rotation basis as prescribed.

14. The Gram Panchayat shall also act as the Bhumi Prabhandak Samiti.

15. Every Gram Panchayat shall constitute four committees, namely- Samata Samiti, Vikas Samiti, Gram Shiksha Samiti and Lok Hita Samiti.

16. The functions of the Panchayats at the village, block and district levels have been identified on the lines of the subjects specified under the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

17. A kshettra Panchayat shall include directly elected members at the rate of one member for every 2000 population, all Pradhans of Gram Panchayats and the concerned MPs, MLAs, and MLCs.

18. In every Kshettra Panchayat the members of the kshettra Panchayat from amongst themselves shall elect a Pramukh, a Senior Up-pramukh and a Junior Up-pramukh.

19. Every kshettra Panchayat shall have four committees, namely- Karya Samiti; Vitta evam Vikas Samiti; Shiksha Samiti and Samta Samiti.

20. A Zila Panchayat shall include directly elected members at the rate of one member for every 50 thousand population, all Pramukha and concerned MPs, MLAs, and MLCs.

21. In every Zila Panchayat, the elected members of the Zila Parished from amongst themselves shall elect Adhyaksha and Up-adhyaksha.

22. A Zila Panchayat shall have five committees, namely-Karya Samiti, Vitta Samiti, Shiksha evam Jan Swasthya Samiti, Krishi Udyog evam Nirman Samiti and Samta Samiti.

23. At the Zila Panchayat level, there shall be a Chunao Samiti consisting of the Adhyaksha as chairman, a member of the Karya Samiti and the head of the concerned departments to act as its secretary.

24. Pramukh and Adhyaksha can be removed through no confidence motion carried by majority of the elected members.

25. There shall be a State Finance Commission consisting three members including the chairman.

26. There shall be a State Election Commission for superintendence and control of the elections of Panchayats.

27. The government or any officer or person authorized by it shall have the power of removal of the chairpersons in case of failure of duties or misuse of power etc.

28. The government or any officer or person authorized by it shall have the power of inspection of the Panchayats and dissolution of Panchayats in case of failure of its duties etc. properly.

Methodology: **Methodology**
Universe:
Anantapur District is one the four district of backward region of Rayalaseema situated in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Total Panchayats in Anantapur District are 1003. Total women headed Panchayats 553.

Keeping in view the objectives of the study the data for the present study is collected both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data is collected by administering by administering a pre-tested Interview Schedule. The Interview Schedule is intended to elicit the opinions of sample women representatives on various functional facets as well as empowerment facts. The secondary data is collected from the published books, journals, periodicals, published reports, action plans, unpublished thesis, official documents, broachers

and official records. Data also collected from various offices like District Panchayat Office, Zilla Parishad Office, Mandal Offices and Research Institutions.

2.2.1 Analysis of Data

The collected data/information was analysed

Sample:
The universe for the present study was all the Women who head village Panchayats of Anantapur District. Since the universe was small and manageable, all the respondents were covered in this census survey. The present study was carried out 100 women Sarpanches occupying the Gram Panchayats in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

i. Tools for Data Collection : Some comprehensive questionnaires were structured to seek information from the respondents. In order to adminster the questionnaire we classified it into four categories : All the members of Gram Panchayat including Pradhan, Women members of Gram Sabha, Officials connected with Gram Sabha.

ii The Secondary Data : The study made use of secondary data. At the Gram Panchayat Level the main materials collected were the Government Orders, Circulars, Attendance of the members, proceedings of the monthly and Committee meetings Finally, relevant literature published and unpublished, articles from the journals, newspapers clippings and books not directly connected with the area of study, but essential to widen awareness about Panchayati

Raj Institutions in India. to.

iii. Field Work:
To collect the primary data all the four categories of respondents were contacted. Several times to get the complete information. The meetings of the Gram Panchayat were attended to get an insight in to the actual working. Various work spots like construction of borewells, school buildings, Khadancha etc. were visited to get an idea as to how the officials communicate with the panchayat members and villagers in executing the development work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:
The literature on women's empowerment has been reviewed under three separate categories i.e. first the concept of empowerment of women, second, the studies on empowerment of women in general and third, the studies of the PRI and empowerment of rural women.

1. The Concept of Empowerment of Women:
The noun "empowerment" which is now listed in Webster's New World Dictionary (1982), refers to the process by which power is gained, developed, seized, facilitated, or given. An individual or group moves from a condition of relative powerlessness to relative power through the empowerment process. Yet, to be empowered also refers to the state of possessing or controlling power, being able to act or prevent action. In this sense, "empowerment" (holding power) is the product of the same process. The empowerment concept includes both process and product dimensions and the relationship between them often is complex.

Empowerment is often described as building "community capacity" which involves enhancing the aptitude of community groups to procure and manage social and economic resources. It implies a focus on developing the resources and skills necessary for individuals and communities to exert authority and power (Mayer, 1984). The Social Work Dictionary defines empowerment as "the process of helping a group or community to achieve political

influence or relevant legal authority" (Barker, 1991:74). Empowerment is an active, multidimensional process, which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted, nor can it be given away as aims. Power has to be acquired and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved (Pillai, 1995). Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation and redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance (Chandra, 1997). Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action (Sahay, 1998).

The concept of women's empowerment appears to be the outcome of several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world and particularly by Third World feminists. Its source can be traced to the interaction between feminism and the concept of 'popular education' developed in Latin America in the 1970s (Walters,). Empowerment is a very positive concept with the capacity for self-action and the transformation of self. It is inextricably linked to both the ability and opportunity to make decisions and to act for one. Thus, empowerment is egalitarian in nature, stressing the competence and right to people to take charge of their own destinies. For the powerless, this entails a bottom up process whereby they transform from passive or reactive subjects to positive actors in the drama of their individual lives (Friere, 1973).

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. In the word empowerment power can be defined in two ways: as (1) the ability to get what one wants (2) the ability to influence others to think, feel, act or believe in ways that further one's interests (Parenti, 1978). When women make their own empowerment into a goal close to their hearts as a primary task of each day then they will inevitably become an integral part of grassroots activism (Diaz-Diocaretz and Zayala 1985; Iglitzin and Ross, 1986). However, when women choose to ignore or deny their need to be empowered, they become pawns of the social mechanisms that perpetuate their subordination (Durkheim,1984).

Women are empowered when they are in touch with their own traditions, shared achievements, and real interests. Women's expansion of power depends on their abilities to stay centered in their own uniqueness, as well as to be open simultaneously to the range of action possibilities demonstrated through other women's lives (Gerson, 1985). Empowerment is the initial phase of women's liberation freedom, and equity as well as a long-range goal of women's political

participation. It is the first step in a long journey toward the formulation and realization of human rights and responsibilities that transcend gender role stereotypes and the objectification of women and the men (Charlton, Everett, & Staudt, 1989).

Empowerment through organizing helps to sustain both the struggle and the support base. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, women have to swim against the stream that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment (quoted from the book "Work and Empowerment: Management of women's Economic Activities (A Manual for Activists, New Delhi, 1991). Women's empowerment is synonymous with the achievement of equity and equal mindedness in society. These are not

accomplished at the expense of others, but in a mutually co-operative spirit whenever possible (Hall, 1992).

Empowerment of women means many things. Summarizing the various dimensions of empowerment Bhasin (1992) mentions that it means recognizing women's contribution, women's knowledge; helping women fight their own fears, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority; enhancing their self-respected and self-dignity; women controlling their own bodies; becoming economically independent and self-reliant; controlling resources like land and property; reducing women's burden of work, especially within the home; creating and strengthening women's groups and organizations.

During the Earth Summit held in Rio (3-14 June, 1992) Women's Treaty for NGOs seeking a just and healthy planet, pledged their commitment to the empowerment of women which is the central and powerful force in the search for a safe environment, economic and social justice, adequate reallocation of resources. According to the Treaty, for raising the social, economic, political and health status of women, there is the need for policies and actions to assure them to equal access to education, information, fair wages, land, safe working conditions, inheritance rights, credit and appropriate technology, environmental friendly consumer products and health care. There should not be any deprivation of women of their reproductive freedom, the knowledge required to exercise that freedom, the provision of comprehensive reproductive health care and family planning, including the right to parental care, safe and legal voluntary contraceptives and abortion, sex education and information. The process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power, may be termed as empowerment.

This broad definition has been proposed by feminist scholars and activists within the context of their own regions (Batliwala, 1995). The term "empowerment" is ubiquitous, used by presidents and poets alike, yet its meaning often seems hazy and undeveloped. The concept of empowerment has been unevenly developed, has been unevenly developed, has been unevenly developed, and has been used in different ways. Some describe empowerment primarily as a goal, others as a process others as a form of intervention (Gutierrez: 1995). Empowerment

represents a means for accomplishing community development tasks and can be conceptualized as involving two key elements giving community members the authority to make decisions and choices and facilitating the development of the knowledge and resources necessary to exercise these choices (Zippy: 1995).

UNFPA report mentions that empowerment of women also implies avoidance of crimes and atrocities against women and improvement in education, health etc. Improvement of the status of women and their access to family planning services, make a triple contribution to sustainable development such as they make their own contribution to the quality of life and eradication of absolute poverty, they contribute to economic growth, by raising the quality and skills of the work force and slowing down population growth.

Empowerment is the process of building capacities of creating an atmosphere, which enables people to fully utilize their creative potential in pursuance of a quality of life. It also deepens and popularizes the democratic process (Pandey, S.C.). Empowerment gives women the capacity to influence the decision-making process, planning, implementation and evaluation by integrating them into the political system. This implies political participation, which includes right to vote, contest elections, campaign, party membership and representation in political offices at all levels thereby leading to political empowerment. The passing of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments can be considered as the greatest event for women's empowerment as one-third of the seats are reserved for women in local bodies (Dr. Bhargagva, B.S. and Dr. Subha, K.).

Empowerment is a process and is not, therefore, something that can be given to people. The process of empowerment is both individual and collective, since it is through involvement in groups that people most often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organize to take action and bring about change. Women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. Since empowerment is a necessary part of any intervention to enhance women's income, it is essential to understand some of the critical tenets of empowerment.

Women's empowerment will bring more balance to the male value hierarchies in current traditional and modern societies. Empowerment reestablishes cooperation as a viable social process and makes the development of all people more possible then is the case in fiercely competitive patriarchies. (Sushma Sahay, 1998) Women's empowerment is a global issue, and discussions on women's rights are at the forefront of many formal and informal

campaigns worldwide. Empowerment is the process through which individuals gain efficacy, defined as the degree to which an individual perceives that he or she controls his or her environment. Women's empowerment is a base for human liberation and empowerment for all. Although initially women will neutralize patriarchal structure in order to ground their own rights in social realities, women cannot be empowered effectively at the expense of others.

Empowerment should also generate new notions of power. Present-day notions of power have evolved in hierarchical, male dominated societies and are base on divisive, destructive and oppressive values. The point is nor for women to take power and use it in the same exploitative and corrupt way. Rather, women's empowerment process must evolve a new understanding of power, and experiment with ways of democratizing and sharing power building new mechanisms for collective responsibility, decision making and accountability.

Empowerment has been differently defined in the development and gender studies. It will be pertinent to discuss at this point, the various viewpoints on empowerment before analyzing the government's efforts to empower women.

Empowerment has been defined as a change in the context of a woman's life, which provides her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected in external qualities such as health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision-making, and also at the level of material security. It also included internal qualities such as self-awareness and self-confidence. (Human Development in South Asia Report: 2000; Mohanty: 2001)

From the above definitions it may be concluded that the empowerment is both a process and the result of the process. It is change in the structure of society and institutions that reinforces women's status. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of power positions. Empowerment is a process and therefore, is not a product, which can be given to women in society.

The process of challenging existing socio-political milieu and of gaining greater control over the sources of power may be termed as empowerment. The process of empowerment is at both individual and group level. It leads to greater awareness, greater participation and greater sharing in decision-making power in various walks of social life.

2. Studies on Empowerment of Women in India:

Mass participation of women in India was recognized during Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and during the Quit India Movement of 1942, when thousands of women came out on the roads and courted arrest. All the credit for this goes to Mahatma Gandhi who mobilized the support of women in the movement for India's independence. He knew that they are more tolerant and disciplined agitators, which well suited to his policy of Ahimsa. Later on, Indian National Congress elected Annie Besant as its president in 1917. This phase was one of the turning points in women empowerment in India. Mass participation of women was recognized during Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and during the Quit India Movement of 1942, when thousands of women courted arrest. Women from various castes, communities and regions participated voluntarily and together, to raise their voice on important issues.

The wave of reforms in the 19th century was initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and followed by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Keshav Chandra Sen, Mahadev Govind Ranade etc. All this lead to a gradual loosening of the traditional knots restricting the liberty of women and prepared a new climate for the further forward leap. Sarojini Naidu, while addressing a meeting organized by the Prayag Mahila Samiti in May 1926, said that it was not for men to give them or not to give them any rights; nor was it appropriate for men to make any decisions for women. Women must begin to exercise their own rights.

The convention on the political rights of women adopted by the General Assembly in 1952 stated that 'women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.' This was the first instrument of international law aimed at granting and protecting of women's rights on a world-wide basis.

In the recent years the Chipko Movement initiated in 1972-74 is an example of the powerful impact that women's initiative can have on the power brokers, contractors and family members. Thus, the record of women's participation in political processes other than the formal has been quite creditable. Of course, while women have been visible in mass movements, group up surges and protest struggles, their presence in not felt in structured decision— making institutional settings. Even in the structures where women's participation is substantial, they have not been given positions of powers.

The United Nations declared 1975 as the 'International Women's Year' and 1980 as the 'Year for Development of Women.' The member nations declared 1975-1985 as the 'Women's Development Decade.' During this period, the nations of the world were to focus their attention and resources on the problems of women and aim at integrating women with the social, economic and political activity. Empowerment of women is not only a regional matter. The UN declaration of 1975 compelled the national government to shift its emphasis on women's programmes from welfare to development.

Earlier to this declaration, the national governments including our own floated a large number of welfare programmes for the women. However, these programmes do not provide any long-term solution to the problems of women. In addition, therefore, the declaration prescribed for the development of women.

The process of liberation of women was further accelerated after independence. In the Constitution of India, all the women above 21 years of age are given the right to vote. Article 15 clearly states that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, sex, place of birth, or any of them. Women's franchise has been described as 'easy victory'. The Constitution makers were more influenced by the world history and the Gandhian philosophy in granting women's franchise (Forbes, 1979). This helped in the loosening of social shackles and mobilized women for political equality. Since independence, women's status has

undergone several changes (Hate, 1930; Desai, Kapadia, 1953; Asthana, 1974; Desai and Patel, 1986; Jain, 1988 and Chaudhary, 1988).

The Research Center for Women's Studies at SNDT Women's University began its work in 1974 as a research unit. Under the able Directorship of Neera Desai, it was accorded the status of Center for Advanced Research in Women's Studies by the University Grants Commission in 1980. Later on, under the supervision of Dr. Vina Mazumdar, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) established an advisory committee on women's studies. All the researches carried out under the direction of this advisory committee attempted to discover the conditions in which women lived and worked in contemporary India.

In 1980, the Center for Women's Development Studies, an autonomous research institute, was founded, with Vina Mazumdar as Director. This center has carried forward the work of studying the status of women and making recommendations to the government for the empowerment and of women. In the editorial of his book, 'Symbols of Power', Mazumdar writes that, "A large number of politically active women told the committee on the status of women in India that increasing violence, character assassinations, and unscrupulous competition for positions had become the greatest deterrents to women's participation in any effective manner" (1979 : xx).

In the Indian society women's participation in politics was never encouraged particularly in rural society. The position of Indian women in the field of politics was characterized by a passive political orientation rooted within the social structure (Imtiaz Ahmed :1975). Muni submits that Indian women have largely remained inactive and indifferent towards politics. " This is accounted for by the absence of such traditions that encourage women in politics, the social backwardness of women and, above all, heavy demands that home and family make on a women's time, attention and energy" (1979:42). Similarly Ram Ahuja (1985) in his study of political awareness and participation of women in rural society noted that rural women's participation in political activities and their political awareness is very low. He further maintains that only political mobilization can improve women's economic and social status and to ensure this reservation of seats for women is extremely necessary.

A review of the political history of women in India reveals that women took to politics only when encouraged by male family members. Women have always perceived their political role as depending on men's consent and also supportive to males (Vijay Agnew: 1986).

The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) could be considered as a landmark for women's empowerment in India. It was realized that women's educational advancement and economic independence is a necessary pre-requisite for empowering women (Chandra, 1997). In grass root programmes and policy debates alike, the term empowerment virtually replaced terms such as welfare, upliftment, community participation and poverty alleviation to describe the goal of development in reference of women (Batliwala, 1995).

The Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) launched in 1995, aimed at co-coordinating and integrating Sectoral programmes related to various women's issues like health, education, water, sanitation, housing and others at local, block and district levels and increasing their awareness and income through group activities and participation with the aim of empowering women.

Dr. Vinita Kaul has pointed out the following shortcomings in the political participation of women: "(i) Women are not independent voters; (ii) that a majority of them are illiterate; (iii) that a majority of them make their choice on the basis of suggestions from male members of the family, like their husbands and sons; (iv) that women lack information and political awareness so crucial in making an informed and enlightened choice and (v) women are not politically conscious" (2000: 326-327).

The government of India announced a 'National Policy for Empowerment of Women–2001', keeping women's empowerment year in view. The objectives of the policy are to bring about an advancement, development and empowerment of women belonging to the weaker sections, including empowerment of women belonging to the weaker sections, including Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes. The Policy has reiterated the commitments made in the Ninth Five year Plan in a more focused way namely, the poverty eradication schemes should be implemented in an improved manner keeping the women component in mind.

It also discussed impact of globalization on women. It is pointed out that the micro studies conducted by the Department of Women and Child Development, show that "there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment'. The Policy also highlighted the importance of resource management. However, it ignored land as the main resource base.

All the above mentioned studies have concluded that in spite of equal political rights women still do not enjoy political participation in general and political power in particular. As we have noted earlier various reasons have been identified for this phenomenon. However, since independence a shift towards women's political empowerment is visible. Upreti and Mathur observe that, "One might, therefore, say in summing up that the political attitudes, awareness, and commitments of women voters are gradually evolving in the context of a democratic political system. Given more opportunities, and with the growth or political articulation and involvement, women are likely to play a more effective and discerning role in politics than hitherto" (1979: 66).

Political participation of women has been studied by several scholars (Gail, 1974, Mehta, 1975, Ashraf Ali and L.M. Sharma, 1983, AshokKumar, 1990, Sangeeta Mishra, 1993). Many studies are also available on the socio-economic background of women in politics (Vijay Agnew, 1986, Annapurna Devi, 1986).

One of the measures of political empowerment of women is the reservation policy, i.e., to reserve certain positions for women. Contrary arguments have been made on this issue. On the one hand, Vina Mazumdar has quoted the most important argument made against the reservation for women that, "Many women leaders believe that it would be a retrograde step after the acceptance of equality.

They also claim that such a step would isolate women from the mainstream of political and social life" (1919: XVII). On the other hand, arguments have been given in favour of reservation. It is said that without reservation it may be difficult to ensure to women a fair share in power and without which any improvement in their status is impossible. Women's World Congress at Nairobi in 1985 released a document on empowerment of women. This document highlighted the issue of women's political participation. It was recommended that 35 percent of the total seats should be reserved for women and some posts should be reserved for women at the village level.

3. Studies of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI):

Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of the recorded history. The idea of village republic of Mahatma Gandhi has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj System to enlist the people's participation in rural reconstruction. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1959 suggested that an agency should be set up at the village level, which would not only represent the interests of the village community but also take up the development programmes of the government at this level. The Gram Panchayat, which was to constitute this agency, was, therefore, perceived as an implementing agency of the government in developmental sphere.

Panchayati Raj is a step towards decentralization of power. Desai maintains that, "Panchayati Raj is also claimed as a real democratic political apparatus which would bring the masses into active political control from below, from the vast majority of the weaker, poorer sections of rural India. According to some it will decentralize democracy" (1969:534).

In 1974, Deptt of Social Welfare of the Govt. of India appointed a Committee to look into the status of women in India. The report of this committee entitled 'Towards Equality' (1974) was the first major attempt to review the status of women in India. The report stated that it is only through reservation of certain percentage of seats in PRI that women's effective participation can be achieved.

Ashok Mehta Committee Report (1978) maintained that, the involvement of rural women in the developmental process has always been regarded as an integral part of the total development of the village community. The introduction of PRI has added another dimension to the role of rural women.

In 1988, the Deptt of Women and Child Development conducted a study which was published in the form of a report entitled, 'National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 A.D.' The report submits that there is a continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors-economic, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal. As women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life. The study has recommended 30 percent reservation of seats for women at all levels in PRI.

Various scholars have analyzed the role of Panchayats in the empowerment of women in the villages. Dr. Gopalan, Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India, stated that a silent revolution was taking place in India. The changes that many women chairperson and members are making in day-to-day Panchayat functioning have dispelled the doubts as to whether enough women will be available and be capable of performing. There was such competition, among women for tickets in the reserved constituencies. The Institute of Social Sciences' Newsletter on Panchayati Raj, states that women Panchayat representatives are fast learning politics and changing the scenario that was reported by a UNICEF study that eighty-eight per cent of the women representatives donned Purdah before they were elected. After three or four years of election, they took it off. However, the saying that power corrupts may apply to women members of Panchayat also. Women have no special gift of not falling prey to this vice.

Usha Patnaik (1988) submits that to some extent, the success of the Panchayati Raj movement in some states of India like West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, etc., has led to a false assumption that setting up of the structures of the Panchayati Raj and holding elections to the Panchayats with one-third seats reserved for women are by themselves enough to ensure democratic decentralization and democratization or to encourage and strengthen the Indian women's movement. Of course, Panchayats are a necessary condition for a decentralized participatory democracy but they are not a sufficient condition for a genuine growth of the Indian women's movement. If we have to empower the movement, and Indian women, this cannot be achieved only by holding Panchayat elections and placing women in decision-making positions at the grassroots level. We have to give more attention to the bases that underlie this process.

Introduction of Panchayati Raj was hailed as one of the most important political innovations in independent India. It was also considered as a revolutionary step (Singh: 1996). These institutions are considered as training ground for democracy and give political education to the masses (P. Satya Naragana: 1990). The introduction of Panchayati Raj systems in various States represents a new beginning in the evolution of the local-self government institutions as agencies of nation building. Within the short life span of less than two decades, the Panchayati Raj institutions in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal have given a fairly good account of themselves in various functional spheres— economic, social, political and administrative — and are well on their way to strengthening their positions in the countryside (Krishnan, 1992).

Panchayati Raj is no longer an experiment with an air of tentativeness about it. It is being accepted as an abiding faith in the democratic process and its values. It is more than a political slogan, more than an administrative device. By a common authority of scholars, it is a precursor of revolutionary changes to come. 20thApril 1993 is a landmark day in the history of Panchayati Raj in India as on this day the Constitution Act 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the PRI. Reservation of seats in PRI is one of the most important instruments of political empowerment of rural women. With 73rd Amendment in the constitution of India, one third of all seats i.e., 33.5 percent are reserved for women.

The impact of provision reserving seats for women in Panchayats has not been studied in detail in the State of U.P. However, it may be observed that the empowering process certainly has brought about a marked change in the knowledge, attitude, status, and style of life and self-identity of the elected women of the Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh. Women's participation in the election of the Panchayats has given them a chance to talk and understand politics and power. It can be said that no other event in the recent history of India has awakened so much political consciousness among the women than the entry of women into the governance of Panchayats.

Some studies have quantified the perceptible changes in the functioning of the Panchayats and the way elected women were coping with their new responsibilities. The areas for which the elected women gave their priority for utilization of funds were clearly focused and reflected the most urgent needs of women namely, employment, improving health and drinking water facilities and solving the problem of atrocities against women.

The statutory reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj bodies has provided an opportunity for this formal involvement in the development and political process at the grassroots level thereby enabling them to influence the decision making process in the local

governments (Gowda 1999, p.37).

If we look at the studies that have been carried out in the last 3-4 years, it is very clear that Panchayati Raj has struck deep roots in the countryside. A look particularly at the role of women in Panchayats shows that things have changed dramatically. This provision, whereby not less than one-third of the seats were reserved for women, has brought about a revolutionary change. In the context of the role of women, I must make particular mention of a study, which covered the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, where a large number of women members and heads of Panchayats have been interviewed. At the time when the study was conducted, there was political support at the state-level for Panchayats only in Madhya Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan such support was lacking. However, in these two states, despite the handicap, the women Panches and Sarpanches began working very efficiently.

When they stated out, they did so from a state of helplessness, but very soon, they reached the state where they did not experience any feeling of helplessness. On the contrary, many of them indicated that they would be willing and be able to contest elections even from

unreserved seats. Today, a woman heading a Panchayat is able to interact with government officials and she is able to manage the affairs of the village in an effective way. In many such Panchayats, the rates of school enrolment have gone up dramatically.

Correspondingly, there has been a significant reduction in child labour. There are a few sad stories here and there, but largely women have struggled and prevailed. This struggle has not been in vain. In the villages, there is tremendous social support, as all their activities are widely perceived as conducive to the well being of the community.

Therefore, there is no doubt at all that the presence of women in Panchayats has been very beneficial. It has benefited women by empowering them and it has benefited the village community by enabling that community to take advantage of a sharper focus on the needs of the village. (Sudha Pillai, 1999)

The transfer of power to one million women elected local representatives many of whom are malnourished and illiterate is the greatest social experiment of our time (Joan Holmes, 2000 p.1). What has been the impact of the reservation for women and to what extent this has helped them is a burning debatable issue (Meenakshi Hooja and Rakesh Hooja, 1988 p.472).

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India popularly known as an agent of rural transformation are not merely a formal arrangement with specific form and function but have a certain legitimacy and meaning by which they are identified. After independence, there have been several attempts to make panchayat a more viable institution and crystallize certain practices, which are necessary for rural development. Unfortunately, panchayat as an institution failed to make its own identity. A number of factors can be attributed to the failure of it. Taking into account all-global as well as contextual factors, one point becomes more obvious that institutions have, in general, a longer life span than individuals or organizations.

Sometimes they decay over time and become attenuated or even extinct. Very often, they change or adapted themselves to the changes taking place in the wider society. By the same token, it is argued that the panchayat system has enormously changed over time but is still recognized as an institution today. The new PRIs differ from the old ones not only in their morphological forms but also in the value that give them meaning andlegitimacy.

A study of the women elected representatives to Karnataka panchayati raj institutions between 1987 and 1990, conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences, 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, their present sociological and cultural compulsions and their leadership role in society. Since it has an all-India bearing, it is important to go into these findings in some detail.

The study revealed that women from the dominant castes– the Lingayats and Vokkaligas–formed 60 percent of the elected women members in the Zilla Parishads in Karnataka. It may be

mentioned here thatthese two castes constituted 50.61 percent of all the members in the Zilla Parishads. In Karnataks, women had contested only for the seats reserved for them and not for the general ones. The 1983 act provided for at least one Scheduled Caste woman to be represented in each Zilla Parishad.

There was a predominance of younger members among the women compared to that among men. More than three-fourths of the women Zilla Parishad members were below forty-five years and more than half the members 'were in the age group of twenty-five to thirty-five. Incidentally, Karnataka was the first state to lower the voting age to eighteen. It is said that political parties had considerable difficulty in finding women candidates but found it easier to persuade younger women to enter public life than the older generation because of the latter's conservative and traditional outlook. This also means that the candidates were relatively inexperienced in politics and public life. Almost 80 percent of the women members in the Zilla Parishad had no experience of active politics, except for exercising their franchise in a few elections. The remaining 20 percent had served either in the erstwhile panchayats or in taluk development boards. In addition, this 20 percent included two former M.L.As.

The women who contested the 1987 elections were very often the relatives of political leaders. Usually a male member of the family had been instrumental in persuading the women to contest. During the election campaign, these women were always projected as someone's wife, mother, sister or widow, as the case may be. They attributed their victory in the elections to the political party or its leader or the status of the male member of the family. None mentioned there own potential or promises. Largely, these women candidates were unknown in their constituencies. (Georage Mathew, 1999)

The recent Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIE) Act does have the potential to include women in a very good proportion to male at the grassroots level political institutions. Presence of 33 per cent women is likely to affect and influence the political processes of decision-making and policy formulations at this level. It will not only enable them to give a women's angle to the decision and policy formulation activity. It will also awaken them to the problems facing the community as whole. It will enable a journey from the private to the public sphere of activity. It will train cadre of women political activists for partaking in the affairs of state and federal politics. Total sharing and equality in decision-making may not happen for yeas to come, but it Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIS) promise a path towards that goal. When women armed with physical presence of a sizeable proportion reach the position of a 'critical mass', their voices cannot be ignored. They have to be heard. No longer can they be ignored. It could be a road to women's political empowerment. However, for a wider representation effective sharing in power process, this needs to be extended to representative bodies right up to the federal level. Wider representation will not ensure instant quality. It will take time and practice, moreover many studies have already proved that democracy, even while being the best form of government, need not be the best government, that men as much as women are guilty of devaluating its

quality all over the world. The experience of Orissa and West Bengal testify that women are guilty of devaluating its quality all over the world. The experience of Orissa and West Bengal testify that women are capable of efficient political performance given the chance. However, a word of caution is necessary at this juncture.

A survey was conducted in the 100 Panchayats of Ananthapuramu district of Andhra pradesh. Women Panchayat members revealed that the social institutional barrier has been obstructing their way to contest the election of a member or Sarpanch in the village. This clearly shows that the sampled women Panchayat members are aware of their political rights but they cannot claim those because of male dominance. Women members of the Panchayat may be, to begin with representatives only in name. However, with passage of time they become aware of their rights and duties as Panchayat members and after attending several Panchayat meetings they come to master the art of weaving their way through opposition mounted by power conscious male dominated bureaucracy and upper caste politicians. They become more self-confident. With that self-confidence when they participate in the proceedings of Panchayat meetings, they deal with many issues focusing on economic aspects. Thus, we can say that the political process provides both capacity and empowerment in terms of economic aspects. The woman Panch would also look forward to quality education for her children. At the back of this ambition would be the fact that good education would lead to better employment and better standard of living. (Shobhita Jain, 2001) The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has unleashed the power of women and it is hoped that the new forces will enable them to not only define their role in the political and socio-cultural ethos of their villages, districts and their country, but will also change the mind set of the orthodox.

The review of literature reveals that an in-depth study on the empowerment of rural women in India. Mishra, K, (2006) Women's Role in polities in modern world, omega, New Delhi.. Murty, R.K. (eds.) (2001)," Building women's capacities. Intervention in Gender Transformation" sage, New Delhi.

Siddashrama, B.K. (2009) Women and leadership, sumit, New Delhi

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Objectives:
1.To exam powers and duties in the degree of awareness of Panchayat members and general people about their.

2. To analyse the extent of participation of members in decision making of Panchayat.

3. To find out the scope and extent of women-members participation in the process of planning decision-making and execution of various development programmes.

4. To examine the   political factors which hinder in the participation in PRIs.

5. To make suggestions and recommendations for creating awareness and greater involvement of women in Panchayat decision-making.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN SARPANCHES

Table – 1

Distribution of the Women Leaders their motivated reason for entering under Local Self Government in Ananthapuramu District.

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Maintain Family Status	17	17.0
Reclain Family Status	5	5.0
Achieve Status	12	12.0
Any Other	66	66.0

The data presented Table-1 clearly presents the reasons given by respondents for their entry into Local Self Government.

Among the respondents it was heartening to note that 17.0 per cent respondents have expressed opinion that their entry was to achieve some status for themselves, 12.00 per cent said their entry was to reclaim their family status and other 5.00 per cent opinioned that their entry was to reclaim that their entry was to reclaim the family status. Remaining 66.00 per cent the majority of the respondents the opinion to express any other reasons.

In this Table it is evident that 44.00 per cent of the Women Leaders have entered Panchayati Raj to achieve status or to maintain status and to reclaim family status.

Table – 2

Distribution of the Women Leaders opinion whether they were forced enter Politics under Local Self Government in Ananthapuramu District.

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Yes	34	34.0
No	14	14.0
To some extent	52	52.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

An attempt was made to examine the opinion of Women Leaders as to know whether they were forced into politics or was it due to their own volition. The data presented in Table-2 suggest that 14.00 per cent have said that they were not forced but they entered into politics on their

own. On the whole 86.00 per cent have accepted that they were force into politics to some extent 52.00 per cent and certainly yes 34.00 per cent.

Table – 3

Distribution of the Women Leaders by Enter into the Local Self Government in Ananthapuramu District

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
As a compromise candidate	36	36.0
As a concensurs candidate	8	8.0
To Neutralise factional interest	3	3.0
Due to reservation	53	53.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

The data presented in Table-3 presents the immediate causes that forced the Women Leaders entry into Local Self Government. The data reveals that 53.00 per cent have expressed mere reservation as a causative factor for their entry into politics.47.00 per cent of respondents have attributed their prevalent situation in which these women emerged as the compromise candidate or as a consensus candidate. There is a small group of 3.00 per cent of respondents attributed their neutralise factional interest.

Table – 4

Distribution of the Women Leaders by attributing Factors for their Emergence under Local Self Government in Ananthapuramu District

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Party	33	33.0
Caste	41	41.0
Family	25	25.0
Leadership	1	1.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

The emergence of Women Leaders has become a reality mainly due to the reservation. The study tried to examine the attributing factor responsible for their emergence as opined by the leaders themselves clearly stated that their caste was the main factor, while 25.00 per cent attributed their families. The fraction of 1.00 per cent attributed their entry to their leaders who happen to be their political patrons as the reasons instrumental for their emergence and small fragment 33.00 per cent respondents have attributed their emergence to their political party. The point of inference here is that the factors that are responsible for their emergence, to a large extent are their families and caste. The reason that their political entry was due to their political

party in a way caste based for, parties in the state are divided on caste lines. The process of political empowerment is a reality only as for as their emergence in the Local Self Government.

Table – 5

Distribution of the Women Leaders by help you conducting the village panchayat meeting and Recording minutes under Local Self Government in Ananthapuramu District

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Village Panchayat Officer	19	19.0
Secretary	73	73.0
Village Assistant	7	7.0
Surpanch Own	1	1.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Women Leaders perceptions of their roles and duties were examined to no whether they have the knowledge awareness about their duties and responsibilities. The data presented in Table-5 presents the information as to which whose help, the Leaders conduct meetings and Record minutes. The data depicts that only 1.00 per cent could confidently say that they are able to do by themselves, 7.00 per cent said that they take help of Village Assistant and 19.00 per cent said they take the Village Panchayat Officer. A sizable group compromising of 73.00 per cent of respondents said that they take the Secretary. However the responses given by respondents that they do it by themselves or their inclination to seek the assistance of Village Secretary or other Panchayat Officer all indicates of healthy perception about their role with an inclination of collective, effort and also in a democratic way ensuring of participation of others.

Table – 6

Attendance particulars for the meetings of Grama Sabha of selected Women Leaders in Local Self Government in Ananthapuramu District

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1-5	34	34.0
6-10	43	43.0
11-15	22	22.0
Above 16	1	1.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

It is clear from table-6 that as many as 43.00 percent selected women leaders are conducted meetings 6-10. 34.00 percent of women leaders are conducted 1-5 meetings. 22.00 percent of the Local Self Government women leaders conducting the meetings 11-15, remaining 1.00

percent leaders conducting meetings 16 above. This study reveals that only one percent women leaders conducted the meetings regularly.

Table – 7
Distribution of the Respondents by their awareness of various income sources of Panchayats.

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
House Tax	95	95.0
Cell tower	5	5.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Besides being aware of the procedures and duties, a surpanch is expected to know the income sources to the Panchayat. The success of a leader is very much dependent on the dynamic mobilization or at least an awareness of the sources through which revenue could be raised. In this present study the respondents were asked about awareness of various income sources of the Panchayats. The responses clearly indicate that all the members are aware of the House Taxes, the main source of income, 95.00 per cent. While 5.00 per cent have clearly said Cell Towers. It is evident that the surpanches by and large are aware of various sources of income to the Panchayats.

Table – 8
Distribution of the Respondents by their opinion on sufficiency finances to meet the development needs of Panchayats.

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Yes	1	1.0
No	99	99.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

The data presents the Table-8 gives the opinion of the respondents regarding the sufficiency of the finances to meet the development needs of the Panchayats. It can be seen that 99.00 per cent of the Respondents said that the finances available are insufficient to meet the needs only 1.00 per cent surpanches said that the finances as sufficient on the whole the surpanches are aware of the main sources of income and to a considerable extent are aware of the adequacy or in a adequacy of the finance of the Panchayat.

Table – 9
Distribution of the Respondents by Achievements.

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Water Problem	11	11.0
C-C Roads	20	20.0
Sanitation	54	54.0
Plantation	15	15.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Women Leaders were asked to evaluate their own achievements during their tenure. The responses given clearly state that 43.00 per cent respondents felt that their tasks was full filed in sanitation. 30.00 per cent respondents said that they fulfilled the plantation. 17.00 per cent, 7.00 per cent respondents said that they fulfilled water problems and C.C. Roads, remaining 30.00 per cent respondents said that they fulfil the problem of streetlights.

Table – 10
Distribution of the Respondents awareness of different Government functionaries.

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
EORD	17	17.0
Panchayat Engineer	67	67.0
Mandal Development Officer	11	11.0
MLA	4	4.0
MP	1	1.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

The data presented Table-10 gives us an idea about the awareness of different Government functionaries who are connected to Panchayat Raj. 67.00 per cent could tell Panchayat Engineer, 17.00 per cent EORD, 11.00 per cent said that Mandal development officer, 4.00 per cent said that M.L.A. and only one per cent said that M.P. as persons connected to Panchayat Raj. All the surpanches are in a way well aware of the Government functionaries related to Panchayati Raj which only shows that amount of awareness and knowledge of the Panchayat Raj functionaries.

SUGGESTIONS
1. It is evident that men's attitude towards women's entry into politics has begun to change from that of total rejection to limited encouragement and in some cases even to active encouragement. This trend needs to be strengthened through orientation courses and training programmes for officials and elected representatives, both men and women. Besides there is a need to train the women leaders at regular intervals to enable them to manage the

responsibilities assigned to them in the Panchayats at all the levels. Since the hard up women members found it difficult to forgo their wages for attending training programmes, these must be organized at their doorstep and some of the articulate Panchayat leaders should be involved as the trainers.

2. Another important effort required for real empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and rearing children needs to be transformed into a feeling of equal partnership of women and men. To inculcate this they should be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both.

3. Studies on women in politics have emphasized that contact with outside world makes women more alert and also active in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly, interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected one's should be encouraged. Secondly, these women could be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged.

4. The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. The Mahila Mandals in the village can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize them for this purpose. Some successful women's organisations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging the women's participation in social and political activities. The Government should provide finances and infrastructure to some of the deserving and successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives. The leaders of women's movement in the country could also take up this task. They too can provide support to sensitize the rural women.

5. Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayats, who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honouring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will get replicated.

6. The media both print as well as electronic can play an important role in creating awareness in the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.

Concluding Observation:
We are living in different age, our aspiration are different our needs are different. Women are not as vulnerable as we think, nor as foolish. Dissemination of information about latest technology and encouragement of environment protection could help in widening women

perspective and providing fresh insight on issues of concern. The trend increasingly is towards better communication and healthy interaction.

If we talk about empowerment in women in a very broad sense, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the movement has proved to be quite effective and continues to gain popularity. The problem confronting women for the 21st century go beyond social abuse like physical beating, dowry deaths and female infanticide. With modernization and the growing influence of education on society has evolved tremendously over the years.

The role of women today was unthinkable just a few decades back. Many them are now seen working in urban cities and are decision makers in several families. Women are to be blamed to a large degree for their current plight. It's about time they get stronger hold on their lives, and stop succumbing to the social pressures. It's about time they stop letting their

passiveness and sensitivity be misunderstood for weakness. It's about time they gather the courage to break the barriers of tradition and take an independent stand. Only then can the empowerment of women be considered complete. Till then, the empowerment of women holds little meaning and significance in their life.

Based on the analysis of the Socio-Economic data pertaining to the Sarpanches of Ananthapuramu District brings forth the salient features

1. The age-wise classification of the respondents as presented in Table-3 depicts that, a majority of women respondents hail from 41-50 years above age group are 65.00 per cent. It is heartening to know that women in their prime adult age are entering politics, which indicates the enthusiasm and interest they exhibit to come forward to participate in the process of development.

2. As per the study reveals that Backward Caste women tops the list with 45.00 per cent, followed by other caste women with 29.00 per cent, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Women with 26.00 per cent respectively.

3. The study reveals that most of the Women leaders are 99.00 per cent are married and living with spouses and the rest of women who form (1.00) per cent are either divorced or separated.

4. Ananthapuramu District is characterized by the presence of many religions. Popular and numerical dominant religion of the District is Hinduism, only 2.00 per cent Respondents belonged to Muslims.

5. It is observable that 7.00 per cent of the respondents are illiterates. It was only 1.00 per cent are with educational levels of Degree and above.

6. The occupation wise classification of the women srapanches indicated that majority of them came from agriculture and allied occupations and most of them are from lower economic rung with very low levels of earning.

7. The overall inference is that all the respondents have minimum of land holdings which is an indicator of their economic status in their rural areas. Based on the sample it is observed that owning a land certainly enhances a person's political stature particularly in the rural areas.

8. The income levels of the families of Backward Caste sarpanches are in category lower middle and lower classes.

9. The housing conditions of respondents in similar to that of general population as we can see in any rural area.

10. It was found large numbers of family members of srapanches are in the workforce as in the case of typical rural households, where large numbers of people are dependent on small fragments of land leading to over dependence and lower levels of income and standard of living.

Empowerment of Women Leaders in Ananthapuramu District

The analysis of the reasons and factors responsible and the process of emergence of women leaders and their perceptions, attitudes and self-appraisal of their performance brings forth the following points.

1. The basic social institutions viz family and caste continue to be motivating factors for women leaders into politics.

2. The respondents clearly indicated that 66.00 per cent the majority of the respondents the opinion to express any other reasons. Among the respondents it was heartening to note that 17.0 per cent respondents have expressed opinion that their entry was to achieve some status for themselves.

3. 14.00 per cent have said that they were not forced but they entered into politics on their own.

4. The data reveals that 53.00 per cent have expressed mere reservation as a causative factor for their entry into politics.

5. 33.00 per cent respondents have attributed their emergence to their political party. The point of inference here is that the factors that are responsible for their emergence, to a large extent are their families and caste.

6. Women Leaders perceptions of their roles and duties were examined to no whether they have the knowledge awareness about their duties and responsibilities. A sizable group compromising of 73.00 per cent of respondents said that they take the Secretary.

7. 43.00 percent selected women leaders are conducted meetings 6-10.

8. Besides being aware of the procedures and duties, a surpanch is expected to know the income sources to the Panchayat. The responses clearly indicate that all the members are aware of the House Taxes, the main source of income, 95.00 per cent.

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