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## EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN GRAM PANCHAYATS – A CASE STUDY OF MYSORE DISTRICT.

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### Abstract

1993 that institutions of self-government, known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), were first institutionalised in India. 2018 marks 25 years since they came into existence through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. As stated by the Balwant Raj Meheta Committee we can find that decentralization of power has led the local bodies to take active participation in all socioeconomic and political decisions. Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) provide the opportunity to the rural masses to involve themselves from grass-root level to achieve all the national challenges. For complete involvement of the society, participation of rural women is ensured with 33 percent women reservation. Accordingly we now find women are also elected as the member of PRIs. But it is often found that rural women lack in decision making in any aspects whether economic, social, political or family matters and are dictated by their male counterpart.

Key words: Panchayat Raj Institutions, Rural, Women Participation, Rural development .

### Introduction

Panchayati Raj Rural development is one of the main objectives of Panchayati Raj and this has been established in all states of India except Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, in all Union Territories except Delhi. and certain other areas. These areas include: The scheduled areas and the tribal areas in the states The hill area of Manipur for which a district council exists and Darjeeling district of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists. Evolution of Panchayati Raj The Panchayati system in India is not purely a post-independence phenomenon. In fact, the dominant political institution in rural India has been the village panchayat for centuries. In ancient India, panchayats were usually elected councils with executive and judicial powers. Foreign domination, especially Mughal and British and the natural and forced socio-economic changes had undermined the importance of the village panchayats. In the pre-independence period, however, the panchayats were instruments for the dominance of the upper castes over the rest of the village, which furthered the divide based on either the socio-economic status or the caste hierarchy. The evolution of the Panchayati Raj System, however, got a fillip after the attainment of independence after the drafting of the Constitution. The Constitution of India in Article 40 enjoined: "The state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government". There were a number of committees appointed by the Government of India to study the implementation of self-government at the rural level and also recommend steps in achieving this goal.

The committees appointed are as follows:

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Ashok Mehta Committee G V K Rao Committee

L M Singhvi Committee Balwant Rai Mehta Committee & Panchayati Raj

The committee was appointed in 1957, to examine and suggest measures for better working of the Community Development Programme and the National Extension Service. The committee suggested the establishment of a democratic decentralised local government which came to be known as the Panchayati Raj.

### Recommendations by the Committee:

Three-tier Panchayati Raj system: Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad. Directly elected representatives to constitute the gram panchayat and indirectly elected representatives to constitute the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad. Planning and development are the primary objectives of the Panchayati Raj system. Panchayat Samiti should be the executive body and Zila Parishad will act as the advisory and supervisory body. District Collector to be made the chairman of the Zila Parishad. It also requested for provisioning resources so as to help them discharge their duties and responsibilities. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee further revitalised the development of panchayats in the country, the report recommended that the Panchayati Raj institutions can play a substantial role in community development programmes throughout the country. The objective of the Panchayats thus was the democratic decentralisation through the effective participation of locals with the help of well-planned programmes. Even the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, defended the panchayat system by saying, “. . . authority and power must be given to the people in the villages .... Let us give power to the panchayats.”

#### Ashok Mehta Committee & Panchayati Raj

The committee was appointed in 1977 to suggest measures to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj system in India.

The key recommendations are: The three-tier system should be replaced with a two-tier system: Zila Parishad (district level) and the Mandal Panchayat (a group of villages). District level as the first level of supervision after the state level. Zila Parishad should be the executive body and responsible for planning at the district level. The institutions (Zila Parishad and the Mandal Panchayat) to have compulsory taxation powers to mobilise their own financial resources.

#### G V K Rao Committee & Panchayati Raj

The committee was appointed by the planning commission in 1985. It recognised that development was not seen at the grassroot level due to bureaucratisation resulting in Panchayat Raj institutions being addressed as ‘grass without roots’. Hence, it made some key recommendations which are as follows: Zila Parishad to be the most important body in the scheme of democratic decentralisation. Zila Parishad to be the principal body to manage the developmental programmes at the district level. The district and the lower levels of the Panchayati Raj system to be assigned with specific planning, implementation and monitoring of the rural developmental programmes. Post of District Development Commissioner to be created. He will be the chief executive officer of the Zila Parishad. Elections to the levels of Panchayati Raj systems should be held regularly.

#### L M Singhvi Committee & Panchayati Raj

The committee was appointed by the Government of India in 1986 with the main objective to recommend steps to revitalise the Panchayati Raj systems for democracy and development. The following recommendations were made by the committee:

The committee recommended that the Panchayati Raj systems should be constitutionally recognised. It also recommended constitutional provisions to recognise free and fair elections for the Panchayati Raj systems. The committee recommended reorganisation of villages to make the gram panchayat more viable. It recommended that village panchayats should have more finances for their activities. Judicial tribunals to be set up in each state to adjudicate matters relating to the elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions and other matters relating to their functioning. All these things further the argument that panchayats can be very effective in identifying and solving local problems, involve the people in the villages in the developmental activities, improve the communication between different levels at which politics operates, develop leadership skills and in short help the basic development in the states without making too many structural changes. Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the first to adopt Panchayati raj in 1959, other states followed them later. Though there are variations among states, there are some features that are common. In most of the states, for example, a three-tier structure including panchayats at the village level, panchayat samitis at the block level and the zila parishads at the district level has been institutionalized. Due to the sustained effort of the civil society organisations, intellectuals and progressive political leaders, the Parliament passed two amendments to the Constitution – the 73rd Constitution Amendment for rural local bodies (panchayats) and the 74th Constitution Amendment for urban local bodies (municipalities) making them ‘institutions of self-government’. Within a year all the states passed their own acts in conformity to the amended constitutional provisions.

#### Also read: Caste system and Panchayati Raj

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 Significance of the Act The Act added Part IX to the Constitution, “The Panchayats” and also added the Eleventh Schedule which consists of the 29 functional items of the panchayats. Part IX of the Constitution contains Article 243 to Article 243 O. The Amendment Act provides shape to Article 40 of the Constitution, (directive principles of state policy), which directs the state to organise the village panchayats and provide them powers and authority so that they can function as self-government. With the Act, Panchayati Raj systems come under the purview of the justiciable part of the Constitution and mandates states to adopt the system. Further, the election process in the Panchayati Raj institutions will be held independent of the state government’s will.

The Act has two parts: compulsory and voluntary. Compulsory provisions must be added to state laws, which includes the creation of the new Panchayati Raj systems. Voluntary provisions, on the other hand, is the discretion of the state government. The Act is a very significant step in creating democratic institutions at the grassroots level in the country. The Act has transformed the representative democracy into participatory democracy. Salient Features of the Act

Gram Sabha: Gram Sabha is the primary body of the Panchayati Raj system. It is a village assembly consisting of all the registered voters within the area of the panchayat. It will exercise powers and perform such functions as determined by the state legislature. Candidates can refer to the functions of gram panchayat and gram panchayat work, on the government official website Three-tier system: The Act provides for the establishment of the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj in the states (village, intermediate and district level). States with a population of less than 20 lakhs may not constitute the intermediate level. Election of members and chairperson: The members to all the levels of the Panchayati Raj are elected directly and the chairpersons to the intermediate and the district level are elected indirectly from the elected members and at the village level the Chairperson is elected as determined by the state government.

**Reservation of seats:**

For SC and ST: Reservation to be provided at all the three tiers in accordance with their population percentage. For women: Not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women, further not less than one-third of the total number of offices for chairperson at all levels of the panchayat to be reserved for women. The state legislatures are also given the provision to decide on the reservation of seats in any level of panchayat or office of chairperson in favour of backward classes. Duration of Panchayat: The Act provides for a five-year term of office to all the levels of the panchayat. However, the panchayat can be dissolved before the completion of its term. But fresh elections to constitute the new panchayat shall be completed before the expiry of its five-year duration.

in case of dissolution, before the expiry of a period of six months from the date of its dissolution. Disqualification: A person shall be disqualified for being chosen as or for being a member of panchayat if he is so disqualified – Under any law for the time being in force for the purpose of elections to the legislature of the state concerned.

Under any law made by the state legislature. However, no person shall be disqualified on the ground that he is less than 25 years of age if he has attained the age of 21 years. Further, all questions relating to disqualification shall be referred to an authority determined by the state legislatures.

State election commission: The commission is responsible for superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and conducting elections for the panchayat. The state legislature may make provisions with respect to all matters relating to elections to the panchayats. Powers and Functions: The state legislature may endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. Such a scheme may contain provisions related to Gram Panchayat work with respect to: the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice. the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them, including those in relation to the 29 matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

Finances: The state legislature may –

Authorize a panchayat to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees. Assign to a panchayat taxes, duties, tolls and fees levied and collected by the state government. Provide for making grants-in-aid to the panchayats from the consolidated fund of the state. Provide for the constitution of funds for crediting all money of the panchayats. Finance Commission: The state finance commission reviews the financial position of the panchayats and provides recommendations for the necessary steps to be taken to supplement resources to the panchayat. Audit of Accounts: State legislature may make provisions for the maintenance and audit of panchayat accounts. Application to Union Territories: The President may direct the provisions of the Act to be applied on any union territory subject to exceptions and modifications he specifies.

Exempted states and areas: The Act does not apply to the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram and certain other areas. These areas include, The scheduled areas and the tribal areas in the states. The hill area of Manipur for which a district council exists. Darjeeling district of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists. However, Parliament can extend this part to these areas subject to the exception and modification it specifies. Thus, the PESA Act was enacted. Continuance of existing law: All the state laws relating to panchayats shall continue to be in force until the expiry of one year from the commencement of this Act. In other words, the states have to adopt the new Panchayati raj system based on this Act within the maximum period of one year from 24 April 1993, which was the date of the commencement of this Act. However, all the Panchayats existing immediately before the commencement of the Act shall continue till the expiry of their term, unless dissolved by the state legislature sooner. Bar to interference by courts: The Act bars the courts from interfering in the electoral matters of panchayats. It declares that the validity of any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the allotment of seats to such constituencies cannot be questioned in any court. It further lays down that no election to any panchayat is to be questioned except by an election petition presented to such authority and in such manner as provided by the state legislature. PESA Act of 1996: The provisions of Part IX are not applicable to the Fifth Schedule areas. The Parliament can extend this Part to such areas with modifications and exceptions as it may specify. Under these provisions, Parliament enacted Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, popularly known as PESA Act or the extension act.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

S.K. Singh's article on '73rd constitution Amendment: An Analytical Framework', summarizes the main provisions of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, and then while noting the important new elements, sought to be injected into P R Is, it focus attention on the areas that "leave scope for rendering the Panchayats with powers and urges on to take remedial steps.

K.V. Palanidurai in his article 'Democratic Decentralisation in India - Retrospect and Prospects', has traced chronologically the developments relating to the establishment of local self- government Institutions in the country. He has narrated the experience of few States which have attempted democratic decentralization. As pointed out by the author that still the position has not altered from 1978. He concludes that unless function- sharing and power sharing process begins with appropriate follow-up measures by the Central and State governments, it is difficult to achieve desired results.

P.S.K. Menon and Bakshi D. Sinha's work Panchayati Raj in Scheduled Areas conducted on behalf of the Institute of Social . Sciences, New Delhi, makes a critical evaluation and comparative analysis of implementation of the provisions of the Extension Act with special reference to the power of Gram Sabha. Based on oil, the field -studies in the State of Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, it examines the nature, historical perspective and it suggests measure to achieve the goals, envisaged in extending the provisions of part IX of the Constitution.

G. Palanithurai in the volume 'New Panchayati Raj in Tamil Nadu provides State -wise outlook of the devolution of powers. It aims at providing analysis of the performance of the institution in terms of the powers assigned to them. The whole process of the transformation has been captured in this work from the experiences of the provinces.

Snehalata Panda's study "Emerging Pattern of Leadership Among Rural Women in Orissa" (1996) focused mainly on women entered into politics and also the changes of women's outlook and behaviour. Panda also highlighted an opportunity particularly related to the labour and lower caste women in village politics.

Rashmi Arun in an excellent case study "Role of Women in Panchayati Raj" (1997), discussed about housewife women in Madhya Pradesh who recently played a big role in politics, most of them were. illiterate. She also highlighted some younger women who were literate and elected in Panchayat election.

### Objectives Of The Study

1. To examine the measures undertaken by Panchayat Raj Institutions to improve the basic infrastructure viz, public health, anganawadies, education, water and sanitation.
2. To study whether the PRIs have implemented any employment schemes for the empowerment of women.
4. To study the attitudes of Panchayat Raj Institutions members towards women's empowerment.

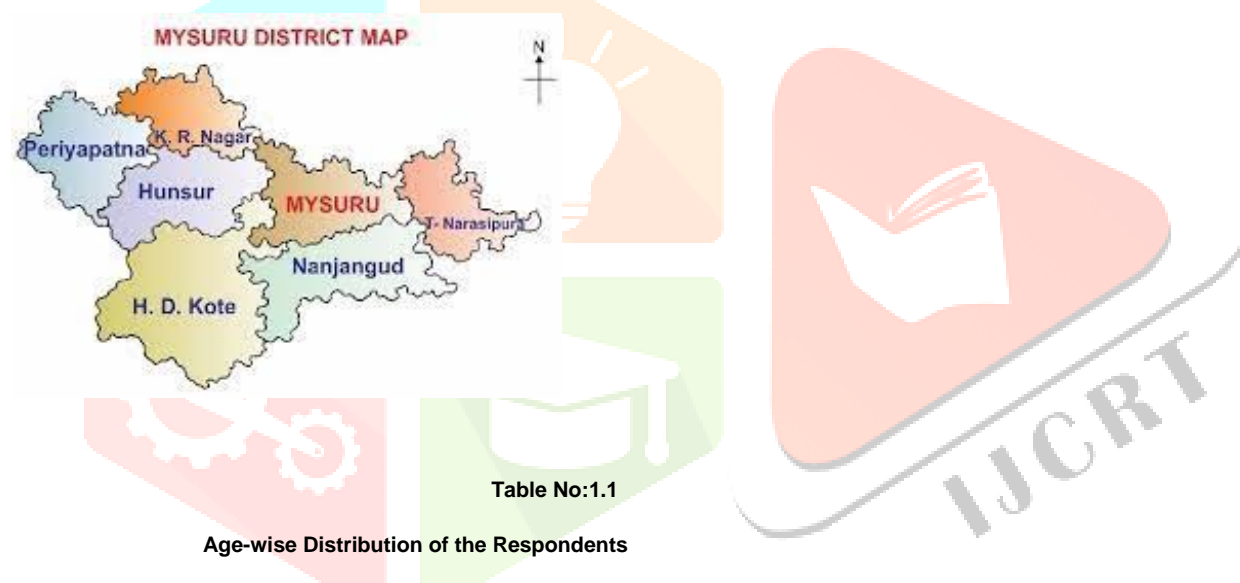
### Hypotheses:

- 1 )The Socio-economic status of the individual and the family influences the empowering process
- 2 )An external environment that is conducive in terms of providing better opportunities, freedom of expression, mobility and access to information and resources etc., gives more scope for women representation.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study was undertaken collecting data in purpose sampling method from 100 EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN GRAM PANCHAYATS. Besides the primary data was collected through structure questionnaire method and secondary information has been collected from various sources of PANCHAYATS, Magazines, and internet. The questionnaire was designed in such a way to elicit information like profile of members, income, expenditure, savings, loans, type of house, self confidence, reaction to social evils, behavioral change and health, water supply and sanitation. The main objective of this study is to find the EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN GRAM PANCHAYATS.

The mysore district has 235 Grama Panchayats (GPs) in which 23 (10 per cent) respondent to a questionnaire. The total number of GPs elected members is 4300, of which 215 (05 per cent) of respondent to a questionnaire. Samples were selected from all the taluks of the district.



Age group	Number	Number Percent
< 25 years	20	20%
25-35 years	25	25%
36-45 years	25	25%
46-55 years	10	10%
>55 years 09	20	20%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE : FILED WROK

An analysis of the present age of women members as presented in Table 1.1. This shows that marriage and motherhood do not seem to inhibit women from seeking a political career. The mean age of women in gram panchayat is 37 years, which indicates that the younger generations of women have realized the value of political participation. They are more mobile in comparison with the older generation and have broken the traditional barriers.



Table No:1:2

## The educational background of the women gram panchayat

Educational Level	Number	Percent
Illiterate	20	20%
Primary	30	30%
Secondary	20	20%
Pre university	10	10%
Graduate	10	10%
Post graduate	10	10%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE : FILED WROK

The educational background of the women gram panchayat members illustrated in Table 1.2 This illustrates that the educational level of the women members is lower. It clearly indicates that the participation of respondents with below secondary education tends to be more in a decentralized democracy. It is an accepted fact that the overall educational status of female is quite low in all the Gram Panchayats.

Table No:1:3

## Caste-wise classification

Caste level	Number	Percent
Scheduled caste	30	30%
Scheduled Tribe	20	20%
Backward castes	20	20%
Forward castes	30	30%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE : FILED WROK

Caste structure of respondents has been depicted in Table No. 1.3 The one-third representation of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women in the gram panchayat clearly indicates that the reservation of seats for them in general and women in particular ensured the participation of women. It may be pointed out that 73rd constitutional amendment introduced reservation of seats for women in gram panchayats. This reservation was based on population of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes. It is instrumental in bringing the socially and economically backward sections of the people to the main stream of politics.

Table No:1:4

## Religion-Wise Classification of Respondents

Religion	Number	Percentage
Hindus	20	20%
Christians	20	20%
Muslims	60	60%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE : FILED WROK

Table No. 1.4. This result is an outcome of population structure of the villages. It may be observed that the Christians had a better representation than Muslim members in the Gram Panchayats.

Table No:1:4

## Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Number	Percentage
Married	50	50%
Unmarried	20	20%
Widow	15	15%
Separated	15	15%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE : FILED WROK

Table No. 1.4 Data on the marital status of women members are given in majority are married women and they are able to balance their roles as gram panchayat members/vice presidents/presidents with their role in the family. The participation of more number of widows indicates their faith in the political empowerment of women through grass-roots level democratic institutions.

Table No:1:5 .

## Husband's Occupation of the Respondents

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Agriculture	60	60%
Service	10	10%
Labour work (Cooli)	20	20%
Petty business	20	20%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE : FILED WROK

The occupational status of the spouses of the women gram panchayat members illustrated in Table No. 1.5 It revealed that a majority of gram panchayat members' spouses were engaged in the agricultural activities as cultivators.

Table No:1:6 .

## Income-Wise classification of the Respondents

Annual income	Number	Per cent
Less than Rs. 11,000/-	10	10%
11,000/- to 25,000/-	20	20%
26,000/- to 50,000/	20	20%
51,000/ to 75,000/	30	30%
76,000/ to 1,00,000/-	10	10%
Above 1,00,000/-	10	10%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE : FILED WROK

Table No. 1.6 It was found that large number of respondents fell in the low income group. It was well visualized that very little opportunities and freedom have been provided to women to participate in educational systems, social and cultural activities and in seeking employment in rural areas of selected 32 sample gram panchayats due to traditionally developed and prevailing backward social and cultural system. Inequalities in work participation were highly prevalent among the women of different castes and income groups. The women among the upper castes and those belonging to economically sound households were hardly participating in different economic activities even in the family enterprises and agricultural operations. The existence of some strict practices in Muslim communities restrict the ladies to participate in different social and religious functions. However, the unmarried girls had little more opportunities than the married women to participate in different activities and to move outside households. The proportion of literate women representatives was significantly higher than in the previous years. The economic activities of different categories of respondents show that agricultural operations were generally performed by the women members belonging to low-income groups. The women members belonging to upper castes and higher economic background participated more in other economic activities apart agricultural work. By and large some women members of Gram Panchayat had relatively higher level of freedom to move outside households and to participate in different economic, social, cultural and political activities. At the same time, various studies also postulate the fact that poverty is not the sole cause; other socio-cultural factors also influence the phenomena of women respondents' participation in work.

Table No:1:7

Table showing number of times Respondents elected to panchayats

No. of times elected	Number	Per cent
First time	50	50%
Second time	25	25%
Third time	25	25%
Total	100	100%

Thus majority of the members are first entrants to Panchayats and hence are less experienced.

Table No:1:8

## Awareness of 73rd amendment

Awareness of 73rd amendment	Number	Per cent
Very well aware	60	60%
Just aware	20	20%
Ignorant of it	20	20%
Total	100	100%

It is concluded that most of the respondents knew that reservation of seats has been made for women as per the Amendment Act. This illustrates that the awareness levels of women in gram panchayat is quite high.

Table No:1:9

## Opinion Expressed by the Respondents on the women's Political Reservation Bill

Opinion on Women's political Reservation Bill	Number	Percentage
Absolutely essential	50	50%
Essential	15	15%
Not essential	15	15%
Not at all essential	10	10%
Total	100	100%

It can be concluded that an overwhelming majority of the respondents are in favour of the bill, because, this has enabled a large number of women to enter into politics. Similarly, the reservation for SC/ST, OBC and women has provided opportunities to become members and participate in the development process.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the objective of the study following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of empirical analysis:

- 1 In all the thirty two panchayats, it has been found that women are fairly young in age, which indicates that the younger generation of women have realized the value of political participation.
- 2 It has been observed that the participation of respondents with below secondary education tends to be more in a decentralised democracy.
- 3 Regarding the caste profile, one third of the representatives belonged to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. The reservation of seats for these groups ensured their participation in Gram Panchayats.
- 4 It is found that the Christians had a better representation than Muslim members in the Gram Panchayats.

- 5 It reveals that majority of the respondents are married and are able to balance their roles in family life and political life.
- 6 An overwhelming majority of the respondents come from joint-family background.
- 7 The occupational status of the respondents' shows that, majority of them were housewives engaged in the household related activities.
- 8 A majority of the respondents belonged to low income groups. Most of the women are from non-political background and entered politics due to the pressure of political parties, husband and family members.
- 9 Social status of the family tends to bear a strong influence in determining women empowerment in Gram Panchayat than the economic status of the family.
- 10 Majority of the respondents are only the members in Gram Panchayats.
- 11 It is found that a majority of the Gram Panchayats are headed by male presidents.
- 12 Majority of the respondents have represented their wards for the first time. It indicates the lack of experience, skill and ability of participation on the part of members.
- 13 The members have secured self-satisfaction and self respect and also acquired a new identity because of their participation in welfare services.
- 14 Most of the respondents knew that reservation of seats had been made for women from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and they were in favour of the Bill. This shows that the awareness level of women in Gram Panchayat is quite high.
- 15 Majority of the respondents have awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They always visit the ward and interact with people to identify the problems of the wards.
- 16 The nature of participation by the respondents in Panchayat proceedings and the ward sabha are quite encouraging.
- 17 Involvement of women in the public activity is important for empowerment of women.
- 18 Majority of the respondents have strong consciousness of their role in Panchayats and are capable of handling issues independently.
- 19 The respondents in most of the Gram Panchayats discuss village problems in meetings, interact with people to identify the needs of the community and implement developmental programmes.
- 20 Majority of respondents have made specific contributions in the form of taking initiative to provide basic infrastructure and water connection forward.
- 21 Decision-making role is important for empowerment. Majority of the respondents have involved themselves actively in decision making process. They have also exhibited potentiality to emerge as decision makers.
- 22 Large proportions of respondents present the problems in the meetings and get the approval. They are aware of their responsibilities and discharge their functions in Panchayat independently.
- 23 Dominance by male members still exists in the Panchayat. The respondents think that only illiterate and ignorant members are dominated by male members.
- 24 A majority of respondents have shown interest in continuation in politics.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

- 1 Women are relegated to the background in politics because of male domination in Panchayats.
2. Most of the women are involved in politics out of the compulsion from political parties and family members. They have not entered into politics out of personal traits.
3. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the reservation policy for women undoubtedly make them to enter into public sphere. But reservation for women by itself will not empower the women members. They require regular orientation, training, educational and awareness building programmes which should be provided by the government. Unless socio-economic empowerment of women is not done, then political empowerment of women is almost impossible. Therefore political empowerment of women should be preceded by socioeconomic empowerment.

#### SUGGESTION

- Men's hostility, indifferent attitude and domestic responsibilities are the major constraints in empowerment of women. Therefore, political awareness programmes should make women understand their rights and the benefits.
2. There is the need for regular orientation and training programmes that will help to increase the political and management skills of women in panchayats. Being politically skillful, they will be able to understand and assimilate diverse political opinion, participate intelligently in political debates and analyse issues to make useful decisions.
  3. A long-term solution to women's participation in political activities rests in greater awareness about their role, responsibilities and entitlements.
  4. Participatory approaches need to be adopted.
  5. Expansion of information, education and development of communication skills of women.
  6. Empowerment as a process requires multi-dimensional efforts and holistic interventions. This requires concerted and sustained efforts by all concerned-policy makers, Governments, NGOs, Training Institutions and by the women and men themselves.

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