

Sharing Series 8

*Capacity Building: Increasing  
Awareness And Changing Mindset*



Empowering Elected  
Women in the Panchayati  
Raj Institution



## **BALA VIKASA SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY**

In 1990, Bala Vikasa was established in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, as an Indian counterpart to SOPAR, a Canadian Non-government Organization. In 1991, it became a registered, secular, non-partisan, non-profit, voluntary, social service organization. Through its collaboration with donor agencies in Canada and Europe, Bala Vikasa assumes a dual role, that of an implementer and a fund provider.

### **Philosophy**

People themselves have to be the true agents of change. Development is primarily for the people and by the people and thus the motto of Bala Vikasa is 'to help people to help themselves'.

### **Objectives**

- Provide support for socio-economic development of the rural poor, especially women.
- Plan, implement, monitor, evaluate development programs.
- Provide institutional support to partner organizations.
- Impart required training for interested community based organizations.

### **Strategy**

- Concentrate on holistic development programs, primarily on the intrinsic social and ethical aspects of human interaction, gradually leading women/community to economic development.
- Help build confidence and a desirable value system by inculcating discipline and human values, like dedication to work, self esteem, respect for the environment, sensitivity to the less privileged, and willingness to participate in community development activities.
- Build partnerships through collaboration with donor agencies and networks to share and work together with the people.
- Focus on replicable, manageable, accountable and sustainable development programs.

### **Development Programs supported by Bala Vikasa**

- Drinking Water through Bore Wells and Over Head Tank systems.
- Surface Water Management through desiltation of traditional water tanks.
- Safe water supply through Water Purification (Defluoridation) System.
- Farmers Cooperatives.
- Healthy Environment and Quality Education to the Children in Rural Public Schools.
- Youth Participation Program.
- Integrated Women Development Program.
- Community sponsorship and scholarship for orphans and poor rural students.
- Training in Community-driven development through its People Development Training Center.

A large group of women, mostly in sarees, are gathered in a room. Many are smiling and looking towards the camera. The women are of various ages and are dressed in traditional Indian attire. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the women in the foreground.

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## GLOSSARY

AIRTDS	: Action for Integrated Rural and Tribal Development Society
AP	: Andhra Pradesh
BC	: Backward Caste
B.C	: Before Christ
BC Goud	: A sub caste in the Backward Caste whose occupation is tapping palm wine (toddy)
BDO	: Block Development Officer
BP	: Block Panchayat
CDP	: Community Development Programme
Chowkidar	: Section Officer
DPDB	: District Planning and Development Board
Dr.	: Doctor
DRDA	: District Rural Development Agency
DWCRA	: Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas
GOI	: Government of India
GP	: Gram Panchayat
GPTC	: Gram Panchayat Territorial Constituency
Gram Panchayat	: Local government at village level
Gram Sabha	: Village General Assembly
Gram	: Village
Gram Sevak	: Village worker working for government
Harijan	: Individuals who are at the bottom of Hindu caste system
JPC	: Joint parliamentary Committee
1 Lakh	: 1,00,000
Lambardar	: Finance officer during the medieval period.
Mahila Mandal	: Women group
Mandal	: Constituency
MDO	: Mandal Development Officer
MLA	: Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	: Mandal Parishad
MP	: Member of Parliament
MPP	: Mandal Praja Parishad
MPTC	: Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency

NDC	: National Development Council
NF	: National Front
NGO	: Non Governmental Organization
NRDS	: Navjeevan Rural Development Society
OBC	: Other Backward Caste
OC	: Other Caste
Panchayat Samithi	: Committee constituted by Panchayat
Panchayat	: Elected Assembly, Village council
Parishad	: Governing Body, council
Patwari	: Village Revenue Officer
PDTC	: People Development Training Center
PR	: Panchayat Raj
Praja	: People
Prof.	: Professor
PRI	: Panchayati Raj Institution
PS	: Panchayat Samitis
Rs.	: Rupees
Samithi	: Committee
Sarpanch	: Head of village Administrative body
SC	: Scheduled Caste
SFDA	: Small Farmers Development Agency
SGSY	: Swarnjyanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (Central Government aided program)
SHG	: Self Help Groups
ST	: Scheduled Tribes
SWEEP	: Society for Welfare Education and Environmental Protection
UNDP	: United Nations Development Program
UNO	: United Nations Organisation
Upa Sarpanch	: Vice President of village administrative body
Zilla Pranalika	
Abrivudhi Mandals	: District planning and development constituency
Zilla	: District
ZP	: Zilla Parishad (District governing body)
ZPP	: Zilla Praja Parishad
ZPTC	: Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency

## PREFACE

A team of experts in the Panchayati Raj Institution, supported by Bala Vikasa staff, conducted an in-depth study<sup>1</sup> on the impact of the Women's Reservation in the Panchayats, through a representative sampling of elected women in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India.

The outcome of the data analysis demonstrates that the Reservation Policy for women, intended to grant women equal rights and empower them to participate in the decision making process at the local levels, has only succeeded to a small extent.

Augmented by reviews of literature on the subject of Reservation and Women's Empowerment, the researchers confirm that much remains to be done to enable women to play their role in the PRI and in the society more effectively. Towards this, the study team has emphasized in its recommendations, the importance of building women's capacity to truly empower them.

While the team's research reflected a slightly dismal picture of women representatives in the PRI, a study on the women representatives, who are members of Bala Vikasa Integrated Women Development Program, reveals a considerably different picture.

This Sharing Series 8 (SS8) illustrates Bala Vikasa's integrated approach to Capacity Building, wherein it emphasizes the need to train a person at all levels: head (knowledge and information), heart (attitudinal changes) and hands (skills).

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<sup>1</sup> A limited edition of Bala Vikasa *Study on Elected Women to Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh* has been published in July 2009 and is available on request.

The regular training session for elected members of the Panchayat, has empowered more than 250 Bala Vikasa women who have been elected as women representatives in the PRIs. A Bala Vikasa manual for Sarpanches, titled "Effective Leadership" in Telugu, has also contributed in building the capacity of women.

As the intention of Bala Vikasa PDTC, is to share the outcome of studies and its own grassroots experience with like-minded organizations, this Sharing Series 8 (SS8) illustrating success stories of Bala Vikasa in chapter five, it is hoped, will provide an impetus specifically to women in the PRIs, to further empower themselves through training programs, so as to increase their awareness and bring about attitudinal changes, confirmed by many studies and experience, as essential to fulfill their responsibilities successfully.



## THE STUDY

### I. RESEARCH

#### *Rational for the study*

Ten years ago, the Indian Parliament passed the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution which have impacted nearly 600 million Indian people in 5 lakh villages. The 73rd Amendment, that reserves one third of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, has empowered over a million women and has irrevocably changed their lives. Yet, there are quite a few misconceptions, as well as a miasma of prejudice. These stem from a resistance to accept the emergence of women into the public sphere as power brokers, as this historic step has interrogated the private/public dichotomy and has forced discussion on issues such as women's traditional roles, familial expectations and changing responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the percentage of women at various levels of political activity has risen from 4-5% to 25-40%. More than one million women

have now entered political life in India and 43% of the seats are occupied by them in the district, province and national level. With the introduction of reservation or quota system in the Panchayati Raj Institutions there is a legitimate entry of women in mainstream politics at the grassroot level in the whole country which has created political space for women across caste and class. Significant beginning has been made in the direction of legislative empowerment of women. Women's empowerment through collective voicing and participation in the development stream, it is hoped, would go a long way in the real empowerment of women.

Presently, the critical questions are: how far this step has been really successful? Has it effectively involved women in the decision

making process and raised issues related to the women community? Has it helped women get integrated with the mainstream of decision making? Has it really worked in solving the basic issues and problems faced by women in the society? The rationale of Bala Vikasa study was to find answers to these pertinent questions.

### ***Hypothesis***

The study is based on the premise that:

- Reservation policies clearly have an impact on women's representation. Women participate more in the political process in Gram Panchayat in which seats are reserved for women. Reservation policies are bringing about changes in the status of women.
- Women's experience of being involved with the Panchayati Raj Institutions has transformed many of them. They have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources, officials, and most of all, by challenging men. They have become articulate and conscious of their power.

Despite their low- literacy level, they have been able to tackle the political and bureaucratic system.

### ***Aim of the study***

To examine the premise, by analyzing the real impact of the women's reservation and their representation in the development activities of the village.

### ***Specific objectives of the study***

Focusing on the PRI in Andhra Pradesh, the specific objectives were:

- To study the socio-economic background of women Sarpanches.
- To study the factors contributing to women empowerment.
- To study factors causing differential empowerment of women.
- To identify gaps in women's empowerment.



- To assess the impact of 'Reservation' on the political empowerment of women

***Assessment of reservation and women's empowerment***

The study was to assess the impact of reservation on the political empowerment of women in the PRI's. It focused on the emergent character of women's role in the PRI's, women's leadership, and the level of empowerment among the elected women in PRI's, etc.

***Identifying gaps/ recommendations***

Research through systematic and objective collection, analysis and evaluation of information, was to identify the gaps and provide recommendations to help the public and private sectors to make effective decisions.

***Duration of the study***

The time period for the study was one year from June 2008 to June 2009.

**II. METHODOLOGY**

***Data collection***

- Primary data were directly collected from the elected



representatives in the PRIs. The data were collected through a questionnaire.

- Secondary data were compiled from a selection of books on the topics of women empowerment, participation of women in the PRIs, political empowerment of women at the grassroots, etc.
- For a better insight on the present situation of women in the PRIs, existing at the grassroots, various government publications, news papers, internet websites, blogs and social networks were also consulted.

***Research instrument***

For data collection the "questionnaire method" was used. The researchers spent a good amount of time in structuring the questionnaire which was a mixture of open ended, close ended and multiple choice questions.

Familiar and simple words were used in the questionnaire to avoid confusion and misunderstanding among the respondents.

The questionnaire was pre-tested. A number of data were removed, modified or added in its final edition.

In formulating the questionnaire, various factors like generated income, family assets, family size and family debts were taken into consideration to find out the changes in the living standards of the elected women. In the study, these factors served as indicators of economic empowerment.

### ***Research approach***

Comprehensive women interviews were the main tool to gather information about women's participation and performance in the PRIs.

Formal interviews were complimented with collections of relevant information through informal discussions with villagers, Panchayat council members and with respondent's family members.

Musings of elected women representatives received during direct contacts with the PRI women

served as valuable case studies, which have added substantial value to the study.

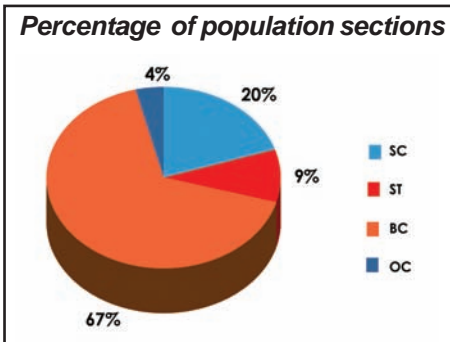
Observation helped understand the genuine feelings of the respondents. Perceptions helped receive an insight into their traditional norms and attitudes, which in turn enabled researchers to adapt a culturally sensitive approach

### ***Sampling Unit***

For the purpose of the study, 6 districts of Andhra Pradesh—Warangal, Adilabad, and Mahabubnagar in Telangana region; Srikakulam and Prakasam in Coastal Andhra Pradesh; and Ananthapur in Rayalaseema region were selected. Since it covers almost one district in each region of Andhra Pradesh, and represents the socio-economic diversity of its rural regions, this selection was deemed more than adequate for the study.

### ***Sample Size***

A sample of 10 percent from among the elected women representatives (women Sarpanches only), making a total of 30 respondents from each district were interviewed, making a total sample of 193 women in all.



The sample is representative of the national percentage of diverse sections of the population.

***Sampling Technique***

The technique adopted was the probability sampling and simple random sampling.

***Statistical tools applied***

1. Percentage
2. Co-relations

**III. EXPECTATIONS**

***Outcomes***

- Identifying the social, economic and political profile of the selected women Sarpanches.
- Understanding the gaps in the functioning of the elected women representatives.
- Recognizing the various measures required to be taken by the government (local and national), Panchayat Raj

department, NGOs, Private organizations and individuals for the effective functioning of the women Sarpanches.

- Establishing the factors causing differential empowerment.

***Impact***

- Enhance awareness of the governments, Panchayati Raj departments, NGO’s, private firms and individuals, on the existing ground realities and the actual problems faced by the elected women in their governance experience.
- Enable the governing bodies to address identified gaps and design effective training programs.
- Help the women Sarpanches to become more effective in their role and performance of their duties through capacity building.
- focus on the need to build capacity to be.
- Facilitate different stake holders, including Bala Vikasa, to better plan community development and leadership capacity building programs, based on the needs/gaps identified in the study.

### ***Dissemination***

The study will be published and distributed to various agents who are involved in Panchayati Raj Development such as NGOs, PR department, Officials, political leaders, people elected to local Panchayats, etc., to create awareness of the existing ground realities, and measures to improve the situation, that could be taken up by different stake holders in the Panchayati Raj system and rural development.

It is the view of the researchers, that the findings and the recommendations of this study based on Andhra Pradesh, can be effectively applied to India as a whole.

### **IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study is essentially based upon the primary evidence collected from the various female Gram Sarpanches of the 6 districts of Andhra Pradesh, relying thus on the feedback obtained from them as a means of accessing and assessing the ground reality.

One major obstacle was the inability

to elicit uninhibited responses from the target group. The very nature of the survey caused a general feeling of suspicion, apprehension and discomfort. The husbands had to be informed first about the survey and only with their consent the woman leaders accepted to cooperate.

Furthermore, the very idea of parting with such sensitive information collected by "alien individuals" was not looked upon with favor. Therefore, at the beginning, the interviewers met with indifference bordering upon apathy, if not hostility. This impediment was largely mitigated by understanding their cultural ethos, and involving husbands and family members in the process.

The reluctance of the women was also counter-acted by assuring them that their identity would remain confidential and that the responses collected were meant to be used only for enhancing government policies which would be more advantageous in their endeavor to carve a niche for themselves in a traditionally male dominated set up.

# EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

This chapter is specially introduced to enable development professionals and others gain an insight into the evolution of the Panchayati Raj Institution. It will help appreciate that it has been a system of governance in India from time immemorial and has over the years evolved slowly but steadily into a dynamic Institution. Since development is not static, this system of governance too will further evolve, to match the changing needs, which is bound to take place as years roll on. But for now, it would be helpful to understand from where we have come, up to this point of time.

### 1. History of the Panchayati Raj System in India

Historically, every village in India had a Panchayat which was responsible for finding the solutions to the local problems within the village itself. (Joshi and Narwani, 2002, pp. 20-35). Panchayats or the village councils are as old as



India's history and have been part of local self-governance tradition.

#### ***Vedic Period***

The concept of 'Panch Parameshwar' existed in the ancient period. In the old Sanskrit scriptures reference is made to 'Panchayatan', which means a group of five persons, including a spiritual man.

'Panchayat' - a group of five persons selected by the villagers - denotes the system through which rural people are governed, indicating that there was some form of self-government.

### ***Epic Period***

The system of governance was divided into the rule of the king, the rule of the people, and the rule of the wise men or educated and knowledgeable persons. The king used to take the advice of all the caste representatives who were also ministers.

The village was the smallest unit of self-government. It was the duty of the lower village head to give information about special events to the higher village head. They were empowered to collect local taxes and were responsible for the protection of their villages.

### ***Ancient Period***

In South India, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. there were local bodies for governance in the cities as well as the villages. 'Nadu Parishads' were representative bodies which were solely responsible for the maintenance of the villages.

In North India, there were small republics which were quite independent in internal matters. The village Panchayats having been vested with sufficient administrative powers, the king least interfered.

### ***Medieval Period***

A village was the smallest unit where the management was looked after by Lambardar, Patwari and Chowkidar. Villages had sufficient powers as regards self-governance in their territory. Panchayats were prevalent in villages in the medieval period.

### ***British Period***

Self-governance was not the objective of the British government. With the main objective of protecting imperial interests, the local level was empowered. More attention was paid to urban administration rather than to rural areas.

The Local government was established mainly to share the burden of resources of the central and provincial governments.

### ***Post-independence Period***

The first draft of India's constitution did not include a provision for Panchayats. Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that villages in India were caste-ridden and had little chance of success as institutions of self-government. Arguments of those who pleaded for inclusion of

Village Panchayats in the Constitution, however, finally prevailed and found place in the Indian Constitution: Article 40: "The state should take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."

Mahatma Gandhi said: "In a democracy, decentralization of political and economic power is essential, because a few centers of power cannot realize or fulfill the needs of vast multitudes of people. If India is to develop, the power and responsibilities must be shared by all."

**Dimensions of Decentralization - a View from States, P.R. Sharma and R.P. Joshi, p. 192; note from N. K. Bose, Studies in Gandhism, Navjeevan, Ahmedabad, 1962, p. 202**

From 1947 to 1957, Gandhiji's conception regarding the Village Panchayat as the primary grassroots level democratic unit prevailed. People's participation came to be considered necessary so that India's perception as a welfare state could be fulfilled.

Community Development Program (CDP) was started in 1952. Panchayats at the village level

took interest in development schemes. District boards were hardly given any role in the implementation of development programs. There was a lot of interest and enthusiasm in the beginning but it was short-lived. The programs were more or less bureaucratic and excessively politicized.

### **1957-1961**

Complaints of wastage of funds, corruption, malpractices and favoritism began to mar the public image of the development process. A study team under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta was appointed in 1956 to suggest measures for effecting economy and improving efficiency in the implementation of schemes.

Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team suggested that the concept of democratic decentralization should form the basis for the planning and implementation of the community development and national extension service programs. Both the programs should be merged. The National Development Council (NDC) agreed to most of its recommendations in 1958. Taking

into consideration the diverse conditions, states were given the freedom to decide about the exact application of the concept of democratic decentralization and its institutional set-up. The Government of India also convinced the states to switch over to institutionalize participative approach to rural development at all levels with some variations in the structure. Almost all the states adopted the system.

### **1966 – 1988**

During this period, Panchayati Raj gained momentum. In 1966, the report of the Ministry of Community Development indicated that younger and better leadership was emerging through PRIs and a high degree of satisfaction was in evidence among the people about their working.

However, the Venkatapiah Committee report (1968-69) resulted in the creation of Small Farmers' Development Agencies (SFDAs) which were subsequently converted into District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) in all the districts in 1978. All the central funds for rural employment

and poverty alleviation were routed through these agencies. As a consequence, the Zilla Parishads became weaker and weaker. Thus, interest and enthusiasm in PRIs declined during this period.

The Government of India appointed the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 to study the role and powers of the PRIs in rural development and give suitable suggestions. The Ashok Mehta Committee suggested measures to strengthen the PRIs so that the system of democratic decentralization became effective for planning and development. Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka implemented these suggestions by creating Mandal Panchayats.

The most important thrust of this phase was that the emphasis shifted from the bureaucracy to political elements. This was a welcome trend. PRIs emerged from development agencies at the local level into political institutions.

To the extent that the development plans continued to remain centralized, the participation of local people decreased. Consequently, experts, under the

leadership of Dr. C.H. Hanumanth Rao, were deputed to study as to how to prepare plans at the district level. They suggested that decentralization of planning should take place. In 1985, the G.V.K. Rao Committee, appointed by Union Government in 1985 regarding organization of PRIs, advised for regular elections to the PRIs and formulation of plans at the district level. In 1986, the Laxmi Mal Singhvi Committee advocated that Panchayati Raj should primarily be viewed as the local self-government system and should be strengthened accordingly. The committee advocated constitutional recognition to strengthen Panchayati Raj, which became the basis for the 64<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill. Following a number of workshop throughout the country it was decided to amend the Constitution so as to provide protection to Panchayati Raj against negligence or arbitrary action by the state governments. In 1989, the P. K. Thungan Committee recommended to conduct regular elections and to accord constitutional status to the PRIs and to make the Zilla Parishad the agency of planning and development.

### **64<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Bill**

The demand for constitutional status to the local bodies was more widespread during the 1980s. In view of these demands and also because of political compulsions the Congress (I) Government at the Centre had come up, in May 1989, with a bill in favor of a constitutional amendment for the revival of Panchayati Raj backed by the slogans 'power to the people'. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi wanted, what he called "syndrome of dependence" of PRIs ended, so that they become grassroots institutions with maximum devolution of power and maximum democracy (Narayana, 2008, pp. 32-33).

The 64<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Bill makes it obligatory for all states to establish a three-tier system of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels with a fixed tenure of five years and due reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women.

The non-Congress State Governments particularly in the

**The guiding principles of PR are embodied in its credo:**

Give power to the people.  
Power is about peoples' participation.  
Build democracy from the bottom-up.  
Awaken the collective consciousness of the masses.  
Start with the Gram Sabha.  
Through elected representatives not bureaucrats.  
Give the feeling of participation.  
Bring about transformation through real devolution of power.  
Teach by showing, learn by doing.  
Plan with the people's consensus.  
Work with the people in cooperation.  
Motivate people to strive for their own good.  
Approach with humility and a measure of faith.  
Lead the people to achieve their goals.  
Not a showcase but a pattern.  
Not coercion but consensus.  
Not order but participation.  
Not rule but representation.  
Not relief but realizing their potential power.  
Not to conform but to transform.  
Not a piecemeal but integrated approach.

**H.S. Mehla**  
**The Constitutional-Legal**  
**Perspective on Panchayati Raj.**  
**P. 81**

south opposed the Bill. They saw a threat to the autonomy and powers of the state governments. In spite of the opposition from the non-Congress state governments and opposition parties, the Congress Government got the 64<sup>th</sup> Amendment bill passed in the Lok Sabha. The Bill was, however, defeated in Rajya Sabha in which the Congress Party could not command a two-thirds majority to push through the legislation. Thus, the first attempt to accord constitutional status to the PRIs failed.

**74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Bill**

The National Front Government which came to power in November 1989 also promised to strengthen the Panchayati Raj. 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Bill, seeking periodical elections to the PRIs and reservation to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes on the basis of their population, was introduced in September, 1990. The NF Government was felled before it could fulfill its promise. (Narayana, 2008, p. 35).

## **73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act**

The Constitution (72<sup>nd</sup> Amendment) Bill seeking to amend the Constitution for strengthening the PRIs was introduced by the then State Minister of Rural Development, G. Venkataswamy in the Parliament in September, 1991. This Bill was a modified form of 64<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Bill and more akin to the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment bill introduced by V.P. Singh Government. The Congress Government tried to convince the opposition for the need to pass the Bill. A Joint Parliamentary Committee(JPC) under the chairmanship of Nathuram Mirdha was appointed to examine the Bill and report to the Parliament. The Parliament took up the Bill and JPC Report on December 1, 1992. The Bill became 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act on April 23, 1993, with the assent of the President to the Bill. (Narayana, 2008, p.35)

## **2. Working of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Andhra Pradesh**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of India has provided

a framework of a three-tiered Panchayati Raj system with regular elections throughout India. The state governments and union territories passed fresh Panchayati Raj laws or amended their existing ones in conformity with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act. The reorganized Panchayati Raj system has been at work in states and union territories. The following is a brief account of the way Panchayati Raj system is at work in Andhra Pradesh. (Narayana, 2008, p. 43)

### **Three-tier System of Panchayati Raj<sup>2</sup>**

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithi and Zilla Parishad Act 1959, was an important landmark in the evolution of Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh. At the bottom of the structure stood the Gram Panchayat elected by the voters of the village once in 5 years. The head of the Gram Panchayat is the Sarpanch, elected by the members of the Panchayat and assisted by a upa-sarpanch in the implementation of the resolutions of the Panchayat and its functional

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to Annex 2 for a brief description of the Panchayati Raj Institution Three-Tier System.

committees. The number of members of a Gram Panchayat varies between 5 and 17 depending upon its population, the big Panchayats had the Executive Officers appointed by the Government. In such cases, the Sarpanch exercised supervision and control over them. The law provided for an assembly of all the voters of the village known as Gram Sabha which would meet twice a year to review the activities of the Panchayat besides advising it on village affairs.

The Panchayat Samithi, the middle-tier, was the most important body in the three-tier system of the Panchayati Raj. It consisted of the sarpanches of the Panchayats of the area (ex-officio) MLAs representing the area (ex-officio) and co-opted representatives of SCs, STs and women. Members of the Samithi elected the President who was the political head. Most of the decision-making power was exercised by the Standing Committees. The executive authority of the Samithi was vested in the Block Development Officer (BDO) over whom the President exercised supervision and control

for the purpose of the implementation of the resolutions of the Samithi and its committees. The BDO was assisted by Extension Officers who were subject experts. The Zilla Parishad was the apex body of the Panchayati Raj in the State. It consisted of the presidents of the Samithis in the district, the MLAs and the MPs elected from the district, and the District Collector, as Ex-officio members. Representation to SCs and STs and women was given through co-option. The executive authority of the Zilla Parishad was exercised by the Secretary appointed by the State Government over whom the Chairman of the Parishad, elected by the members, exercised administrative control and supervision. The District Collector was the chairman of all standing committees of the Parishad. (Narayana, 2008, p. 97-104).

### ***Mandal System***

The Government of Andhra Pradesh made several efforts to reform the rural self-government. The Andhra Pradesh Mandal Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Pranalika Abhivrudhi Mandals Act

was enacted and Andhra Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959, was repealed in July, 1986. Under the provisions of the Act, Mandala Praja Parishads (MPPs) came into existence on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1987 in the place of Panchayat samithis.

### ***Mandala Praja Parishad (MPP)***

The Mandala Praja Parishad consisted of the sarpanches of all the gram Panchayats in the mandal area and MLAs representing the concerned mandal area. MPs also were ex-officio members of the mandal parishads but they had to opt for one mandal within their constituency of the district. Besides, there was one elected member belonging to minorities based either on religion or language. Each mandal parishad had a President and Vice-President. The tenure of office was 5 years. President was elected directly in a manner similar to that of a MLA. The Vice-President was elected indirectly by the members of the MPP among themselves. Of the mandal presidentships in each district, 15% were reserved for the SCs, 6% for the STs, 9% for women, and 20% for the BCs. The

President was the head of the Mandala Praja Parishad. He had to convene, and preside over and conduct the meetings of Mandala Praja Parishad. The post of Mandal Development Officer was specifically created and so designated under Section 28 of the 1988 Act. He is the Chief Executive Officer and Member Secretary of the Mandala Praja Parishad. He was responsible for implementing the resolutions of the Mandala Praja Parishad, attended its meetings without right to vote and supervised the staff working in the Mandala Praja Parishad. The Mandala Praja Parishad was entrusted with a wide range of functions including the execution of all developmental programs.

### ***Zilla Praja Parishad (ZPP)***

The Zilla Praja Parishad consisted of Presidents of Mandala Praja Parishads, MLAs representing rural areas of the district, MPs and one person belonging to minorities based on religion or language. The Chairman of ZPP was directly elected by the entire electorate of the district. The Vice-Chairman was elected indirectly by the members of the ZPP from among

themselves. Out of 22 ZPPs, 3 (15%) were reserved for SCs, one (6%) for STs, 2 (9%) for women, and 5 (20%) for BCs.

The District Collector was the Secretary and the District Development Officer was the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Praja Parishad. There were six Standing Committees in the ZPP. Each committee was entrusted with one subject such as development, education, social welfare, women welfare, finance and works. The Chairman of ZPP was the Chairman of every Standing Committee. All the powers, functions and finances of the existing Zilla Parishad were transferred to the Zilla Praja Parishad.

### ***Zilla Pranalika Abhivrudhi Mandal***

The Act also empowered the government to constitute the Zilla Pranalika Abhivrudhi Mandal (District Planning and Development Board) – DPDB - at district level. The Chairman of ZPP, MLAs and Member of Parliament, and District Collector constituted it. It was headed by a minister nominated by the Chief Minister as chairman with

District Collector as the Member Secretary. The Chairman of ZPP was its Vice-Chairman. The DPDBs were empowered to formulate, execute annual district plans and distribute funds. These powers were, however, transferred to the elected Zilla Praja Parishads by an amendment to the 1986 Act. It was once again decided to entrust DPDBs at a later date, the powers enjoyed earlier by the District Planning Boards. This had reversed the earlier amendment to the 1986 Act and gave powers to the MLAs as desired by them.

### **Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994**

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 (Sarumathy, 2002, p. 242) was enacted on 25 the April 1994 as a comprehensive single act in accordance with the principles of the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment. A three-tier system of Panchayati Raj constituting Zilla Parishads (ZPs) at the district level, Mandal Parishads (MPs) at the intermediary level, and Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the village level, was thus reintroduced by merging the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayats Act, 1964 and the Andhra Pradesh Mandal Praja Parishads, Zilla PRaja Parishads,

Zilla Pranalika Abhivridhi and Samseeksha Mandals Act, 1986.

### ***Gram Sabha***

A Gram Sabha is constituted for every village and consists of all electorate of the Gram Panchayat as its members. The Gram Sabha meets at least twice in a year for considering the following matters:



- Annual Statement of accounts and audit reports.
- Report on the administration of the preceding year.
- Program of works for the year or any new programs not covered by the budget as the annual program.
- Proposals for fresh taxation as for enhancement of existing tax.
- Selection of schemes, beneficiaries and location, and
- Such other matters as may be prescribed.

All the meetings of the Gram Sabha are convened by the Executive Officer and presided by the Sarpanch. The quorum for convening the meeting of the Gram Sabha has not been mentioned in the Act. (Sarumathy, 2002, pp. 242-243).

### ***Gram Panchayat***

The Gram Panchayat is the body constituted for the village administration for revenue village or hamlet. Gram Panchayat consists of members selected from the Gram Panchayat territorial constituency (GPTC) constituted for 350 population each. The sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat is directly elected by the method of secret ballot on non-party basis. Out of the total strength of the elected members, seats are reserved for the members of SCs and STs on the basis of their population. Besides, one-third of the seats are reserved for women, which includes those belonging to SCs and STs based on their population ratio. The Amendment No. 5, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1995 to the Act, stipulated reservation of not less than thirty-four percent of the seats for the Backward Classes.

The term of office of the Gram Panchayat is five years. The office of the Sarpanch is again reserved for different categories of people like SCs, STs, women and BCs on the scale of reservation adopted for electing the members. (Sarumathy, 2002, pp. 244).



The functions of Gram Panchayat include mandatory functions and obligatory functions.

The mandatory functions are: maintenance of buildings, roads, bridges, culverts etc., lighting of road and public places, construction of drains, disposal of drainage, cleaning of streets, removal of garbage etc., improvement of sanitary conditions, providing public lavatories, maintaining cremation and burial grounds, prevention and remedy of epidemics, registration of births and deaths, maintenance of cattle ponds etc.

The law also specifies a list of 26 functions, which the Gram Panchayats may undertake depending on their convenience and availability of funds. The list includes welfare as well as development functions, such as construction of rest houses, planting of trees, promotion of elementary education, maintenance of dispensaries, libraries, promotion of improved methods of cultivation, organization of voluntary labour for community development, maintenance of maternity and child welfare centers, famine relief, maintenance of public markets, slaughter houses, implementation of land reforms, etc. Gram Panchayats with the availability of meager funds are not in a position to execute a number of obligatory functions. (Sarumathy, 2002, p.246).

### **Planning Process**

The Planning process as expected by the Constitution under the new democratic decentralization has not undergone any change in the state. Although Gram Sabha is called on twice a year, planning is done at the district level. Neither the electorate nor the elected

representatives are involved in the preparation of the district plan. (Sarumathy, 2002, pp. 248-249).

### **Devolution of Powers and Functions**

The state has not attempted so far to devolve the powers and functions with regard to the 29 items listed in the XI Schedule of the constitution.

In Andhra Pradesh, agencies like DRDA, SC and ST Welfare Corporations, District Industries Centre, BC Welfare Corporations are involved in the implementation of poverty alleviation program.

### **3. Need for Reservation**

The political goal of India is to achieve and ensure for all its citizens equality of status and opportunity and, social, economic and political justice. Yet, the reality is that there is explicit absence of equality and justice in almost every sphere of society. The social system is based on inherited and graded hierarchy as a guiding principle in social relationships – the most thorough and static gradation ever known in human history. A few groups have elevated status while

the numerical majority faces degradation.

For centuries, the social, economic and political life of Indian people have been marked, rather marred, by a vast array of disadvantaged sections where barriers between or among different sections of people have been unequivocal and steadfast. The intriguing question in this context has been how the glaring inequality can be obliterated and equality and justice be ensured.

One measure by which such inequalities can be countered with is believed to be the provision of reservation for those downtrodden and excluded sections of society. Reservation, a statutory share or quota for specified group(s), is otherwise known as compensatory principle, positive discrimination, quota system, with the 'affirmative action' as practiced in the West. The main plank of reservation for the ill-starred sections is that this is supposed to be the viable option to equalize the unequal relationships. Equality means abolishing inequality and it cannot be done without providing extra or

additional boost for those denigrated. It is the deliberate discrimination in favor of groups that have in the past been discriminated and face historical handicaps. The objective of it is to bring about equality under unequal circumstances, one advertent measure where backbenchers are helped so that they can catch up with those who are ahead of them. It needs to be borne in mind that reservations should not be construed as a concession but the recognition of the rights of the downtrodden, not a charity but a facility, an aid to enable them to realize and rearguard their fundamental rights, a special care to ensure that all can participate on an equal footing and reap advantages that are available. Rather than a policy of discouraging or prohibiting discrimination against or allowing the process of competition to determine who is to receive benefits, reservation affirmatively guarantees that a minimum number of those disadvantaged sections can receive benefits.

In the words of Galanter, the invidious treatment for long has

resulted in accumulated disabilities for certain groups in the society. To achieve equality and distribute benefits by neutral standards will only perpetuate and amplify unjust exaction and exclusions of the past. Arrangement should be made to undo and overturn old bias, to suppress past injustice. Reservation is such a measure and may be regarded as a step embodying the 'brave hope of India reborn.' (Mandal, 2003, pp. 41-43).

Reservation for SC, ST, and BCs has come to stay and it has vindicated for the reason that these groups are backward, suppressed and debased.

### ***Reservation for Women in Panchayats***

It took 43 years to realize and recognize that women are yet another disadvantaged group and they also require positive discrimination though the realization falls short of giving benefits similar to SC, ST and OBCs – that is women have received preferential treatment only in the sphere of political representation and that too only in local government. (Mandal, 2003, p. 44).

It is only through some quota or protective measures that women throughout the world have found meaningful entry into mainstream politics. It is usually submitted that women display consistency, inventiveness, they seldom succumb to authoritarian style of behavior, exercise positive influence over males by restraining, disciplining and improving behavior. They are basically honest, have profound managerial skill and perfect in balancing family budget. And these qualities can be tapped to manage the political houses where financial irregularities are open secret. (Mandal, 2003, p. 56).

This is how the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Manual, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition (2003) speaks about Reservation for Women in Panchayats: "There is provision that one-third of the total seats are reserved for women in all local bodies i.e., at Panchayat level and at the Municipal level. It is really a welcome feature. For all these years women have always been ignored. Women are treated as second class citizens though under the Constitution, they are given equal rights. To a large extent justice is meted out to women.

Women comprise 50% of our population. The one-third of the total seats of reservation will give an opportunity to women to function as elected representatives. They will know how to function in public life, how to solve the problems, and how to face the different situations. This will be a spring-board for them to be elevated for a greater political role which they are ultimately destined for." (Manual, 2003, p. 44).

Panchayat Act of Andhra Pradesh, as amended in 1986, reserved minimum of 2 and maximum of 4 seats for women in Gram Panchayats (about 25 %). For Zilla Praja Parishad and Mandal Praja Parishad the Act reserved 9 % seats for women. The Act also reserved 9 % for Chairpersons in Zilla Parishad. (Mandal, 2003, p. 48).

According to Mandal (Mandal, 2003, pp. 54-55), the benefits of Reservation for women in Panchayats are as followed:

- In India, the institutional intervention and support,

particularly political will alone make a dent and, will bring about improvement in women's social, economic conditions and status.

- Given the barriers to equal participation, reservation seems the only way to provide access to policy making, which in turn, foster confidence, increase sense of responsibility, enable women to contribute to political and developmental process.
- The quantitative increase in number of women can contribute in highlighting women specific concerns.
- Reservation affirmatively ensures that a minimum number of women receive benefits.
- The access to political power and resource is critical and vital

for women as they have traditionally been deprived and subjected to longest servitude in history.

- The realization that more representation can influence the redistribution of power and resources, women's participation in political process is regarded both as central to democratic dimension and crucial for capacity building necessary for challenging ideology and hierarchy which oppress womenfolk.

Reservation for women is supposed to break the hard rock of existing structure of inequality, help to serve the long term objective of equality better than the prevailing pattern where inequality gets more and more intensified day by day.



## CHAPTER THREE

### FINDINGS

The findings are based on the researchers analysis of the statistical data obtained from the sampling of the 193 women elected selected for the study.

This chapter is a synthesis of the findings of this study.

The findings give the socio-economic profile of the women interviewed by the researchers. They focus on the performance of these women in their role of elected members of Panchayats. They identify the level of awareness that these elected women have of their role. Finally, they demonstrate the impact that Reservation has in politically empowering women.

#### ***Social and economic scenarios***

The study revealed that majority of women's representatives are in the age group of 25 to 45 years.

It was noticed that the representation of elected members

on the basis of religion, is not proportionate to the National percentage. It is concluded that the minority communities' representation is less.

Analysis confirmed that all castes as per the caste population of India are represented. This reflects that all castes are given opportunity for political power.

The survey revealed that 90% of the respondents are illiterate or have an education only up to the Primary school level. Analysis corroborates that the lack of education and knowledge resulted in the women's poor understanding of the Gram Panchayat manuals, their role and responsibilities,



thereby making them ineffective in the decision making process. Further statistical data and analysis demonstrates that the Women PRI representatives have overcome this lacuna by becoming more dependent on their husbands.



Despite political representation, women continued to help their husbands on their agricultural land and perform their traditional duties.

The study illustrated that majority hold less than 3 acres of land. This implies that most of the women representatives are not land owners and are economically poor. The findings is that majority under this category belong to the low caste people. (SC and ST).

The study disclosed that all the heads of the respondent's family are employed and 40% of them receive less than Rs.12000 to 20000 as income per annum.

### ***Women's awareness level***

Analysis of the statistical data gives clear evidence of a majority of the elected women representatives lacking in leadership experience. Many

contest for the first time. 49.7% of them have no political background. Some are truly interested, while many others consider it a prestige to be elected. This increases competitiveness among women.

They take loans to contest in the election, and fall into debts.

The data also proved that the 7.8% of women representatives, who do not have any awareness, and the 18.7% who have knowledge to the least extent, on the provisions of the Act, besides presenting a gloomy picture, create doubts about their success. This is the result of illiteracy, poverty, various disbeliefs and the conservative social norms prevailing in the country.

The study revealed that a large percentage of elected women representatives, not taking active

interest in performing their duties, are mostly the illiterate ones with no political background and having no knowledge of the functioning of the Panchayats.

From the study it is apparent that there are still 15% of the respondents who do not head the meetings as the women in rural areas feel inferior to male members of family/Panchayats. They lack



self-confidence., especially women hailing from SC and ST categories find it difficult to mix with representatives of general categories.

The Gram Sabhas are not held three times in a year as seen in 60 % of the surveyed areas. Both grassroot leadership and grassroots bureaucracy do not make it to the Gram Sabhas in the village. In some places only a formality is observed, at times proxy meetings are

convened and proceedings written even without the knowledge of those who attended the meeting.

Most of the women representatives, do not involve themselves in any voluntary service for the development of the village and welfare of the people, due to their poor education and economic background and also due to their lack of knowledge on how to benefit from the various government and NGO schemes.

Another important finding was that majority of the women representatives do not perceive their role in the proper light, and they mostly rely on the male members of the family to carry out their duties. This is due to lack of education, awareness and knowledge regarding the Panchayat manuals.



It was also learnt that women who did not undergo training were ignorant of concepts such as participation, self-governance, resource management, resource mobilization etc. They know the government schemes and programs, but do not know how to conduct the needs assessment of the community and furthermore, do not involve the people in the implementation of the activities.

The study reveals the internal constraints of the women representatives, like lack of self confidence, lack of exposure, lack of communication skills, inability to conduct meetings, etc., It is very clear that lack of education is a major cause for women not being able to carry out their duties and being responsible.

### ***Performance of Women Representatives***

The statistical analysis divulges that major percent of women representatives, use different mechanisms to enlist the cooperation of different political parties for the development of village community. This signifies the capability of the women



representatives, working together for the development of the society. In spite of the limitations and difficulties posed by caste discrimination and male domination, some Women Sarpanches, who are courageous in taking bold steps and bringing about social changes, fight against corruption, and succeed in securing facilities for the people in their villages. These are no mean achievements on the part of Women Sarpanches.

The study revealed that 84% of the women head the meetings with the support of their husbands, 15% of the meetings are headed either by the husband or son themselves, and one percent of the meetings are headed by influential people. Conducting meetings through the male members of their families, provoked people to criticize the very functioning of the women leaders.

However, it was also learnt that majority of the elected women representatives, take decisions at the meetings with the participation of the village people.

The study also showed that Sarpanches (mostly illiterate from SC and ST communities) are considered to be dummy Sarpanches, as they avoid participating in the meetings of the Panchayat altogether by staying away from the meetings, or attending the meetings but not actively participating in the deliberations.

It was also found that the general attendance of women at the meetings is poor. The average attendance is between 25% to 49%. Out of the women who attend, most of them (85%) participate and are involved in the decision making process but the other 15% of the women do not participate in raising any issues.

Another interesting feature learnt was that the literate women representatives take self decisions on the issues raised at the meetings while the illiterate ones,

depend on their husbands, council, or the influential people of the village

It was also evident from the study that wherever the women found supportive organizations for their activities through training and orientation, women leaders' performance is better compared to the women who are untrained.

It was also learnt that 87% of the women representatives take collective decisions with the participation of the people and the Panchayat council members.

An interesting aspect discovered was that majority of the elected women gain prestige as compared to empowerment by holding a Sarpanch post. Gain of empowerment is less than the gain of prestige among the elected women.



Only the educated elected women go to the Panchayat office regularly- once in two days. The illiterate women representatives do not visit the Panchayat office regularly and it is their husbands who manage the village affairs.

The study showed that several factors are responsible for women's low participation. The most important being illiteracy, traditionalism, prejudices, economic dependency and the unfavorable political structure, with its high rate of predominately male incumbency.

All the representatives reported their difficulties in mobilizing funds locally and also the insufficient allocation of funds for the development of rural areas, which affected their performance.

### ***Impact of Reservations on Political Empowerment of women***



The study revealed that 33% of reservation was utilized by women. A majority i.e. 53.9% of the Woman Sarpanches were elected under different Reserved Categories. This became possible only because of the implementation of the provisions made by 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Indian Constitution. The remaining 40 % were elected under different General categories. This data proves that 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act has opened up the gates in favor of rural women to enter the area of development initiatives.

Research also shows that the role of women in grassroots governance has increased the percentage of women at various levels of formal political activities. Women are considered a crucial pivotal point in the process of change in the rural areas.

As per the findings, provision of reservation quotas has certainly given authority and some social status to the backward communities in the state. Reservation allows all sections of societies to develop and to share benefits of power, which were out

of reach for such communities before the commencement of the process of democratic decentralization under the PR system.

Most women showed a positive attitude to re-contest in the election, because they felt that Reservation gave them an opportunity for political empowerment, and also an opportunity to compete, enhance their status, and make a difference to employment of women, freedom to gain their rights and opportunities. Only 20.7% of women did not want to re-contest.

50% of the women representatives interviewed did not have any political background and the only ones with a political background were from the BC caste.

50% of the Sarpanches felt that it is a good opportunity to govern the village and get closer to the people, know their needs, and fulfill their needs and thereby also feel a sense of satisfaction in performing the job.

The survey proved that political



participation of women in the local rural bodies has hardly made any noticeable dent in terms of raising their social and economic status, improving the literacy ratio, providing health, maternity and sanitation benefits to women and ameliorating violence, oppression, menace of dowry, rape, discrimination, etc.

Despite reservation for women, it was found, that effective participation in PRIs failed due to misuse and manipulation by the local power-brokers. Ignorance of women about their rights and procedures and about their potential and responsibilities have kept them far behind men in the local bodies

The statistical data revealed that the percentage of women present for the Gram Sabhas is very poor. This becomes more pertinent in a socio-cultural milieu where women's

participation is low and society is deeply fragmented and hierarchical. One of the important bottlenecks among women to attend the meetings is rural women do not have the required exposure.

Study also showed that wherever the women members are weak, the male council members terrorize the women members and leaders and dominate over them.

63% have taken the opportunity to participate in the PRI activities under Reservation Category, through their personal interest and initiative even though familial connections continued to have influence on recruitment. Some of them perform effective roles with the help of family members and in some cases with the very cooperation of husbands.

Most of the elected women Representatives, 85% of them, do not face any Gender discrimination problems in the functioning of their role.

Most found it difficult to allocate more time for Panchayat development activities ignoring their duties as mothers. The average time spent for the Panchayat activities is 2 to 4 hours.

Study showed that some of the women representatives did not abdicate their daily chores. Apart from the family work, they managed to attend to many activities in the Panchayats.

It was found that most women are helped by their husband, and widows by their son, in the effective functioning of their role. Male domination prevents the women representatives to intervene in the social issues. There is a feeling among the male members of the family that the women leaders, however much they may be educated, do not have sufficient skills to tackle the crisis and hence they feel it necessary to play a role. It was also noticed that wherever the husband sponsored his wife for positions, he gives the direction and wife merely acts according to the directions given by him.



### MUSINGS OF ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

During the field survey in the villages, the researchers made several observations while interviewing the elected women. From the musings of the women, they became more aware of the real-life scenario that existed, affecting several women in their performance as elected representatives to the Panchayats.

The first section of this chapter is a summary of the researchers' observations and their reflections based on them. The second part illustrates a few case studies which substantiate their perceptions.

#### I. OBSERVATIONS

##### **On women leaders and their performance**

With the women representatives ages ranging between 25 to 45, there seems to be a major shift in political representation, which signifies revitalization of women's participation in the Panchayati Raj bodies.

Women representatives interviewed gave the impression that they themselves are convinced that it is hard for a woman to play a leadership role in their male dominated society.

It was perceived that women contested elections more because they were persuaded by their husbands and backed later by the villagers. Since they did not have the required skills, leadership qualities, nor self confidence, majority of them could not achieve anything and remained mere 'show pieces' in the Panchayati Raj institutions. Women themselves were well aware that they could hardly influence the political process



in general and decision making in particular, without their husband's or son's support.

Poor literacy rate, lack of awareness on various welfare schemes and the general family responsibilities, were observed as being the primary factors for the counter performance of the women representatives. However, in realizing the need to shift from stamping their thumb impression, they have now learnt the basics- they have learnt to sign their names, as required for records.

It was noted that the elected women are also reluctant to participate in the meetings due to their lack of communication and public speaking skills. This has been a deterrent in their participation in decision making in the local bodies, despite the provision of reservation.



The training programs organized by the government are not adequate to enhance their capacities and innovative skills.

Standing for elections and becoming a Sarpanch has made a



difference to the women's lives. It has made them realize that the basic requirement to boost their confidence level and discharge the functions of the village Panchayat at the grassroots level effectively, is to become literate. This increased awareness is having a positive impact as it was observed that there is a marked increase in the female literacy rate, as after their election into PRIs, many

women have demanded literacy skills. It was also perceived that women now feel the need to educate their children.

In some Panchayats, it was noted, that the literate Sarpanches are efficacious in their role and showed more success. On the other side of the spectrum, those who fumbled in their role of elected members, preferred to distance themselves from future Panchayat posts.

The caste discrimination prevalent in the society was seen as posing a subtle threat.

Since the Constitution provides for rotation in the reserved position, a seat which is reserved for one election, may not be reserved for the next. The women leaders who like to have more chances in the Panchayat, blame this policy of the government for the inconsistency of reservation of a particular seat for a long period. A woman Panchayat member who has served successfully for one term may not be able to seek re-election from the same constituency. It was observed that the principles of rotation thus prevent women

members from consolidating their work and political strength. Researchers' perspective, like that of the women representatives interviewed, is that there is a need for the amendment of the policy without which the issue of good governance in the political structure of the villages will remain questionable.

From the interviews, it was obvious that corruption is very deep rooted - any transaction that releases funds to village work has multiple stages and corroborated by the women, it was observed that at each stage a bribe is being paid. Since there is no transparency, the Sarpanches have ended up misusing or misallocating funds meant for village development, thereby bringing other work for village betterment, more or less to a standstill. There is significant pressure on the Sarpanch from influential people and factions in the village.

The Gram Panch meetings are not held and ward members generally are very unaware and apathetic. They do not act as any meaningful check on the Sarpanch and often

collude with them. People view the Sarpanch as a powerful person who is quite likely to misuse the power and against whom they have no protection.

Elected women expressed their view that the little development they attempt in the villages is driven by the knowledge they have acquired through several programmes implemented through women's Self Help Groups, through NGO's and other User Groups. It was perceived that women do seek more intervention of government, NGOs and other local firms to organize awareness and capacity building programs. However, it was perceived that this approach which has some merits has however resulted in the Gram Panchayat being completely left out of these activities.

Researchers observed that when women were interviewed in the absence of men, they are bold in their comments. Women Sarpanches expressed their views that it is advantageous for the village to have elected women, as they are convinced that they understand the basic needs of the

village better, such as the problems relating to water, health of women and children, facilities in schools, ration cards, roads, and so on. Women Sarpanches felt that they more often resolved problems, while men on the other hand, when elected, invariably got involved only in politics and failed to address the real problems.

### **On men of the village**

It was observed that men did not want the women to share political power. But now with reservation, they do not deny their wives to be contestants at elections. They encourage them and provided full financial and moral support.

Women have to utilize this opportunity through reservations provided for them through the Constitution. They have to discard certain traditions which have kept them in subjection for centuries, and obtain socio economic stability to take independent decisions. They have to act boldly for effective functioning of their role. They need to explore various resources to gain efficient skills and knowledge through various training and awareness programs organized

by the government and different NGO's to emerge as leaders to sustain their potentialities and influence.

The inability of some elected women leaders to function as required, has led men to interfere in the women's role, fill the gaps in their functioning process, and achieve cooperation and collaboration of the people in the village. However, It was also observed that men were willing to let the women leaders manage the affairs of the village Panchayat, if women exhibited enough confidence. They were willing to be non-interfering and support the women for effective implementation.

Men's view is that several government functionaries are involved in the implementation of certain projects in the village like Technical Assistant, Financial Assistant, Project Officer, MPDO etc, and there are communication gaps between them and the illiterate women Sarpanches. Hence they feel the need to be involved, to interact with the right authorities, and to ensure that

matters move forward expeditiously.

### **On the Villagers' point of view on Women Leaders (Sarpanches)**

The researchers' general perception of the current state of the PR institutions in reality, is that in some areas it is indeed deplorable. This was voiced by the villagers themselves.

When the people in the village were asked to measure the efficacy of the women leaders in their functioning and performance, majority of the people expressed their view that any form of development is difficult for women leaders to implement, as they are incapable of taking decisions on their own without consulting their husbands. This inherent norm, only delayed matters.



Researchers observation was corroborated by most of the people in the villages, that the 'dummy' Sarpanches, (those who are mere figure heads) mostly from the SC and ST caste, do not bring any development in the Panchayat nor within their families. Hence it was declared by the villagers, that reservation for this category does not empower the rural community.

Men were also of the opinion, that elected women are inactive and play a dummy role with minimum participation in the implementation of the development schemes, due to their lack of political experience, level of education only up to the primary school, and lack of awareness on various issues.

The traditional concept that the rightful place for a woman is the house, has been observed to still prevail in the present day notion, that 'Woman is a home guard'. . Therefore the wife is primarily bound to her household duties. In such a scenario, the villagers observe that women, added to the

fact that they are illiterate, cannot bring about any meaningful contribution to the village. With the prevalence of such views, and due to further degradation, poor economic, social and political background, women's participation in the developmental programs of the village Panchayat reduces considerably. It was observed that this unavoidable chain reaction is the present reality.

However, researchers observed that although illiteracy is one factor which induces the husband to take up the role of the Sarpanch (as husband of the woman leader), in some Panchayat areas, women leaders are effective, and it is due to their being members of Mahila Mandals initiated by NGOs .

On the other side of the coin, the observations made by the women themselves, on women leader, is that the women leaders imbue more confidence in them . As Rehana, a resident of the Cheriyal village put it: "women are known to use money very carefully at home and

somehow manage the family budget even when income is low. Women show the same abilities when they manage the village funds." Another woman, Shaheen added, "When men are in-charge of development works, they indulge in a lot of wasteful expenditure, spending on inaugurations and completion ceremonies. Women, on the other hand, know how to be frugal and divert funds to real work."

It was observed during the study, that women representatives have shown the capacity to increase the Panchayat income to make the development work be more self-reliant. Many elected women have been closely involved with the promotion of self-help groups. This involvement in the SHG has enabled women play a more effective role as a elected representative.

### **Researcher's observations on the Government policy implementation**

The study amply testified that the Government has no real support and follow-up in the functioning of the

women leaders. There is no comprehensive plan (like the 5 year plans that Gram Panchayats are expected to come up with) for the development of the village. In the village, the Gram Sabha meeting is supposed to take place every six months and the Gram Panchayat meeting (elected ward representatives presided by the Sarpanch) at least once in 3 months. This meeting rarely takes place.

A lot of uncertainty prevails in the income sources for the Panchayat, which makes planning any meaningful development activity very difficult. Office bearers are usually not well-educated or aware of their roles and responsibilities and of the government's working procedures. They are not motivated to work towards the betterment of the village. Zilla Parishads and Mandal Parishads are supposed to plan and implement similar development programmes, but these have not been done in practice.

## II. CASE STUDIES

### 1. Sourapaka Kavitha: Garmilapalli village, Warangal district.



#### Background

Sourapaka Kavitha, 24 years old, is a member of a Scheduled Caste family. She is illiterate. She was married at the age of 20 and is a mother of two children. The primary occupation of the family is agriculture. Her husband is a group activist and is highly involved in the political affairs of the village.

#### As Sarpanch

Her husband persuaded her to contest in the local election when the post of the Sarpanch became a reserved seat for women,

assuring her of his full support in her work.. In contesting, Kavitha spent a huge sum of money to be elected, incurring a debt of Rs.2,50,000.

#### Ground Realities: Stumbling Blocks/Achievements

Kavitha acknowledges that although she presides over the meetings of the Gram Panchayat, all decisions are made by the local leaders. This has resulted in her not being able to utilize the allotted Gram Panchayat funds to implement substantial development work to uplift the underprivileged in her area. As traditionally, the leaders decide on the allocation of funds for the village development, Kavitha comments that she is a mere puppet in the hands of the local politicians. The biggest stumbling block she faces, is her inability to execute any development initiative without having to bribe different stake holders. Although she is keen to fight the system, she is discouraged by her husband.

Despite the numerous hurdles, Kavitha has succeeded in constructing a water pipe line in the village by taking a personal loan from the bank. However, due to insufficient funds released by the government, she has been unable to repay the loan and has incurred an added personal debt.

**If given a Voice Kavitha would like:**

- Sarpanches to receive adequate remuneration, sufficient to support the family
- More income - generating programmes to be introduced, to enhance women's economic status, and self confidence.
- To fight corruption and bribery which she is presently unable to voice in public, apprehensive of being ridiculed due to lack of knowledge and status, as she belongs to a low caste.

**2. Maradi Jangamma:  
Yadireddipalli village,  
Mehabubnagar district**



**Background**

Jangamma, 52 years old, is illiterate. She belongs to the Scheduled Caste and is a mother of three sons and two daughters. She was married at an early age of 15. She and her husband work as agricultural wage laborers.

**As Sarpanch**

She contested in the local body elections conducted in August, 2006, under the SC (Scheduled Caste) Women reservation category, although she was not personally interested in contesting. She was persuaded by a higher caste male landlord, an earlier Sarpanch, who assured her that he

would take upon himself all the Panchayat related responsibilities, and she would only be required to act as a proxy. Since there were very few women contestants, Jangamma won the seat, but remained a puppet.

### **Ground Realities: Stumbling Blocks/Achievements**

Jangamma was illiterate and had no previous experience on how to manage the affairs of a Panchayat. Neither she, nor any member of her family, had in the past been affiliated to any political party. Her caste category was an impediment, as people from upper castes were reluctant to accept her leadership and authority.

As she was only acting as a dummy Sarpanch, she never felt the need to participate in any Panchayat activities. She was convinced that the Panchayat male members had much more experience to obtain government funds released, to discuss matters with the district officials and when some problems

cropped up, to find suitable solutions. She felt that she could not effectively accomplish these tasks and left decisions to be taken by the high caste patriarchs. Furthermore, she was not comfortable sitting alongside other male members, and the upper caste of the Gram Panchayat during meetings, as they had a condescending attitude. For this reason, she preferred to remain silent and not participate actively in the deliberations. She admitted that she only attended the meetings because her thumb impression was required on the minutes of the proceedings.

### **Jangamma's Voice**

- People do not respect a Sarpanch who is illiterate and from a low caste

### **Her choice**

- Primarily, to fulfill the domestic needs of husband and children.
- To be a loving grand mother and take care her sick husband.

### **3. Thalla Suguna: Danampalli village, Warangal district**



#### **Background**

Thalla Suguna, 49 years old, is a widow with four children. Her husband was an active social worker, who due to his voluntary work was much respected by the poor in the village. People wanted him to become Sarpanch but unfortunately he died before the elections.

#### **As Sarpanch**

After the death of her husband, the people of the village requested her to run for election. Suguna herself had a great desire to fulfill the aspirations of her husband in rendering service to the village people. She contested and won.

#### **Ground Realities: Stumbling Blocks/Achievements**

Although Suguna wants to discharge her responsibilities, her son has taken total control of her and the Panchayat matters. He does not allow her either to assume her responsibilities nor discharge her duties as Sarpanch. He takes it upon himself to preside over all the meetings, and prevents her from getting involved in any of the village activities. She only attends the meetings to sign documents. Under the control of her son, Suguna is unable to personally accomplish anything for the people.

#### **Suguna's Voice**

Depressed by the dominance of her son she says:

"I don't like to be a Sarpanch. It is only to fulfill the dream of my husband in developing the village that I took up this role. But my son does not allow me to discharge my duties and I am confined to household work. I am frustrated and waiting to complete my term

as Sarpanch. I feel so sad that I cannot fulfill my husband's dream of a progressive village".

**4. Ramindla                      Vijaya:  
    Mulkalagudem            village,  
    Warangal district**



**Background**

Ramindla Vijaya, 42 years old, has two sons. She has studied up to the Primary level. She belongs to the Scheduled caste.

**As Sarpanch**

Ramindla Vijaya was elected from 'Reserved Scheduled Caste (SC) Category'. She can only sign her name and can hardly read. She is totally dependent on her husband in her role as Sarpanch.

**Ground Realities: Stumbling Blocks/Achievements**

Since Vijaya belongs to the Schedule caste, she is not allowed to sit on a chair by the other Panchayat members. She is also prohibited from speaking during the meetings.

In her village, elected woman members are not allowed to attend the Gram Sabha meetings. Only the women Sarpanch and the women ward members are allowed to attend. However, due to male dominance, these women are not allowed to speak nor raise any issues. The other elected women are forced to remain outside the Panchayat compound.

Alcoholism is a big problem in Vijaya's village. Men generally come to the Panchayat meetings drunk and do not allow the meeting to proceed smoothly. The women are afraid to come together to collectively tackle the problem.

Nevertheless, with the support of

her husband, Vijaya organized a movement, involving all the youth, to protest against brewing of country liquor in the village.

### **Vijaya's voice**

"I am not especially interested in my role in the Panchayat. However if I get another opportunity, I would like to be elected as Sarpanch."

## **5. Manigala Saritha: Inavolu village, Warangal district**



### **Background**

Saritha is 27 years old. She has studied up to 4th class. Her husband has been working for the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). She enjoys the full support of her husband.

### **As Sarpanch**

Due to her husband's political influence Saritha won the election. She and her husband devote their time to serve the people. At the Panchayat level, Saritha personally presides over all the meetings. Among the 12 Ward Members, 6 belong to the Telugu Desam Party and 6 others to the Congress Party.

### **Ground Realities: Stumbling Blocks/Achievements**

Saritha does not get the support of Ward Members who belong to the Congress Party. Decisions are made on the basis of quorum and on party line. Therefore, the effective functioning of the Panchayat is affected.

Despite the lack of support from Ward Members, Saritha approached the higher authorities of the Mandal and of the District and obtained some benefits for the people of her village. Thanks to her efforts, all the people in the

village now have their ration card. Villagers, especially women, have started to cooperate with Saritha.

**Saritha's Voice:**

"If I win the next election, I want to continue to serve my village as

a Sarpanch or in an higher post, to bring development to everyone in the village, irrespective of caste and creed. I wish to eliminate Party differences among the people, which is a hindrance for the development of the village."



## EMPOWERMENT OF ELECTED WOMEN

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of uplifting the economic, social and political status of women, especially of the traditionally underprivileged ones in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of



violence.

Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Deepa Narayan in her book 'Measuring Empowerment'

states: "Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives "

Broadly there may be two ways of bringing about women empowerment-a) through inducting women in the mainstream of development and assuring their access to productive assets, and b) through legislation for ensuring them equal social and political status and assuring their participation in political decision making and thus providing them a platform for venting their grievances, integrating their issues into the mainstream of the decision making process and fighting for the cause of female community in general and of the poor and oppressed women in the society in particular.

Economic independence is the basic premise behind empowerment through development. While women's participation in the development process provides them with employment prospects and the opportunity to break away from the clutches of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, etc., economic independence imbues confidence and the courage to think of their future.

Empowerment of women through legislation provides the women with a constitutional platform to stand up to men, to raise their voice on issues concerning oppression of women, subjugation, and related issues. Thus, in effect, it provides them with an identity in an orthodox male dominated socio-



political setup, in addition to a much needed forum for them to seek redress of problems directly affecting them: the true essence of empowerment. In a decentralized federal structure, with growing emphasis on the implementation of various employment and income generating schemes, participation of women in the decision making process at the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) level becomes imperative if they are to seek any meaningful and significant gains for themselves.

The preceding chapter on the '**Musings of Elected Women Representatives**', indicates, that the process of empowerment through capacity building of the rural women has not taken place up to the expected level. The performance of the elected women is, as indicated by the ground realities, far from the expectations of the Reservation Act.

### **Study on the Bala Vikasa Women representatives**

In addition to the elected women

interviewed, the researchers also interviewed a number of women members of Bala Vikasa Integrated Women Development Programme, who contested elections. Contrary to the sample study conducted, a different scenario was unraveled, when the focus was on Bala Vikasa women. To make Panchayati Raj an instrument of effective local governance, Bala Vikasa concentrated on empowering PR functionaries through training and capacity building.

The initiatives of Bala Vikasa towards Women empowerment and Gender dimensions, are the reasons for Bala Vikasa women being successful in PRIs. Since BVs process of capacity building has gone a long way in truly empowering rural and urban women, the Researchers recommendations to the Government, NGOs, and Panchayat, Mandal and Zilla Parishad offices as seen in Chapter VII, are not only the result of the Study but are also largely drawn and substantiated from the lessons

learned from Bala Vikasa Women representatives.

### **Bala Vikasa at the micro-level**

Bala Vikasa mobilizes more than 1,80,000 women. From this large number, more than 250 have been elected as members of Panchayats in 2009.

Bala Vikasa women are divided into small groups of ten members, headed by women leaders of their choice. All Bala Vikasa women members receive monthly and systematic training. BV women leaders also attend regular and special training programmes in communication, personal growth, self-esteem, etc. as BV aims at making these women true agents of change at the micro-level. Bala Vikasa elected women to Panchayat come mostly from the Leaders rank.

From the success of the women illustrated below, it is amply evident, that Bala Vikasa training has had a definitive impact on the performance of elected women.

## **SUCCESS STORIES**

### **1. Yasarapu Anitha**

Village : Chinna Vangara  
District : Warangal  
Age : 26 years



#### **Personal Information**

Anitha is a young and dynamic woman who completed her graduation. She belongs to the Scheduled Caste. Her husband is an employee in a private organization. She has one son. She was leader of the Mahila Mandal groups . Her active participation in fulfilling her role as leader, increased her reputation and she had a great influence over the groups. Women compelled her to contest the election.

#### **Elected as Sarpanch**

Anitha's commitment to serve the people won her the Sarpanch post

in the Panchayat elections held in 2006, when she contested from the Scheduled Caste Women Reservation category. She is supported by her husband who was a MPTC member (Mandal council member) in the past. She actively participates in all the deliberations for the development of the village.

#### **Hurdles encountered and overcome**

Chinna Vangara village comprises of the upper caste Reddys, who hold the posts of Secretary and are Panchayat Council Members. Anitha being dedicated to her job, attends meetings regularly and actively participates in the functioning of the Panchayat. On one occasion, while presiding over a meeting, sitting on her designated chair, she was asked by the Secretary and the Council Members to give up her chair to the upper caste people attending the meeting. Empowered by her training in self-confidence and self-respect, Anitha declined. She filed a case against the Secretary under the caste discrimination Act. He was imprisoned under non-bail able

offence. This unexpectedly bold action, taught the villagers a lesson.

### **Achievements**

Anitha decided to eliminate caste discrimination among the people of the village.

As she is educated, and trained, she relies on her leadership traits. She has launched an anti-arrack (local made liquor) movement against selling liquor in the village, and has successfully mobilized the village women and others in this campaign. By next year she wants her village to be declared a "liquor free zone".

Anitha organizes meetings for all the Mahila Mandals on regular basis and educates them on different social issues. Being young, she actively involves the youth of her village in development activities and in the environment issues: Reforestation program through planting of saplings. As a member of the Bala Vikasa Women group, she receives support and training from Bala Vikasa, which in turn is enthusing her to work towards making her village a model village.

To further improve herself, she attends various training program organized by the government and private organizations. She tries to get support from different sources to implement development programs for the welfare of the people.

### **Future Endeavors**

If she gets elected for a second time, Anitha aims to continue her services as Sarpanch.

She aims to totally eradicate caste based sentiments among the women and work for the integrity and benefit of her community.

## **2. Mekala Bagyalaxmi**

Village : Shameerpet  
Mandal : Jangoan  
Age : 42 years



### **Family Background**

Mekala Bagyalaxmi is a typical housewife and a mother of three daughters and one son. She belongs to a traditional family of BC Golla. She has studied up to class VII. The primary occupation of the family is agriculture. Her husband owns a brick factory.

In the year 1997 she joined Mahila Sangham run by the government as a member. Its main activity being money transaction, she actively participated in collecting and issuing loans as a group leader. In the year 1998, she was nominated for the Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency (MPTC) election but lost by a few votes. In the same year she was elected as Director for Agricultural Marketing.

In the year 2000, she joined Bala Vikasa and became a group member. She attended and actively participated in the monthly group meetings. She says: "The various development activities undertaken, the exposure to various issues, the training obtained in the group

meetings of Bala Vikasa have all given me a lot of self-confidence and have boosted my capacity to do more service".

### **Election as Sarpanch**

Following the last Panchayat elections held in 2006, Mekala won the post of Sarpanch. She is personally interested in politics and contested the election without any family influence. As her husband is not interested in politics, he initially opposed her standing for election, but on being elected, he accepted it. He does not interfere in her political affairs. He supports her by sharing her domestic chores.

Although Mekala has only Primary level education, she is very active at the meetings and takes decisions on her own and when it concerns the community, the decisions are made collectively with the Panchayat council and the people. She goes regularly to the Panchayat office and attends all the meetings. To ensure the presence of all the village people at the meetings, she takes necessary steps to inform people

of the meeting three days in advance, using “dappu” (drum beats calling for people’s attention). Women attend the meetings in large numbers and they seek her help. She encourages women to get involved in development activities.

### **Hurdles encountered and overcome**

Patriarchal values, political intimidation from opposition parties or from men in her own party, vested groups, and the political and administrative system, were the major obstacles obstructing her effective functioning.

Having only a primary education Mekala says: “As a Sarpanch, initially I lacked confidence to address public meetings, chaired by a MLA or MP. But now, I have got over the fears. I have good relations with the people in my village especially with the women groups.”

### **Achievement**

Mekala Bagyalaxmi attended several awareness training

programs conducted by the government and thus she is familiar with her roles and responsibilities and is aware of the different schemes that can be implemented to develop her village. She also attended the capacity building training programs organized by Bala Vikasa and other local NGO’s. She says:

“The Leadership training I attended at Bala Vikasa made a big difference in my career. I acquired the various skills required to be a competent leader”.

She carried out a needs assessment in the village to better understand the needs of the people. On learning that the people’s primary requirement was pure and safe drinking water, she approached the government. Finding the procedure long and tedious, involving sanctions from different authorities, she approached Bala Vikasa. After learning more about Bala Viaksa project implementation process, she formed committees

and delegated responsibilities to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of the project. After several motivational meetings, she succeeded in establishing a mineral water plant, drill 4 bore wells, and build an overhead tank in the village with Bala Vikasa support. She says: "I attained great satisfaction in providing pure and safe drinking water to hundreds of people. With the implementation of this project I also received the cooperation of all the village people. There is a closer relationship and unity among the people in the village".

As a Bala Vikasa group member she also participates in the Solidarity Day functions, especially conducted to help orphan children. Inspired by it, she supports the orphans in the village, and also works towards eliminating child labour, by regularly conducting raids in the village to rescue child labourers. She has succeeded in preventing 10 children from being used as child labourers and re-

admitting 25 drop outs back in school. She frequently visits the government schools to ensure the supply of nutritious food and hygienic surroundings. She involves women group members to cook nutritious food for the children.

### **Future Endeavors**

Mekala BagyaLaxmi credits her success to her husband, family members and her village people for their support and encouragement in her effective functioning. She says: "With the same support and encouragement I wish to contest the next elections."

She is of the view that reservation of seats for women has helped women to participate in the political affairs of the village and to raise their voice for their rights and welfare. She wants the women to become educated and also participate in larger numbers in the elections and also in the PRI. She attributes her success to the people of her constituency.

In the future, she wants to build a

community hall, and construct a good drainage system.

Under the guidance of Bala Vikasa she wants to make her village a model village like the Gangadevipalli<sup>3</sup> village which has been awarded by the government. She says "I am inspired by Bala Vikasa approach. I would like to follow the same approach to bring about development in my village. Although our village is selected as a model village by the government, there is a lot more to be done before becoming a model. I prefer Bala Vikasa criteria for declaring a village a model village. As it is a better model, I will try to fulfill the criteria of Bala Vikasa. I will introduce village committees and together with the youth, women, and Ward members I will strive to bring development in every nook and corner of the village."

In the next election, she wants to contest as a candidate for MPTC.

### 3. Eravu Ramulamma

Village : Aipur  
District : Nalgonda  
Age : 45 years



#### Personal Information

Eravu Ramulamma comes from a SC lower middle class family. She was married at the age of 16 years. Her husband is a farmer and owns 3 acres of land. She has four children—three daughters and one son. She has studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> class. She had been a housewife doing tailoring work to generate income for the family.

In the year 1995, when Bala Vikasa initiated groups, she joined as a member and was elected as the Balwadi (kindergarten) Animator. To

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<sup>3</sup> Gangadevipalli has been supported by Bala Vikasa for many years. It is now recognized by the Central Government as "a model village" and so has received several awards.

support her family and children's education she took a loan from Bala Vikasa and diversified her business from tailoring to sale of garments which helped improve her economic condition.

In the year 1998 she was elected as Area Coordinator for the Samabhavana Sangham group run by the government.

### **Election as Sarpanch**

When the 2001 elections were announced, a influential man who belonged to the Reddy caste known as "Dora" in the village, encouraged her to stand as candidate for Sarpanch reserved for SC women, being the only educated woman. Her active role in the women groups, and her commitment to the service of the poor instilled in her a new found strength to contest the post of Sarpanch. However, she lost as Sarpanch, and was elected as a Ward member.

In 2006, she contested again for the post of Sarpanch, and won the election under SC Mahila quota.

The experience gained as a group leader and her exposure to the rural problems have helped her to participate actively in the Panchayat affairs.

Eravu is happy on becoming Sarpanch. She attributes her success to her 'Dora' who encouraged her and also to the rural people who elected her. She wishes to do something concrete for the welfare of the people.

### **Hurdles encountered and overcome**

As an SC Sarpanch she could not gain respect from the people, especially from the higher caste, and faced lot of discrimination. Eravu says: "Due to the caste system, most of the families did not cooperate in bringing community development. My poor education level did not help me in assuming my functions as Sarpanch." However, she adds: "Although education is an important factor, self-confidence is still more important to achieve results." She credits her success to following the Bala Vikasa approach. "Following

Bala Vikasa community development approach, I formed different village committees with the youth, women and the Ward members and delegated different responsibilities to committees on health, school functioning, tax collection, Clean and Green activities and other Panchayat functions. This approach helped overcome many obstacles”

She believes that success lies with the involvement of the people in the implementation of the projects. Thus she ensures that there is transparency among the people regarding the issue. She conducts meetings and takes an opinion poll of the people pertaining to the issues and together with the Panchayat council, collectively makes a final decision. Thus making it very democratic. She expresses her opinion by saying: “We support a child until he walks but leave him on his own once he starts to walk. Similarly, we only advise the people and expect them to be the ultimate decision makers. This builds trust and confidence and results in cooperation.”

To increase the economic stability of women, pragmatic programs like ‘Micro-Credit’ for entrepreneurs was made accessible to women, both to enhance their economic standard, and inculcate leadership qualities.

Although in her view political parties are a great hindrance to development, her success she accedes, is due to the cooperation she received from members of all parties since her approach was for the overall development of the village. She quotes the example of implementing the water purification system in the village with the assistance by Bala Vikasa. When land was required for the installation of the purification plant, it was the opposition party leader’s wife who readily consented to donate the land as it was for the overall benefit of the village.

### **Achievement**

Eravu ensures that all government welfare schemes are sanctioned for her village.

As Sarpanch, she has voluntarily

arranged for the construction of 50 electric poles in the village, CC roads, water pipe line, water purification plant, compound walls to the schools for the protection of the children in the village.

She also takes up different issues affecting women, widows, the elderly, and children. She does not approach the police department to settle disputes, as she is confident of her capacity to resolve them herself.

She has succeeded in preventing early child marriages in her village.

She acknowledges with pride that the training she received from the government and from Bala Vikasa has helped her succeed. She says: "The trainings received from Bala Vikasa which are continuous and systematic, participatory and

interactive, has given me "thala balam, guna balam" (moral and psychological support).

### **Future endeavors**

Eravu Ramulamma commented that she is proud of her role and background. She is now confident of her administrative skills gained through experience as Sarpanch over the last three years.

Trusting in her new-found confidence and ability, she is ready to take on the upper caste men and patriarchal forces, who cannot comprehend why they have to agree with her– an SC Sarpanch – on her development projects for the village. With confidence she asserts: "Yes, they try to stall my proposals but I have learnt ways on how to deal with them". Her message of empowerment and success is loud and clear.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations resulting from the study on “Women elected to Panchayat in Andhra Pradesh”, are divided into three sections: One list is directed to the government; the second to those in authority in the Panchayati Raj System: at the levels of the Panchayat Office , the Mandal and Zilla Parishad office; the third to the voluntary sector .

### I. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

**The Government should:**

**1. Develop Mechanisms: create adequate mechanisms to insure effective women participation in PRI.**

**Give women a “Voice”:** women should feel free to express their opinions, ideas, feelings and problems;

**Grant them a “Choice”:**

Women should have the right to exercise their choice during elections. They should have the choice to elect their representative and remove from power representatives who fail to discharge their expected duties. They should have complete freedom to elect a good service provider.

**Bestow on them genuine “Representation”:**

Empower representative groups of the people, pressure groups and interest groups, to enable people channel their choices, voices and to receive information. These groups should be true representatives, ensuring accountability, transparency and responsiveness of the government.

**Provide them proper “Information”:** Since information on

the various services, rules and regulations, rights, etc., create awareness, help the people to make right choice and also voice their opinions and problems, there should be a free flow of information.

**2. Provide Education: provide Adult Education to elected women in PRI. This minimum standard of education should include exposure to the outside world.**

Unless the Women Sarpanches have a minimum standard of education they cannot comprehend the problems of their constituencies, nor can they make any valuable contribution in solving the problems with innovative skills. Therefore, minimum standard of education should be made imperative.

It was observed in the study that elected women with primary or secondary education are better equipped to play their role and those with even limited education participate in

Panchayat activities to a certain extent.

By providing non formal education, women will gradually overcome their inherent timidity and embarrassment.

**3. Increase Awareness: produce and disseminate awareness material and implement awareness program for the elected women.**

The women need to know about their legal rights and duties, the nature of our constitution, democratic processes and values, working of democratic institutions, concept and relevance of the Panchayati Raj, various poverty alleviation programmes for their economic or material wellbeing, and receive information regarding government policies, intervention, and strategies, especially promulgated for the weaker sections.

Small booklets in each regional language if published, containing

information on the various development and social security schemes, they will create better awareness. These should be distributed to all the people in the village.

**4. Facilitate Training Programs: ensure that systematic training is given to elected women.**

The complexity of functions of the local government demand skills, knowledge and aptitude. This could be acquired only through systematic training. Women should be mobilized and provided training.

Setting up a committee to look into the training needs of the elected women and identifying the right organizations which could meet various training needs, will go a long way in building the capacity of the women.

The first task will be to train the elected women representatives to understand the fears, inhibitions and aspirations while acquainting

them with various developmental schemes operating in their jurisdiction.

Training before and after the elections, to the women members, will help them to play an effective role in the Panchayati Raj institutions. Acquisition of training could be made compulsory.

Every divisional head quarters should have a Panchayat training center fully equipped with a dedicated and professional staff and with a resource centre, literature and audio visual aids.

**5. Provide Resources: release funds on time to implement the development schemes in the elected member's constituency and according to plan.**

Timely release of funds will win the hearts of the people by which the Sarpanch can gain support and coordinate better the activities for the development of the village.

**6. Assist Government and NGO partnerships: encourage greater partnership with the people.**

Ensuring the involvement of the people to develop, implement and strengthen the PRI will be highly beneficial. The Government should closely monitor and bring under the umbrella of the Panchayat system, all developmental functionaries working at the district level and at levels below.

**7. Motivate Attitudinal changes among grassroots bureaucrats.**

Attitudinal changes are required among grassroots bureaucracy. Government should make efforts to bring about positive attitudinal changes among the bureaucrats by motivating them to attend training workshops and orientation programmes which would give them an opportunity to interact with women's groups as well as women members of PRI's.

**8. Encourage Transparency: make transparency possible**

Elected women should be encouraged to be more open and transparent, so that people have a clear vision about the activities of the village Panchayat which can make them more vigilant and confident. The Government facilitating transparency will have huge benefits.

**9. Ensure Integration: make sure that Reservation does not degenerate into marginalization of women in the political process.**

Reservation has been seen as a means of integration. Ways and means have to be found to increase the number of women representatives and make their participation more effective.

**10. Improve Rapport: encourage better affinity between lower level officials and the village electorates**

As the Gram Sabhas are generally ineffective, they are in need of the supportive and

facilitative attitude of the lower level functionaries, including the teacher, Panchayat secretary, social workers etc. These officials should act as guides, friends and philosophers.

## **II. RECOMMENDATIONS TO PANCHAYAT OFFICE AND MANDAL AND ZILLA PARISHAD OFFICE**

- 1. Elected women should be given more freedom and flexibility to exercise their functions. More women officials in local bodies should be recruited.**

This will reduce the predominance of males, which will minimize the male hegemony in the administration.

- 2. Structural and institutional reforms should be introduced to neutralize the present power equation and make it more favorable for women.**

- 3. Some self employment**

**opportunities would be of great assistance if created.**

- 4. More economic independence is a pre-requisite for political empowerment of women.**

- 5. A quarterly Women Forum to Exchange Ideas should be created.**

- 6. Elected women representatives of the three tiers should meet once in three months and formulate integrated plans.**

In this way, they would be more participative while deliberating on important issues. The empowerment process requires social change by organizing and mobilizing the women's groups.

- 7. It would be highly constructive, if Women MLAs and MPs undertake frequent visits to meet the elected representatives of PRIs,**

This would help solve problems faced by the rural women members without delay.

Women MLAs and MPs need to motivate elected women by their own examples. They should encourage them to take decisions independently. The national and regional political parties should play an important role in making elected women aware about the process, values and working of democratic institutions.

**8. Women Elected Representatives in PRIs should be better equipped by providing them training in the art and science of decision-making, so that they are not influenced by extraneous factors.**

Elected women must develop leadership qualities. They should discuss among other women and take their opinion.

**7. All women members of Panchayats and other executive bodies should be empowered through training**

If trained, they will be more empowered to exercise their authority. Particular attention

must be paid to the development of inter-personal communication skills among the community leaders.

**8. Efforts have to be made to enlist participation of women by establishing links between the elected representatives and the development functionaries.**

This could be facilitated through special orientation camps .

**9. Elected women should be given due respect by officials.**

When elected women visit the office of their respective local body or government offices to pursue their work, they should be treated with due respect and promptly so as to avoid unnecessary harassment. Receiving respectful treatment will boost women's self confidence.

**10. Work performed by women members, be assessed annually at the state and**

**national levels, and outstanding performance be recognized and due credit through awards be given to deserving women.**

Gaining recognition at these levels could act as incentives for women to come forward in more numbers and participate effectively.

**11. All Gram Panchayats should be provided with telephone facility and a small library.**

This would help raise infrastructure standards and improve working conditions

**III. RECOMMENDATIONS TO NGOS**

**1. Take the initiative to educate and bring awareness among elected women. Providing training to change mindset and social attitude should also be focused on.**

The study reveals that elected women are able to assert themselves. They have started taking interest in their work. Certain measures need to be

followed to help women to play their role effectively. Intensive training is necessary to train women in the intricacies of the process of decision making and administration.

Elected women have also identified the type of training which will build their self esteem and their inner strength: Training on communication, public speaking, Leadership, Appreciative Inquiry, Conflict Resolution, etc. should be included.

**2. Make effective use of Mahila Mandals.**

Mahila Mandals which exist in the rural areas could be used as effective instruments to organize and mobilize women. The Mahila Mandals should become more active. They should not be just collecting savings and issuing loans etc. They should encourage women to participate in social activities, motivate women to contest the Panchayat Raj elections and they in turn should help the rural women to develop.

**3. Conduct awareness programmes for husbands of Sarpanches on a periodical basis.**

For effective participation of women representatives in Panchayats it is necessary to change the outlook of husbands. Husbands must

realize that when women contribute in earnings of the family they too should share some household work. The male member has to motivate the women members or representatives, so that the women come forward and "lift their veil".



## IMPORTANT INDICATORS TO DETERMINE THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY<sup>4</sup>

#	Indicators	Total	Male	Female
1	Population (2001)	102715.247	51.73	48.27
2	Birth Rate (1998)	26.5	-	-
3	Death Rate (1998)	9	9.2	8.8
4	Infant Mortality Rate (1998) per 1000 live births	72	69.8	73.5
5	Sex Ratio (2001)	-	1000	933
6	Literacy Rate (2001)	65.38	75.85	54.16
7	Work Participation Rate (1991)	37.5	51.6	22.3
8	Physical Quality of Life Index (1991)	58	62	53
9	Maternity Mortality Rate (1999) per 100,000 births	540	-	-

Sex ratio is a sensitive indicator of the status of women in anti society. Sex ratio has declined in India over the century from 972 in 1901, to 927 in 1991. The ratio has since gone up to 933 in 2001.

The advancement of literacy for women was only about 8% points

in the first half-century. The pace of improvement has been more significant, raising it by 46.16% points to reach 54.16% by 2001.

The work participation of women in India has been low compared to that of men. This could be mainly because the work done by women

<sup>4</sup> Jha, Mahu, *Women in Decision Making Position – Where Numbers Matter*, New Delhi, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, 2005, pp. 43-44

is largely in and for the household, and does not always get counted as economically productive work. Infant mortality rate, in spite of all the health services that India boasts of, stands at a high of 72 per 1000 live births. The female mortality is again higher at 73.5 when compared to the 69.8 of male children.

The poor condition of health services available to women is also indicated by the maternal mortality rate which still stands at 540 per 100,000 live births.

The physical quality of life is lower for women (53%) than men (62%).



## PANCHAYATI RAJ IN A NUTSHELL

### Panchayati Raj

The term 'Panchayat raj' is relatively new, having originated during the British administration. 'Raj' literally means governance or government. Mahatma Gandhi advocated *Panchayati Raj*, a decentralized form of Government where each village is responsible for its own affairs, as the foundation of India's political system. His term for such a vision was "Gram Swaraj" (Village Self-governance).

It was adopted by state governments during the 1950s and 60s as laws were passed to establish Panchayats in various states. It also found backing in the Indian Constitution, with the 73rd amendment in 1992 to accommodate the idea. The Amendment Act of 1992 contains provision for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats to both for preparation of plans for economic development and social justice and for

implementation in relation to twenty-nine subjects listed in the eleventh schedule of the constitution.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Panchayats receive funds from three sources—(i) local body grants, as recommended by the Central Finance Commission, (ii) funds for implementation of centrally-sponsored schemes, and (iii) funds released by the state governments on the recommendations of the State Finance Commissions.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the history of Panchayati Raj in India, on April 24, 1993, the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. This Act was extended to Panchayats in the tribal areas of eight States, namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan from December 24, 1996.

The Act aims to provide 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States having population of over 2 million, to hold Panchayat elections regularly every 5 years, to provide reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women, to appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations as regards the financial powers of the Panchayats and to constitute District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district.

Powers and responsibilities are delegated to Panchayats at the appropriate level :

- Preparation of plan for economic development and social justice.
- Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects given in Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- To levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

### **Village level (Panchayat)**

**Panchayati Raj** is a system of governance in which gram

Panchayats are the basic units of administration. It has 3 levels: village, block and district. At the village level, it is called a Panchayat. It is a local body working for the good of the village. The number of members usually ranges from 7 to 31; occasionally, groups are larger, but they never have fewer than 7 members.

The block-level institution is called the Panchayat Samiti. The district-level institution is called the Zilla Parishad.

### **Gram Panchayat**

Gram sabha is constituted by all members of a village over the age of 18 years. The Gram Sabha elects the Gram Panchayat a council of elected members taking decisions on issues key to a village's social, cultural and economic life: thus, a Gram Panchayat is also a village's body of elected representatives. The council leader is named *Sarpanch* in Hindi, and each member is a *Gram Panchayat Sadasya* or *Panch*. The Panchayat acts as a conduit between the local government and the people. Decisions are taken by a majority vote (Bahumat). It is said that in

such a system, each villager can voice his opinion in the governance of his village. Decisions are taken without lengthy legal procedures and the process remains for the most part transparent. Panchayat is an ancient Indian word that means means Five Persons ( Headman ). Since its inception, Panchayat has come a long way, it is currently included in the constitution of the Government of India.

#### **Intermediate level Panchayat**

This is the Panchayat set at the block or tehsil level for a group of grama Panchayats in States where

the total population exceeds 20 lakh. Block level Panchayat is not advisable for many States like Kerala.

#### **District level Panchayat**

This is the Panchayats at the district level. Every district in the States where Panchayat raj is implemented will have a District or Zilla Panchayats.

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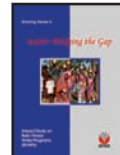


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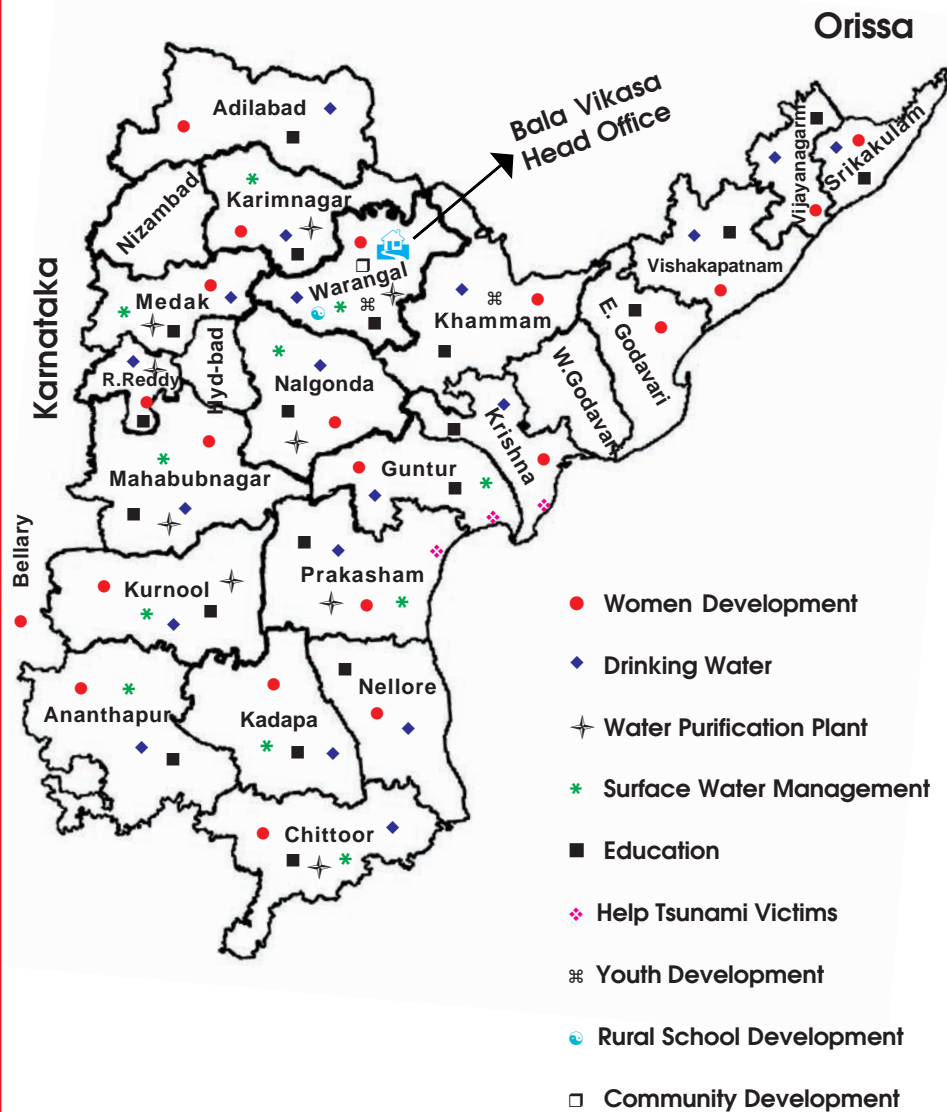
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# Map of Andhra Pradesh - India

## Bala Vikasa Programmes



sketch map not to scale

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