

P **WOMEN** **AND** **POLITICAL** **EMPOWERMENT**

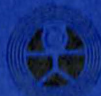
2004

Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations

Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment:
The Journey Ahead

Edited by
Bidyut Mohanty
Joya Roy
Jayasree Ahuja

305.420 954
M 725 W



Institute of Social Sciences



**INDIAN INSTITUTE
OF
ADVANCED STUDY
LIBRARY, SHIMLA**

...rary social, political
and to make available
ntists, policy makers,
action. The evolution
of the Institute. The
bjects in the areas of
conomic and political
issues. The Institute also organises seminars, workshops, discussions and training programmes for the exchange of ideas and dissemination of its research findings. The major research thrust of the Institute is in the areas of Local Governance (*Panchayati Raj*), Urban Studies, and Economic Affairs. The Institute seeks to build a community of concerned scholars and activists engaged in ushering in a humane and just society.

Chairman *Director*
U.R. Anantha Murthy George Mathew



Institute of Social Sciences

8 Nelson Mandela Road, New Delhi - 110 070, India
Tel: 91-11-26121902, 26121909 Fax: 91-11-26137027
Email: issnd@vsnl.com Website: <http://www.issin.org>

Women and Political Empowerment
2004

Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations
**Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment:
The Journey Ahead**

Edited by
Bidyut Mohanty
Joya Roy
Jayasree Ahuja



Institute of Social Sciences

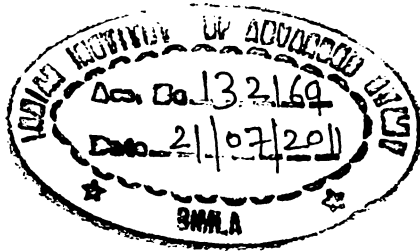


Library IAS, Shimla

305.420 954 M 725 W



00132169



305.420954
M 725 W

WOMEN AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT 2004
Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations on
Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment:
The Journey Ahead

First Published 2005

© 2005: Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

Edited by: Bidyut Mohanty, Joya Roy and Jayasree Ahuja

Layout and Design: P.N. Kuttappan, Joshy Jose and P. Nandakumar

Printed at Kalpana Printing House, L-4 Green Park Extn. New Delhi-110 016

Price Rs: 100/- US\$ 6

Contents

About this Publication iv

Summary of the Proceedings 1

*Charter of Demands adopted by the
Women Panchayat Representatives* 5

Conference on Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment:
The Journey Ahead 10

Inaugural Session 10

*George Mathew, K C Malhotra, Kapila Vatsyayan,
Shabana Azmi, Indira Jaising*

Women's Political Empowerment: a Global Perspective 17

Drude Dahlerup, Rita Bahuguna Joshi

Panel Discussions

Panchayats, Livelihood and Environment:

Ganesan Balachander, Ilina Sen 21

Health: *N H Antia, Uma Nambiar, Alpana Sagar* 26

Education: *Karuna Chanana, Poonam Batra* 32

Law: *Vasudha Dhagamwar* 35

Electoral Process: *Kumud Sharma, Amita Punj, Ginny Srivastava* 37

Role of NGOs: *Rita Sarin, Syeda Hameed, Mamata Jaitley, Revathi
Narayanan* 41

Plenary Session: The Journey Ahead

BD Sharma, Sudha Pillai, Dolma Gyari, Jayant K. Banthia 44

Open Sessions 50

Valedictory Session: Strategies for the Future

M.S. Gill, Poornima Advani 57

Executive Summary of Background Paper 60

About this Publication

The proceedings of the conference on 'Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment: The Journey Ahead' have been edited and abstracted for this book. Select presentations made in English have been given in verbatim form while speeches delivered in Hindi have been translated into English and summarized. Most of the speakers have corrected and approved abstracts of their own presentations.

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of all the people who helped bring this publication to light. Irshad Perwez did the first transcription of the tapes; Jayashree Ahuja transcribed and translated the proceedings into English and made summaries of the presentations. Usha Gopinath checked a number of the original transcripts. P. Nandakumar, Sanjay Kumar and Molly Bino did several rounds of typing and corrections while Joya Roy reworked the final draft of the manuscript. P. N. Kuttappan and Joshy Jose did the final layout before it went to press.

✓

Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations

New Delhi, 23-25 April 2004

Summary of the Proceedings

On 24th April 1992, the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act was passed, giving Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) constitutional status and reserving one-third of the seats of all panchayats for women. By 1994, most Indian states had passed conformity legislations and made preparations to hold panchayat elections under this new dispensation. Since then, the Institute of Social Sciences has observed 24 April as Women's Political Empowerment Day, organizing meetings of elected women representatives, social activists, political leaders, and experts from academia and international organizations in the national capital as well as in several states.

Over 1500 elected women panchayat representatives joined the celebrations of the Tenth Anniversary of Women's Political Empowerment held at the Siri Fort Auditorium, New Delhi, over a period of three days, on 23, 24 and 25 April, 2004. They represented all the diverse regions of the country, from Kashmir to Kerala and from Assam and Nagaland to Rajasthan. Apart from the women panchayat members, researchers, members of non governmental organisations, mediapersons, etc., as well as senior government officials participated in the convention. Among the major highlights of the celebrations was a conference on the theme titled 'Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment: The Journey Ahead'. In its various plenaries, panel discussions and open sessions the different dimensions of women's political empowerment and its linkage with issues like health, education, law, livelihood and environment, NGO intervention and electoral processes were critically analysed by experts as well as practitioners.

The national award-winning film on the struggles of elected women panchayat members titled *Swaraaj: The Little Republic* was screened on this occasion. Cultural programmes were also presented by troupes from different states. A play titled *Faisla Thik Hai* staged by staff members of the Institute was a special attraction. Stalls set up by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) working with panchayats demonstrated the creative capacity of rural women when organised.

The Speakers

As many as 44 speakers and panelists participated in the different plenary and working sessions of the conference on 'Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment: The Journey Ahead.'

The Inaugural Session was addressed by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, former Secretary to the Government of India, and former president, India International Centre; Ms. Shabana Azmi, actor and former member of the Rajya Sabha; Ms. Indira Jaising, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India; Prof. K.C. Malhotra, Chairperson, National Advisory Board, Poorest Area Civil Society Programme (PACS); and Dr. George Mathew, Director, ISS. Mr. M.S. Gill, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and former Chief Election Commissioner of India; and Ms. Poornima Advani, Chairperson, National Commission for Women, spoke at the Valedictory Session. Ms. Sudha Pillai, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Mines, Mr. Jayant Kumar Banthia, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, and Ms. Shalini Rajneesh, Private Secretary to the Minister of State for Finance, GOI; also addressed the convention.

Resource persons at the convention included Prof. Drude Dahlerup of Stockholm University, Sweden; Ms. Rita Bahuguna Joshi, President, All India Mahila Congress; Dr. Ganesan Balachander, Representative, The Ford Foundation; Dr. Illina Sen, of Rupantar, Chhattisgarh; Dr. Chandrakant Pandav, All India Institute of Medical Sciences; Dr. Uma Nambiar, President, National Cancer Care Foundation; Dr. N.H. Antia, Director, Foundation for Research in Community Health; Dr. Alpana Sagar, Assistant Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University; Prof. Poonam Batra, Delhi University; Ms. Vasudha Dhagamwar, Founder President, MARG; Mr. S.K. Sharma, Trustee, People First; Ms. Ginny Srivastava, Director, ASTHA; Ms. Amita Punj, Partners in Law and Development; Ms. Syeda Hameed, Founder, Muslim Women's Forum; Ms. Revathi Narayanan, National Project Coordinator, CHARCA; Ms. Mamata Jaitley, Women's Documentation and Resource Centre; Dr. Lopamudra Mohanty, former Chairperson, State Commission for Women, Orissa, and Ms. Dolma Gyari, Vice Chairperson, Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies.

Plenary sessions and panel discussions were chaired by Ms. Indira Jaising, Advocate; Prof. Bina Agarwal of the Institute of Economic Growth; Mr. A.R. Nanda, Director, Population Foundation of India; Ms. Rita Sarin, Country Director, The Hunger Project; Dr. B.D. Sharma, President, Bharat Jan Andolan; Mr. S.V. Sharan, ISS Senior Fellow; Prof. Karuna Chanana of JNU; Dr. Kumud Sharma, Centre for Women's Development Studies; and Dr. Partha Nath Mukherji, S.K. Dey Chair Professor, ISS.

Dr. Manu Kulkarni, Senior Fellow, ISS; Prof. Gopal Iyer, Panjab University; Prof. B.S. Baviskar, Senior Fellow, ISS; and Mr. D.N. Gupta, Fellow, ISS, guided discussions in the Open Sessions. Filmmaker Ms. Sehjo Singh- anchored the opening interactive session on 23 April. Dr. Bidyut Mohanty, National Coordinator, Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations (WPEDC), was the overall in-charge of the celebrations.

The Highlights

The 2004 Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations had many firsts to its credit. For the first time, more than 1,500 young, energetic, elected women representing 845 panchayats and municipalities participated in the convention. It was by far the largest gathering of elected women members from panchayats in a convention of this kind. For the first time delegates from Leh, (Jammu and Kashmir), Nagaland, Jharkhand and Malkangiri (Orissa) attended the celebrations. A large chunk of delegates were in the age group of 30-40. Moreover, the majority of the delegates were gram panchayat representatives. Women belonging to the Scheduled Castes, including members of the most oppressed Musahar community of Bihar, the Scheduled Tribes such as the Santhals, Oraons and Mundas of Jharkhand and the Kandha of Orissa and representatives of the 'primitive tribal' Banda community of Orissa participated in large numbers.

The convention also drew a large number of Muslim women from the most backward districts and women involved with microfinance programmes in different states. With over 1500 women at the convention waving flags demanding 50 per cent reservation in governance and passing a Charter of Demands, the assembled delegates presented a unique spectacle. The percentage of illiterate and barely literate women panchayat members among the participants was much less than that of the previous years. So also, the number of male relatives escorting the women panchayat members. Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Awards were given to three sarpanches – Ms. Ekta Jaiswal of Madhya Pradesh, a 'Hi-tech' sarpanch, Ms. P. Baby Balakrishnan of Kerala, a People's Campaigner, and one who has effectively implemented government schemes – Ms. Nirmala Devi Sahu of Chhattisgarh (see citations on pp. 7-9).

The Issues

The issues raised in the various panel discussions and interactive sessions ranged from the social dimensions of patriarchy to good governance, transparency and accountability in panchayats. The role of the quota system in ensuring a 'critical mass' of women in local bodies came in for praise. Many of the participants expressed the opinion that though panchayats

4 *Women and Political Empowerment - 2004*

have been given the charge of 29 subjects, devolution of financial power is still largely on paper. Other issues which generated heated discussion included gender asymmetry, both in terms of access to education and health services. Many resource persons maintained that the provision of reservation for women in local bodies should not be seen as a magic wand to achieve empowerment because there are many loopholes in it.

It was also felt that panchayats in general and the women panchayat representatives in particular will have an important role to play in terms of livelihood in the age of globalisation. Essential services like health and education can be more effectively delivered by panchayats provided their representatives are sufficiently empowered and aware of their responsibilities. A session on the role of civil society organizations recommended CSO/NGO intervention in capacity building efforts to strengthen PRIs. Finally, speakers reiterated that while the elected women representatives have every right to press for implementation of the Charter of Demands, they should not lose sight of their own accountability and responsibilities.

Bidyut Mohanty
National Coordinator, WPEDC

Charter of Demands adopted by the Tenth Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations, 23-25 April 2004, New Delhi

We, the 1,500 representatives of elected women panchayat leaders from all the States and Union Territories of India, who assembled in Delhi to celebrate the Women's Political Empowerment Day, after due deliberation unanimously resolve the following and appeal to the authorities concerned to implement these demands:

1. Raise reservation for women in panchayats to fifty per cent and provide reservation for women in Parliament and State legislatures.
2. Set up Panchayat Training Centres for women; at least one in each division in each state, to strengthen the capacity-building of women representatives within a year of their election. Refresher courses be organised at least once every year. Training programmes for women panchayat members should aim at continuous skill up-gradation including internet access to enable them to handle panchayat work with competence and efficiency.
3. Introduce regular gender sensitive reorientation programmes for the MPs, MLAs and bureaucrats about the funds, functions and functionaries of the panchayats.
4. Ensure that preference is given by gram panchayats to women's self-help groups in awarding contracts for village level construction work.
5. Ensure that due consideration is given by authorities at all levels to the proposals of the Gram Sabha, particularly those relating to issues of women and children.
6. Facilitate formation of women's associations at different levels to act as pressure groups.
7. Provide reservation for women for the post of Up-Pradhan/Up-Sarpanch of the gram panchayats.
8. Ensure adequate number of women panchayat secretaries and entrust not more than two gram panchayats to one Panchayat Secretary/Village Development Officer.
9. Ensure that every state government opens a 'toll-free help line' for panchayat women at the state and district levels to attend to emergent needs (adverse or otherwise) of elected women functionaries of PRIs in terms of police assistance, information dissemination, legal assistance, counselling, etc., with a view to strengthen women's

6 *Women and Political Empowerment - 2004*

- participation in local governance. Set up a national centre in Delhi to co-ordinate all the state-level helplines and act as a resource centre.
10. Provide for a sub-quorum for women in the Gram Sabha.
 11. Give representation to women on all committees of the panchayats at all levels and see to it that parallel committees are not formed.
 12. Implement the Women Component of the Five-Year Plan through panchayats.
 13. Provide for stringent laws to deal with those committing violence against women candidates during and after elections.
 14. Scrap the two-child norm as applicable at present in respect of the representatives of panchayats.
 15. Provide right to land and housing in joint names of spouses and for single, deserted, Dalit, tribal, *devadasi*, widowed and battered women, and for those rendered homeless in caste/communal riots and due to displacement.
 16. Strictly implement the law regarding equal wages for women.
 17. Provide literacy training under special crash programmes for illiterate women panchayat members.
 18. Facilitate exchange programmes for panchayat women representatives inside and outside the country.
 19. Give awards for outstanding performance by women representatives at all levels of the panchayats in the country.
 20. Ensure that the government provides funds for celebrating women's empowerment day at national, state and district levels.

Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award 2004

CITATION

Presented to
P. Baby Balakrishnan

P. Baby Balakrishnan, President of Madikai Gram Panchayat, Kasaragod district, Kerala, was elected as Panchayat President in 1995 for the first time at the age of 21, thereby becoming the youngest Panchayat President in the state. Subsequently, she was elected unopposed for the second term in 2000, a testimony to her immense popularity in the area. It is thanks to her initiative in adopting innovative techniques that it was possible to execute a variety of social and developmental works which gave boost to vegetable production among the Madikai community.

She was an active member of the People's Campaign programme during 1997-99, and still takes keen interest in Neighbourhood Community Groups (NHGs) and Beneficiaries Committees. Her panchayat has made judicious use of micro-credit schemes and has formed several Self Help Groups and Kudumbashree NHGs to augment the income of women. She also helped create a congenial environment for women's empowerment by generating new employment opportunities and increasing people's participation in the developmental process through vocational and non-formal training. Baby Balakrishnan has contributed in no small measure to improving women's literacy.

Holding of review meetings and follow-up meetings to review developmental projects in her area and to ensure timely implementation of government sponsored schemes, are also credited to her able role and efficient leadership.

Thanks to her dynamic leadership and vision, Madikai became the first panchayat in Kerala to publish a Citizens' Charter. Under her leadership, the Madikai Panchayat has made significant progress in the area of watershed development and in the making of a truly self-sufficient agricultural village where there is now surplus water both for irrigation and drinking purposes. She has been a catalyst for social transformation and community development in her panchayat.

This award is given to Baby Balakrishnan in recognition of her outstanding achievement as a panchayat leader.

Director
Institute of Social Sciences
New Delhi

Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award 2004

CITATION

Presented to
Ekta Jaiswal

Ekta Jaiswal, Sarpanch of Amlaha Gram Panchayat, Sehore district, Madhya Pradesh, has demonstrated that with dedication and sincerity of purpose, it is possible to accomplish any task against severe odds. During her tenure as Sarpanch, Amlaha Gram Panchayat has made considerable strides in various fields.

She has steered through a number of development projects, including construction of multipurpose community halls, community toilets, provision for potable and clean drinking water, concrete roads for improving connectivity and community development projects, specially for tribals. Under her dynamic leadership, Amlaha Gram Panchayat has achieved about 70 per cent female literacy. Besides, she has been instrumental in organising women's health camps and training of women in different skills and vocations.

Under the 'Swashakti Programme', several women's awareness camps have been organised. Her efforts towards water conservation and recharging of groundwater have been equally commendable. Rapid computerisation of all panchayat records and internet connectivity have added feathers to her cap. She was the first 'Hi Tech' Sarpanch of undivided Madhya Pradesh. Ekta Jaiswal organised legal aid and arbitration camps in order to bring justice to the doorsteps of the people as also to ensure quick disposal of local disputes and cases. Organisation of vocational training for unemployed youth has made her popular.

Her many achievements and inspiring leadership have also been recognised by the media and government/non-governmental agencies.

This award is given to Ekta Jaiswal in recognition of her outstanding leadership at the grassroots level.

Director
Institute of Social Sciences
New Delhi

Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award 2004

CITATION

Presented to
Nirmala Devi Sahu

Nirmala Devi Sahu, Sarpanch of Amleedih Gram Panchayat, Rajnandgaon district, Chhattisgarh, is among the few women who have been elected from an unreserved seat. She is credited with many commendable works in her panchayat and has emerged as an outstanding woman panchayat leader. She has been confronted with numerous politically motivated challenges to her leadership including violence and arson organised by groups in the area opposed to her. She was primarily targeted for being a woman but her enduring struggle against the gender and caste-biased society has ultimately established her as a shining beacon of leadership.

Dedicated to the cause of the poor and downtrodden, Nirmala is deeply committed to the idea that the fruits of development should reach the poor, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, women, the disabled and other weaker sections in her Panchayat. She has played a pivotal role in poverty alleviation by effectively harnessing various government sponsored schemes. Her special emphasis on education, specially for the girl child, has resulted in significant increase in the level of female enrollment in schools. With her sustained efforts, the Amleedih panchayat started forming self-help groups for women, in which the local women have been leased some mines in the area. Other important fields in which she has made sustained efforts include women's health and maternity benefits.

Maintenance of peace and social amity in the midst of conflicts and challenges to her authority, is another sphere in which she has made a mark. As Panchayat Sarpanch she has encouraged community mobilisation and effective action for conservation of groundwater and reforestation of hilly tracts.

She is also credited with devising innovative fiscal measures including tax on commercial properties, stone quarries, etc. to make her panchayat self-reliant.

This award is given in recognition of her outstanding achievement as a woman panchayat leader, who has brought about real transformation in the lives of the people she represents.

Director
Institute of Social Sciences
New Delhi

Conference on
**Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment:
The Journey Ahead**

INAUGURAL SESSION, 24 April 2004

Towards Justice and Participation

Dr. George Mathew, Director, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) welcomed the delegates and distinguished participants at the Tenth Anniversary Celebrations of Women's Political Empowerment. He reminded the gathering that it was eleven years back, on 24th April 1993, that the 73rd amendment of the Constitution became a law of the country. The most significant aspect of that amendment was the reservation for women for not less than one-third of seats in the panchayats and municipalities. Such affirmative action has not been taken anywhere in the world and it came about not merely due to directives from above. This historic step was made because of a growing recognition of women's struggles in India, particularly of their role in the freedom movement and in public life thereafter. The visionaries of that time had realized that an India, based on a just and participatory society, can not be built without the full participation of women. Since then, women have been demanding their share in governance and, as a result, this law came into place.

Reservations for women in local governance bodies was only the first step towards achieving a "just and participatory society" in this country. Changes are visible now. It has triggered a nationwide demand for the same type of reservation for women in the state assemblies and in Parliament. It may be recalled that the action of the Karnataka government giving 25 per cent of seats for women in panchayats in 1983 had created a role model and accelerated the process to achieve gender equity in political representation.

Since then, the ISS has been working behind the scenes as well as in the forefront of the movement towards decentralisation and strengthening of PRIs. In 1994, the Institute decided to celebrate the significance of the passing of the 73rd Amendment on 24 April annually. The first national convention was held in 1994 in the Parliament House Annexe, presided over by Chief Minister of Orissa and with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha present as Chief Guest.

The Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations (WPEDC) aims at creating solidarity among the elected women representatives from various parts of the country. It is also an occasion for experience sharing of the women representatives, their achievements, their struggles and their problems. The participants gathered here may not be able to talk to each other directly as India has so many languages, but there is a common language which is communicating, giving energy and strength.

Dr. Mathew reported that nearly 100 NGOs took the initiative to bring around 1500 women delegates to this programme. He also thanked the Development Alternatives, which is working in a hundred poorest districts of this country for sponsoring delegates from its study area.

Every year, the Institute writes to the state governments to send their delegates but the interest of the state bureaucracies can be measured by the fact that only a few have responded with very few delegates. So, the power is in the hands of the people and not in the hands of the governments. He informed the gathering that the 2000 women present would be presenting a charter of demands to the effect that - "we are elected and we need these powers", at the end of the programme and expressed his confidence that the women representatives would return to their respective panchayats with added strength, vision and determination.

Empowering the Poor through PRIs

K C. Malhotra, Chairperson, National Advisory Board, Poorest Area Civil Society Programme (PACS)

Prof. K.C. Malhotra in his presentation talked about the genesis and objectives of the PACS programme. He explained that for the last three years PACS is working in 100 of the poorest districts of the country with funding from DFID. The main objectives of the programme are:

- Empowerment of elected women representatives,
- Empowerment of Panchayati Raj institutions, and
- Policy and media advocacy.

Describing the current status of the programme, Prof Malhotra mentioned that, it is operational in six states Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Maharashtra. Working in close association with various NGOs, and voluntary organizations, PACS has so far covered 74 districts, 278 blocks, 10, 000 villages and 3 million people in these states. In the next four years PACS intends to reach 1,30,000 villages, 30,000 self- help groups, and 161 million people. The feedback received so far on the performance of PACS shows that the programme is encouraging. PACS initiatives has resulted in:

- the emergence of vibrant Community Development Organisations (CDOs) and women's organizations
- improvement in the functioning of panchayati raj institutions,
- Awareness of rights among the elected members of panchayati raj.

Prof. Malhotra concluded his presentation by pledging full support on behalf of the entire teams of PACS to the cause of women's empowerment.

The Social Dimensions of Patriarchy

Kapila Vatsyayan, Former Secretary fo the Government of India and Former President, Indian International Centre, New Delhi

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, expressed her immense happiness at meeting the elected panchayat women representatives who had gathered from various parts of the country. She said that these women were the representatives of a very deep and well-spread traditional worldview of India, which reveres the earth as 'Bhumi', as a Mother, whose power or 'shakti' is represented by the feminine.

Speaking about the glorious tradition which treated woman with respect by giving her the status of a Mother Goddess, she said that in our sacred literature and iconographic traditions women were depicted and worshipped as incarnations of the goddesses Usha, Lakshmi and Saraswati, and of Kali, who attains a ferocious form whenever there is injustice and destruction. With the passage of time that pure idea has disintegrated and slowly the society has become male-dominated. Today's reality is that women are suppressed and treated as inferior human beings. In today's society, women are subjected to many forms of extreme violence.

Discussing the active role taken by women in India's freedom struggle, she reminded the audience about Margaret Cousins of Ireland, who had worked for women's franchise in India and inspired a number of noted women freedom fighters like Sarojini Naidu and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya to be in the forefront of India's freedom movement. Although some of these women were elected to Parliament and also held many important positions in the government once India attained freedom, this did not translate into political empowerment of women in general. This resulted in an imbalance in the entire society leading to deterioration of social and family institutions. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution is an initiative designed to correct this imbalance and the first step towards empowering women politically. The 50:50 slogan raised in the convention is to treat men and women as inseparable and equal partners in the process of development. Talking about the difficulties faced by women to get their rights, she said that even though the 73rd Amendment had given political

rights to women, still women had to struggle a lot to get these powers on the ground. The stories of failure and struggles that she had read about in the Institute's publications were disturbing beyond words. Bringing about social balance in local civic societies is more difficult to achieve than getting political empowerment.

Because of the prevalent notion that women are mere objects of pleasure, their presence in power structures is merely tolerated. Even though the women are getting elected to local governance institutions, the control still lies elsewhere in the hands of male members of the society. Society does not respect the EWRs the way it respects the men in the same position. The genesis for this attitude lies in the education imparted at home particularly in the education of sons by their mothers.

What is the journey ahead? The journey that lies ahead is towards "an equalization on the basis of the optimum skills and distinctive qualities of each other and not on the basis of competitiveness and conflict, and in recognizing the complementarities of those distinctive qualities."

Dr. Vatsyayan felt that the complaints being voiced by the women representatives on issues like health, sanitation, water, etc., could not be redressed merely by political empowerment, by virtue of having women members in panchayats. Change has to come through a civil society that puts pressure on the governance system. Pointing out the changes required in the functioning of the administrative system in the country, she said progress would not come about until reforms are brought about through democratic and parliamentary procedures in the functioning of both local administrative systems and the relationships of state governments with the panchayats.

She drew attention to the second issue that had been raised, of literacy and illiteracy, and said that this too was a result of "our having accepted, by our own volition, the whole model of administration and governance in which we denied everything that the Indian tradition had had, and one of these was the validity and efficacy of the oral tradition." We had neglected the primacy of the spoken word in favour of the written word. "It is these women who hold within their hearts and in their voices and experience centuries-old traditions which they preserve in their folk songs, their festivals. None of our programmes take cognizance of this great resource which women have in this country." Nor do the modern social sciences. Researchers write about oral traditions as if they were cultural, artistic things, and nothing to do with life. Yet it is in the arts that the tensions and anxieties that are generated in society first find expression. And it is here that the resolutions must be sought.

Dr. Vatsyayan concluded by saluting the women representatives again, saying that she foresaw that they would be the harbingers of positive change in Indian society and polity.

Need to Change Bureaucratic Mind-sets

Indira Jaising, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India

Ms. Indira Jaising chaired the Inaugural Session. Emphasizing the importance of the issues raised by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, she reiterated the need for reform in the role and functioning of the administrative system in the country. She said the relations of the bureaucracy with the panchayats is an issue that has not been satisfactorily addressed as yet. On equity in civil society, she said that, men and women are equal citizens of the country and women, besides working towards political empowerment, should also fight for their rights as citizens. Democracy does not merely mean electing representatives to the parliament and state assemblies once in five years, but participating in governance and to developing the capacity to demand transparency and accountability from the various levels of government. Devolution of power to local governance institutions will become a reality only when changes are brought in to the functioning of the current administrative system. She urged the audiences to raise demands for that change from their respective state governments and for implementation of the 'Right to Information Act' in their states. She explained that Right to Information has become a mandatory for Panchayati Raj institutions in most states.

Reservations are not a Magic Wand

Shabana Azmi, social activist, actor and former Member of Parliament

Ms. Shabana Azmi, in her introductory remarks, mentioned that barring Scandinavian countries, in all other countries in the world women are in a minority in the government. In such a situation, the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution was an historic event in the Indian democracy. Discussing the factors that contribute towards success of social movements in general and women's struggles in particular, she exhorted the elected women representatives (EWRs) to fight for their rights and for procuring basic amenities for their respective panchayats, be they healthcare, water, sanitation, construction of roads or education, by forming support groups, and leading an organized struggle. She explained that organization increases the moral strength of the women working for the cause and it also helps in bringing about a change both within and outside Panchayati Raj institutions.

Ms. Azmi cautioned the audience that getting 33 per cent reservation in local governance institutions was not the end of the road, but a step towards building a society based on equal opportunities. Reservation of seats is not 'a *jadu ki chhari*,' a magic wand, which would solve all the problems faced by women. Women continue to face a lot of opposition and have to overcome many hurdles like gender discriminations, insensitive bureaucracy, etc. Talking about the gender discriminations prevalent in the country, she said that even today, girl babies are killed before they are born, and the girl child has to share the burden of managing the house along with her mother. Despite working so hard she is ill-treated, malnourished and deprived of her basic rights to education and health.

Speaking about bureaucratic institutions, she said that the bureaucracy tries to keep control and power in its hands, and creates hurdles by blocking the information to be given to panchayat members. To get the required information from bureaucrats, women have to be bold, they have to get rid of their fear and hesitation and demand their rights as elected representatives. Education is one of the tools to overcome fear. She advised the EWRs to form committees comprising women in their constituencies to look at the content and quality of education imparted in schools and the functioning of primary health centres in their respective panchayats. EWRs should guide the schools regarding the kind of education to be given to their children.

Refuting some of the criticisms raised against women, such as administrative failures or lack of performance, Ms. Azmi said that at present the EWRs have not attained the critical mass required to reform society. She hoped that the day women are fully empowered and attain that critical mass, they will change the very notion of power itself. At that time power would mean sharing of equal opportunities rather than of the weak being oppressed by the strong.

Chairperson's Remarks

Commenting on the significance of the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Indian Constitution, Ms. Indira Jaising said that these two amendments have changed the very nature of the federal structure of India and enabled pluralism in government by the introduction of three additional layers of rule reaching down to the remotest village. India's original constitution was drafted in the year 1947. The revolutionary transformation attempted by the 73rd and 74th Amendments could be seen as stand-alone constitution on their own. These two amendments have given powers to elected panchayat members that are similar to those enjoyed by a members of Parliament and state assemblies. In terms of the planning and execution of the development agenda, the 11th Schedule of the Constitution lists 29

subjects over which panchayats have been given powers to control and oversee. Under the 74th Amendment, municipalities in metropolitan areas are exercising these powers, with urban development, land use planning and a vast range of basic services coming within the functions of local bodies.

With respect to powers of taxation, she said the 73rd amendment, has given authority to panchayats to levy and collect taxes on several items and to spend those resources for the welfare of their respective panchayats. However, very few state governments have devolved these powers to panchayats. She advised the panchayat representatives to demand the devolution of these powers by submitting charters in their respective states.

In her conclusion she stated that the institutions of the future are the panchayats. It is not the MPs elected to Parliament, the MLAs elected to state assemblies, or NGOs; it is the people who are elected to the PRIs who are the future of the country. The journey ahead, for the first time in the history of India, is beginning from the bottom up rather than the other way round.

Vote of Thanks

Dr. Bidyut Mohanty thanked Prof. K.C. Malhotra for supporting the Celebrations and reassured him that the programme does reach women belonging to backward sections of the society because most of the delegates came from gram panchayat level and various micro-studies conducted in different parts of India show that the ward members do come from low income groups. As a deliberate policy the Institute tries to reach out to communities in remote backward areas. In this context, it was noteworthy to know that some delegates belonging to the Musahar community from Bihar were attending the convention.

She expressed her deep appreciation of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan for highlighting the social dimension of patriarchy in her inspiring speech and recalled the time when ISS first started this programme in 1995. Initially, women panchayat members would attend accompanied by their husbands, sons or other male relatives. But today they participate in this programme independently. This itself is a big achievement.

Dr. Mohanty thanked Ms. Shabana Azmi for pointing out that the 73rd amendment is not a magic wand to solve all the problems faced by women and that the EWRs must form strong networks to get things done, and Ms. Indira Jaising, for highlighting the provisions of the 73rd and 74th amendments and informing the gathering that panchayats do enjoy power and status at par with Parliament and state legislatures.

PLENARY SESSION

Women's Political Empowerment: A Global Perspective

Chairperson

Partha Nath Mukherji

S.K Dey Chair Professor, Institute of Social Sciences

The Fast Track to Gender Equality

Drude Dahlerup

Professor of Political Science, Stockholm University, Sweden

Dear sisters, I am especially interested in the question of reservation for women in politics. When I give lectures around the world or when I teach my students I always mention the example of the panchayats in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as something that is very very significant.

I think that something very important is happening around the world just now. Politics used to be a man's business and even today only 15 per cent of elected members in the Parliaments of the world are women.

Women's representation is lowest in the Arab region, only 6 per cent on an average. Then comes the Pacific region with 11 per cent, then Sub-Saharan Africa with 14 per cent, then Asia with 15 per cent, America with 18 and Europe is a little higher. The highest is in the countries where I come from, the Scandinavian countries. We have 40 per cent women in the national Parliament. So even if I am very proud to come from the Scandinavian countries where women have a very high representation, I will argue today that Scandinavian countries are no longer the models for the world because it took so long to achieve gender parity. It took eighty years from the time women got suffrage to reach the present figure of over 40 per cent in parliament.

I am very proud to tell you that today Sweden, where I come from, has 45 per cent women in parliament. This used to be the world record in women's representation. The Inter-Parliamentary Union makes the world rank order of countries in terms of women's representation in parliament. I am happy to announce that Sweden recently was beaten by Rwanda; 49 per cent of the members of Parliament in Rwanda are women. And how did it happen? It happened as a result of the new development in the world to

introduce reservations for women, demanding, for instance, 33 per cent women among the elected or quotas requiring a certain minimum number of women for nomination at the ballots. And this is a very important trend. In Scandinavia, quota provisions were never legally binding, but were passed on a voluntary basis, and only by parties at the centre or left. Today I see impatience among women all over the world, who now demands quotas for nomination or reservations in order to make the 'historical jumps' necessary to increase women's representation.

Let me give a few examples of such 'historical jumps': There is Uganda, and also Costa Rica. Costa Rica in Latin America introduced 40 per cent representation for women by law. And, in the recent elections there was a jump from 19 to 35 per cent women in the national Parliament overnight. Let me give another example, that of South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) introduced not by law but by party regulations a minimum of 30 per cent at the party's lists for the election, and with ANC being the dominant party, women representation in South African Parliament is 30 per cent. This is very high.

All in all, we have about 30 countries in the world, which have recently introduced quotas for nominations or reservations for the elected by constitutional amendments or by law. And we have about 50 countries where major ruling parties themselves have made regulations. This is a new trend.

These active equality measures represent what I call the 'fast-track' to women's empowerment. The trend in Scandinavian countries, I would conceptualize as the 'slow track' or 'gradual track'. The 'fast track' is the new trend. So, you are the 'fast track' and I am very happy for that. I also think that India together with Bangladesh and Pakistan is very important because you have this reservation at the local level, at panchayat level. This is an example of empowerment from below. Very few other countries have introduced this kind of reservation at the local level.

You have 33 per cent reservation, but I saw the flags with 50-50 per cent. And I think that may be this is the new claim in the world today. Women's organizations do not go for the 'critical mass' of women, say 33 per cent, but for 'gender balance' in politics, which means 50:50.

In fact, I would say that women are very modest. Because women have never demanded more than 50 per cent while men have had 100 per cent, 90 per cent, or 80 per cent. Women just demand an equal balance at 50 per cent. And if there is a 50 per cent reservation I want to point out that in that case not only women, but also men have a 50 per cent reservation!

If we look at the Parliament in India, I understand there is a big discussion about reservations. And it has not been accepted yet. That's why India is only number 85 on the world rank order with 8-9 per cent of women in Parliament. This is very distressing.

Let me remind the political parties in the Indian parliament that even if they do not make a law or constitutional change, they can, like the ANC in South Africa or the Socialist Democratic Party in Sweden, make their own party regulations. They do not have to wait for a law. They can just say that they want 50 per cent women to be nominated or elected from their parties. In the discussion about reservation some people will say that women are not sufficiently qualified, that we get non-qualified women in. I do not believe that is true. You are a very good example that this is not true. And I just want to pose a question about how qualified are the men in politics?

I think that there are some good men in politics and some not so-good ones also. And of course, there are some good women and there are not-so-good women. So this is not a good discussion. The main question is that of having women's experience represented in politics. Some of those people who argue against reservations would say that they call reservation a discrimination against men. I do not think that is a correct interpretation. Because the social conditions are not fair to women, reservations are not discrimination against men but compensation for unfair structures that work against women. I think that institutional discrimination should be met by institutional measures of equal opportunity.

People talk about globalization. I think it is very important to notice that what is happening now is that many decisions have been taken away from political institutions and transferred to the markets in the new economy. That implies that political institutions tend to lose power, At the same time politics is becoming more and more commercialized. We see politics sold as a commodity, which turns voters into consumers rather than citizens. I regret this development.

Previous discourses stated that first society has to be developed and later we can start working for equality. This is not only unjust but also unwise. Today, we look at this the opposite way, which means that to empower women may be best way to speed up development in the whole society.

Patriarchy a Global Phenomenon

Rita Bahuguna Joshi, President, All India Mahila Congress, New Delhi

Ms. Rita Bahuguna Joshi, former Mayor of Allahabad Municipal Corporation, expressing her happiness to see so many elected women panchayat members at one place, said that, conferences of this type provide a platform for women to share their experiences and give strength and encouragement to overcome the hurdles in their struggle for equality.

Talking about the practical difficulties in implementing the amendments on the ground, she mentioned that after ten years of passing the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, state governments are yet to include their provisions in their policies in true spirit. It is not an exaggeration to say that panchayats have been constituted only for implementation of schemes but not for overall development and progress.

Commenting on the performance of women panchayat members, she mentioned that although there are some failures, on the whole, wherever women are elected to panchayats, there is less corruption, more transparency and accountability. It is generally observed that compared to men, women panchayat members are relatively more sincere and have a better performance record.

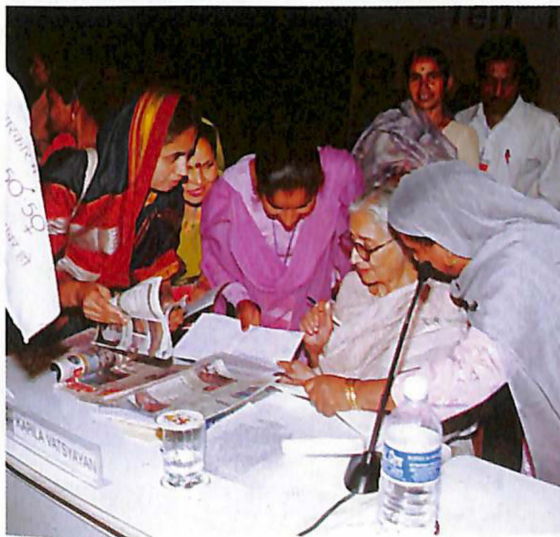
Emphasising the need for reservations for women in political power structures and presenting a global perspective on women's participation, she opined that in a male dominated society men don't want to give power to women. Citing the example of Japan, which is one of the most economically advanced countries in the world, she mentioned that in Japan women's representation is less than two per cent in their political power structure. Even in other developed countries like America, France and Britain, women had to struggle for decades, even centuries, to get voting rights. In the case of India, women got equal voting rights through constitutional provisions. However, it did not translate into sharing of power. She mentioned that in India, even today in administrative, law and judiciary services, women's representation is just about eight per cent. In a democratic set-up power comes through elections. Hence women have to take an active part in politics and work towards taking up decision making positions. When women constitute 50 per cent of the population they should seek at least 50 per cent reservation. In this context she lauded the efforts of late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, who was instrumental in getting 33 per cent reservations for women in local government institutions.

She concluded her speech by saying that generally men enter politics for power, but women join politics to serve society. Because we ourselves are deprived, we should work for the service of the wider society and to bring about change in society. Otherwise, we will weaken the women's movement.



At the Inaugural Session of the Conference: (left to right) Indira Jaising, Baby Balakrishnan, recipient of the 2004 Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award, George Mathew and K.C. Malhotra

Below (left) Delegates surround Kapila Vatsyayan for autographs, and Shabana Azmi addresses the gathering





Above: Poornima Advani and M.S. Gill felicitate the women PRI representatives

Below: Delegates raise flags demanding 50:50 representation in Parliament





(Left) Ganeshan Balachander speaking on Livelihoods; (to the right) Bina Agarwal and Ilina Sen

Middle:
N.H. Antia and
Alpana Sagar



Below:
Karuna Chanana
and Poonam Batra
listen to delegates



Women's Political Empowerment Day Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment: The Journey Ahead

23-25 April 2004

Siri Fort Auditorium, New Delhi

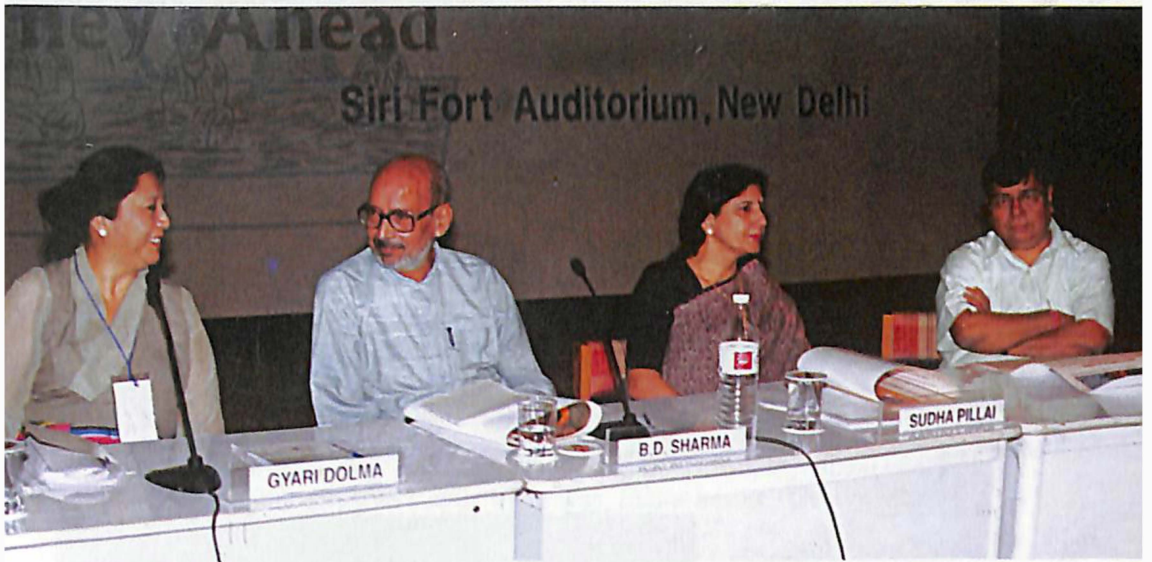


Above: (left to right) Revathi Narayana, Rita Sarin, Syeeda Hameed and Mamata Jaitly in a discussion on the NGO-PRI interface

Middle: PRI representatives share their experiences



Below:
Filmmakers
Anwar Jamal
and Sehjo Singh
introduce the film
Swaraaj



Above: Dolma Gyari,
B.D. Sharma, Sudha
Pillai and J.K. Banthia

Middle:
A.R. Nanda

Below:
Bidyut Mohanty,
Manu Kulkarni
and Gopal Iyer
lead an Open
Session





Clockwise from top: Vasudha Dhagamwar, Shalini Rajneesh, Bidyut Mohanty, and below, (l to r) Kumud Sharma, Ginny Srivastava, Amita Punj and delegates



New Delhi

Women's Political Empowerment Ten Years of Women's Political Empowerment The Journey Ahead

3-25 April 2004



Institute of Social Sciences
New Delhi



An ecstatic moment at the inauguration, with award-winner Nirmala Sahu (centre) at the dais with Kapila Vatsyayan, Indira Jaising, George Mathew and K.C. Malhotra

Middle: Rita Bahuguna Joshi addressing the conference; also seen, Partha Nath Mukherji and Drude Dahlerup

Below: Institute staff present skits on panchayat proceedings





Above: Dance troupe from Orissa performing. Below: The Bihu dance of Assam



PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Theme I

Panchayats, Livelihood and Environment

Chairperson

Bina Agarwal

Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi

PRI's and Natural Resource Management

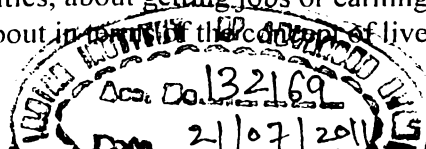
Ganesan Balachander

Representative, The Ford Foundation, New Delhi

Especially in the context of women's empowerment and the important role they play in natural resource management, it is logical to talk about livelihoods and the environment. So where shall I begin? This is the order of my presentation: I'll first talk a little bit about the context of Panchayat Raj institutions and the space that is being afforded by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and also the one-third reservation of seats for women in these bodies. But then, talking about the nexus between environment and livelihood, I want to describe the concept of livelihood and then take stock of a number of very interesting statistics about the human development indicators in our country, especially on women. And from there I think it is natural to look at the experience of Joint Forest Management (JFM) and what has happened over the past 20-30 years, and then come back to ask some serious questions about PRIs and their linkage with natural resource management.

The 73rd and 74th amendments have really created a new chapter in the history of deepening democratic decentralization in the country. They can also be seen as an attempt to bring people closer to the decision making process at the local level. And this is what is key. Ultimately we will come back to see where lies the solution. Ten years on we might say the glass is half full, or maybe a quarter full; we want to appreciate what it has achieved, but we also want to look at how much better it can be and how to narrow the gap between the promise and the reality.

When we're talking about livelihoods, we're not just talking about economic activities, about getting jobs or earning an income. What we're really talking about in terms of the concept of livelihood is that it includes



people, their capabilities or skills as well as the assets that they bring, whether these are their own, or something that they depend on, whether these are natural assets, physical assets, common assets, and human as well as social capital along with all the activities and skills that they have to generate a dignified means of living. This is the concept of livelihood that I am going to be using. And it's not just equating, for example, poverty with income poverty or livelihood with economic activity. One should also understand that the livelihood concept does not merely imply generating incomes. It also involves a range of strategies that may be income generating but also income saving. There are multiple strategies, multiple activities, and livelihood strategies are also dynamic. They shift with factors such as household structure, the lifecycle, and local resource availability. And increasingly, may I add, with globalization, there is a lot of transition. So how do people cope with changes in the economic environment?

Having said that, as part of the broad context in which we are talking about livelihoods and women's empowerment and conservation, there are some very stark realities within which we are operating. India has the dubious distinction of having the largest illiterate population in the world – more than 350 million non-literate people. There are also major disparities in various states within the country between the emphasis given to educating the female child and the male child. For example, in Kerala the difference is of only 3 per cent in terms of the enrolment of the female child and the male child in primary schools, whereas in Bihar it is 42 per cent. An interesting statistic that I came across – I can't say whether it is an absolutely credible number – is that a one year increase in primary schooling can translate into a 23 per cent increase in India's gross national output. Whatever that number is, it implies a significant increase in productivity just by investing in literacy and knowledge. By investing in human development we can have tremendous positive economic impact.

Another stark reality that strikes me, given my experience in the mountains and in some of the natural resource dependent areas, is that the work burden on the women is very disproportionate to what the men do. For example, women are the ones involved in breaking the sod, that is, breaking the ground before it can be planted, preparing the soil for ploughing, sowing the seeds, weeding the crops, pounding the paddy, taking care of the livestock. I remember reading Bina Agarwal's book *Cold Hearths and Barren Slopes* many years ago, about the burden of bringing back the fuelwood in order to cook the meal, and of course, of taking care of the children, and the livestock. The list goes on and on. And increasingly in the hills and mountains, where the opportunities for what you may call 'sustainable' or meaningful job opportunities for men are also decreasing.

the men are migrating to the plains in search of livelihoods. They're more mobile than the women and the work burden on women in the hills is obviously therefore increasing. So what does this all mean in the context of Panchayati Raj, in the context of encouraging a greater role for women in managing natural resources?

Before I get to Joint Forest Management (JFM), we should not forget that in areas which are rich in natural resources like forests, for example, you also have mineral resources. This is especially true of places like the tribal belt of the indigenous communities in central and eastern India. And even though PRIs have come in, with the PESA Act in the Scheduled Areas that are tribal dominated, these laws and institutions are also being manipulated and people are being displaced. So on the one hand there are the opportunities from globalization, but on the other, people are being dispossessed. They are being alienated from their resources, they are not being compensated, their lives are being shattered. So there is an increasing emphasis that needs to be put on governance at the local level. The challenge for PRIs is how to combat the negative impact of globalisation without being oblivious to the opportunities it offers.

I want to quote to you some several very interesting pieces of information from a study that the Ford Foundation funded and this was done by the Ecological and Economic Research Network, about Joint Forest Management, its spread and its impact. Many of you may know that JFM in India even though it started as an experiment in the 70s – 32 years ago, in West Bengal – it was really launched officially in 1990 under the National Forest Policy of 1988. So JFM officially isn't that much older than the new Panchayati Raj institutions. So let us see what has happened to JFM, again the promise and the reality. And again we need to ask some very hard questions as to how we can do better. For example, of the 27 states where it is now operating, 17 million hectares are under JFM, there are 84,000 plus JFM committees. But if you look at the gender composition in these committees, it's very interesting. Where it started, in West Bengal, the ratio of men to women is 98:2 – 98 per cent men's representation in JFM committees in West Bengal, where the whole thing started, to 2 per cent for women. However, in terms of the number of JFMC members to the total village population, it's a much better figure for West Bengal. We find that 40 to 45 per cent of the women are represented and 50 per cent of the men are represented. In terms of representation in important decision making bodies, women are still getting a very raw deal. The other numbers are also very interesting but I won't bore you with too many numbers at this time of the day. What are some of the other key findings? Besides low women membership, percentage of eligible adults who became members of joint

forest management committees is also very low. The conduct of JFM committees also leaves much to be desired. Again, if there are any forest department officials here, I don't think there are, but I will still quote this. Some people said, in terms of joint forest management in some places it is not joint, in some places there is no management and in some places there is no forest! So what do we do about all this? I don't think we are here to wring our hands and talk about what hasn't been done but about what can be done to improve matters.

In terms of participation of women and marginalized groups, in Andhra Pradesh it was reasonably good, but in all other states it was negligible. In terms of micro-plans there was very little involvement of local communities. But there has been significant improvement in terms of restoring forests and regenerating grasses. Again, women are very much dependent on these grasslands and on forests for non-timber forest produce. But what is the impact of JFM on species richness? As far as species richness goes, the impact of JFM plantation was negligible or even negative. Canopy cover, forest cover has increased, but it is not the native vegetation. So the overall performance of JFM is still very limited, haphazard, not very consistent across the states.

What is key now is, given the importance of Panchayati Raj institutions, and the importance, at least on paper, of JFM, is its linkage to rural development. It is necessary to strengthen the community's feeling of joint ownership. Of course, the role of donor agencies, role of NGOs to strengthen the capacities of these local communities, foster linkage to rural development activities through panchayats, etc., these are all very important. And finally, how do you enhance women's participation, especially when the reality is very low literacy levels and so on? Merely giving them a 33 per cent representation is not enough. There has got to be much much more investment in primary education, emphasis on banning child labour, on making education compulsory for certain age groups between, say, 6 and 12 or 13, on being much more flexible in terms of the hours that these children can work, ensuring that it's not only the access but the quality of education that also needs to improve. We could go on and on, but ultimately, when there is local governance, I think the answer can lie in the local areas. I think that's where the intelligence, the genius of the Indian, the women, over the ages, lies. India has seen tremendous increase in its share of knowledge in terms of its rich natural and cultural heritage. Where has all this come from? It is from the genius of the Indian mindset. Unless it is given an opportunity, we will continue to have the problems that we face, not just in the rural areas but in urban areas as well, in the slums, the waste management systems of our expanding cities. We need strong local

governance and capacity building is an important part of that. Ultimately the answer lies in giving local communities the right to manage their own lives, and their resources.

Economic Empowerment — a Long Struggle Ahead

Illina Sen

Director, Rupantar, Chhattisgarh

Political empowerment will be a success only when there is economic empowerment. Government policies are often conflicting and contradictory and generally tend to work against the empowerment of women, and other marginalized groups. On the one hand, government emphasizes political empowerment by providing 33 per cent reservation to women, and proportionate reservations for SC/ST people, and on the other hand there are policies, which deny women their right to livelihood by leasing out lands to private companies.

Employment and income generating opportunities for women are gradually shrinking due to globalisation and other economic development policies. For example, due to mechanization, many labour intensive activities have been reduced, as traditionally women participated in these activities. With the introduction of machines women have become the first victims of redundancy and their livelihood opportunities have also been reduced. Traditionally women have played an active role in agriculture. They have extensive knowledge about traditional crops, seeds and their preservation, etc. However, due to globalisation and the market economy, traditional crops are disappearing, while traditional knowledge is also getting destroyed. If this continues it may so happen that imported food items will soon be cheaper than the self-grown food. We have to be self-reliant in our food production. To be self-reliant, political empowerment, economic empowerment and sustainable development have to go hand-in hand. Only then will women be empowered in the real sense.

Even today many laws are male oriented. Girls don't have rights for a share in their parental property. Similarly, till today, forests are the property of the Union Government and the President of India has the supreme authority over the nation's forests. Although there are schemes like community forest management, joint forest management programme, etc., there are problems in proper implementation of these programmes. On paper panchayats are given power over these committees but in most cases, forest officials indulge in manipulating the formation and conduct of these committees. It is a tough and long struggle to get rights over forests, and their produce, and also on issues related to proper implementation of these schemes.

Theme II

Health and Women's Political Empowerment

Chairperson

A.R. Nanda

Executive Director, Population Foundation of India

Self-reliance in Health a Key to Overall Development

N.H. Antia, Director, Foundation for Research in Community Health (FRCH), Pune

Dr. N.H. Antia informed the audience that today health services have become more commercialized and doctors have become business-oriented. Explaining the real meaning of health, he defined health as well being of an individual at physical, mental and social levels. He lamented that people, especially rural people, mistake absence of disease as health. People go to doctors even for small ailments for which doctors prescribe expensive treatment. As a result, today rural health has become a major cause for rural poverty, second only to the dowry system.

Dr. Antia emphasized that health is a socio-economic problem which has to be managed by each and every individual for himself or herself. He believes that many diseases can be prevented by preventive hygiene, and that diseases like malaria, gastro-intestinal diseases and other common ailments can be cured by simple traditional methods. He advised people to adopt traditional and conventional methods for curing ailments wherever possible and to prevent the disease causing conditions. Explaining the initiatives taken by the Foundation for Research in Community Health (FRCH), he said that with proper training and education, village women will be able to manage most of the health related problems by themselves. In conclusion, he stated that self-reliance in health is very important for overall development of villages.

New Management Strategies to Improve Health Care

Uma Nambiar, CEO, E-Health Foundation and President, National Cancer Care Foundation, New Delhi

Dr. Uma Nambiar disclosed the fact that big corporate hospitals are keen to enter into rural areas as there is a huge market for health services in these areas. Explaining the need to modify this trend, she said that as big hospitals are interested mainly in their own viability, they are offering costly treatment to villagers besides increasing the gaps between the haves and have nots in terms of affordability of health care. If this process continues,

a majority of the rural people may not be in a position to afford any health care services at all since they will be further marginalized in the fringes of the society.

Dr. Nambiar mentioned that 80-90 per cent of diseases do not require big hospitals and expensive treatment. Most of them can be treated by primary health centres in villages, or at district hospitals or at hospitals in nearby cities. As government is cutting funds for rural health services there is an urgent need to improve the services in the existing infrastructure. She talked about introducing modern management strategies to improve the existing health services in rural areas and about some of initiatives taken up by E-Health Foundation, an NGO working in rural health sector which is piloting the health infrastructure changes by using Information Technology. These activities also help in generating employment for the local youth especially young women which is their major workforce.

E-Health is working towards providing medical consultancy under various health schemes drawn out by corporate hospitals through telephone and the Internet. She mentioned that health work can be better managed provided we take care of small details and train village women in those areas. In her opinion, induction of women in the work force is an ideal way to mobilize and implement utility of public health care systems and a key factor in improving health status of the community.

Political Empowerment in Panchayats as a Route to Health

Alpana Sagar, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, JNU

Dr. Alpana Sagar described the genesis of modern Panchayati Raj, attributed to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi who advocated Gram Swaraj. He saw the panchayat as an instrument that could ultimately create the basis for the governance of the country and thus presumably help lead to a healthy nation. In 1992 the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution awarding constitutional status to panchayats as institutions of self- government was introduced in and adopted by Parliament. Today for the first time in the political history of India there is a reservation of 33 per cent for women including reservation for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women.

However, something not commonly discussed is the fact that this is not the first time that measures have been taken to institute Panchayati Raj in our country, though this is the first time an Act has been enacted and reservation has been accepted as part of the Panchayati Raj. Panchayati Raj was introduced in Rajasthan in October 1959. In 1977 the Asoka Mehta Committee envisaged panchayats as a means of democratic self-management

at the local level. Similar committees were set up in 1985 – the G.V.K. Rao Committee; 1986 – the Lakshmi Lal Singhvi Committee; 1988 – the Sarkaria Committee. In 1989 and 1990 the 64th Amendment was introduced but the Act could not be enacted.

Health, as we all know, requires more than medical care. A safe water supply, sanitation, employment with adequate wages, and food, in addition to easily accessible, available and adequate medical services are all part of the requirement for good health. Presently, as per the 11th schedule the Panchayats are to look after:

- Health, Sanitation, Drinking Water
- Hospitals, Primary Health Centres, Dispensaries
- Family Welfare and Women and Child Development
- The panchayat is also supposed to have the power to write the Confidential Report about government medical personnel – their punctuality, efficiency and behavior.

While these are the functions as stated, their enactment is not always easy. The questions we would address in this paper are: once panchayats have been accepted as institutions of self-government can we assume that ‘Health For All’ is a possibility? How far would panchayats be able to ensure this? Is the reservation for women an important step in this direction? Is the present situation sufficiently enabling or would certain changes need to occur?

The panchayat can definitely play an important part in sanitation, construction of roads and infrastructure for health services but this would to a certain extent be limited by the finances available. Similarly, the so-called power of the panchayat over medical personnel is definitely limited. Knowledge of power relations between doctors and laypersons makes one expect that this power would actually extend only over the male and female health workers. However, the health workers union is also a deterrent to the authority available to the panchayat. A case study being carried out at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health (as part of a larger project assessing the impact of the Structural Adjustment Program on health services) on the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) in West Bengal has revealed that when the Panchayat actually complained about a health worker the union filed a case against the members of the panchayat! if a panchayat cannot even practice authority over a health worker, how could it be expected to control someone as powerful as a doctor? In addition, it would be a little difficult for non-medical personnel to decide on the quality of care being given by doctors. How can non-medical personnel decide whether the doctor is asking for excessive investigations or prescribing unnecessary expensive drugs? Also, can the doctors be held responsible for the present cutbacks in health that affect the quality of services?

An additional important issue that needs to be reiterated at this juncture is the fact that many of the secondary causes of death are not amenable to medical but socio-economic solutions; for example, deaths due to malnutrition and anemia, even though the proximate cause of death may be stated to be a medical cause such as a respiratory, gastro-intestinal or viral infection (Table 1).

Table 1
Selected Causes of Death for Children 1-4 years of age

| Selected Causes of Death for 1-4 years of age | Male | Female |
|--|-------|--------|
| Respiratory Infections | 23.2% | 21.1% |
| Gastrointestinal - Typhoid, Dysentery, Diarrhoea | 19.4% | 21.7% |
| Viral Infections | 9.0% | 12.2% |
| Anaemia | 8.6% | 10.0% |

Source: Survey of Causes of Death 1998 (Rural) India, 1998 Series 3, No. 31, Office of the Registrar General of India, Government of India, 2002.

The above data indicates that much of the basic cause of death is poverty. How much can the medical system do about treating poverty? What kind of powers do the PRIs have to deal with the problem of poverty? While many women and panchayat members especially in Andhra Pradesh have fought against liquor how will they fight against the problem of malnutrition? At best they can ensure that the food that comes to the ICDS is distributed to the children who come there. While this is an important function, more powers are needed if panchayats are to be made responsible for health. Can women fight against the fact that their wages are lower than that of their men folk? Can they decide the price of food grains? What can they do about the fact that while some of them starve, food grains rot in the FCI godowns?

In the context of Health Sector reforms, in the present time there have been cutbacks in the health sector. This is reflected in the insufficient infrastructure of health services in the country (Tables 2 and 3).

The presence of specialists is obviously not linked to health problems since pediatricians, gynecologists and physicians are not even 33 per cent of the required numbers though the a major burden of death is in children below 5 years of age – almost 16 per cent of total deaths – and amongst the rest fevers, and gastrointestinal problems are the commonest cause of mortality. It is important that the panchayats should have this kind of information in order to demand sufficient infrastructure and doctors for their areas.

Table 2
Health Services Infrastructure in India, 1999

| Health Services | Infrastructure Required | Existing |
|--|-------------------------|--------------|
| Primary Health Centres <i>1 per 20-30,000 pop</i> | 32711 | 22975 |
| Sub Centres <i>1 per 3-5,000 pop</i> | 196266 | 137271 |
| Community Health Centres <i>1 per 1 lakh pop</i> | 9813 | 2935 |
| Population 1999 | | 9813.2 Lakhs |

Source: *Health Information of India 1999*. Central Bureau of Health Intelligence, Directorate General of Health services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, 2002.

Table 3
Health Services Manpower in India, 1999

| Post | Required | In Place |
|----------------|-------------|----------|
| CHC | | |
| Pediatrician | 2935 | 453 |
| Physician | 2935 | 585 |
| Gynecologist | 2935 | 771 |
| Surgeon | 2935 | 809 |
| PHC | | |
| Doctor | 22975/29702 | 25506 |
| SC | | |
| Male MPW | 137271 | 73327 |
| ANM | 160246 | 134086 |
| CHC+PHC | | |
| Pharmacist | 25910 | 21077 |
| Lab Technician | 25910 | 12709 |

Source: *Health Information of India 1999*, GOI op. cit.

Interestingly, though the panchayat does not have much authority over the medical or paramedical personnel it is supposed to help the health personnel in functions such as Information, Education and Communication (IEC) for health, defaulter retrieval for DOTS, selecting *dais* (midwives) for training and registration of births and deaths. This actually makes them responsible to the health services instead of the other way round.

It is however important to keep in mind the fact that while they are not able to influence the medical service system with the powers vested in them, the panchayats have done some notable work in improving services

that are supportive of health. This includes construction of roads, supply of water, improving drainage and sanitation facilities, solid waste removal and fighting against alcoholism. However, they are limited by the fact that funds may be insufficient. While rich panchayats can collect more revenue from the villages than poor panchayats and get sufficient funds, still at best they administer only government programmes. The quality of leadership is also important. The power of the panchayat will depend on the power of the leader.

The question that we still need to answer is this: What can women panchayat members do at the local level? Some problems that can be tackled by them are – to help improve water supply and sanitation to decrease gastrointestinal diseases, help build medical centres, help create gender sensitization – but this can only occur with the help of male members. However, many women in the panchayats are still not able to get even their own rights. In such situations women will need to form groups to strengthen each other. Social structures are not easy to change but the only hope is that decentralization with a place in it for women is the thin edge of the wedge. Women's social status needs to be improved at larger social and structural levels and Panchayats can be a mechanism of bringing power and respect to women.

A point we still need to discuss is that even if women's status improves, how much can these women do for the health of their sisters? For this we would need to examine the common causes of ill health and death in the villages, especially among women, and locate the factors that cause these. Subsequently we would see how amenable these factors are to management at the panchayat level. Often the causes of health problems can be traced to under nutrition which is due to agricultural policies and also targeted PDS, ; poverty, the cause of which lies in employment patterns, poor wages and poor conditions of work, especially for women; poor sanitation, which is exacerbated due to cutbacks in social sector spending, and inadequate health services worsened by such cutbacks, high user fees, no regulation of private sector, and irrational drug therapy practiced by many doctors in both the public and private sectors.

We therefore also need to recognize the limitations of what panchayats or the women members can do by themselves. They cannot improve wages or improve access to food or improve quality of medical services. It is obvious that in the face of these larger structural issues to help improve health of people the panchayats have to help bring about changes at not only local but national levels. For this panchayats need at the very least access to information that can then be used to help in creating group pressure. They therefore need support from those in power such as influential people.

especially males in the village, as well as bureaucrats, politicians and doctors. For the women in the panchayats this means that they will need to be involved in all these activities to try to bring about changes.

It is obvious therefore that the functions of the panchayat are limited and the power of women members is even more limited. However many women pradhans or panchayat members are vocal and strong and if they stay in power can help improve some situations in the village and press for changes at the Zilla, State and Central levels. Only if this can be done can Gandhiji's dream of Gram Swaraj become a reality.

Theme III

Education and Women's Political Empowerment

Chairperson

Karuna Chanana

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

EWRs can Reform Schools and School Education

Karuna Chanana

Education is obtained not just through schools but also from society, family and through self-experiences in life. All these are important sources of education. The stand taken by the first Chief minister of Gujarat, late Shri Morarji Desai, against prohibition is an example of giving priority to certain values in life. The policy of the Central government is that the states get a matching grant equaling the revenue raised by the state governments. This is an incentive for the states to have a liberal policy for the sale of liquor and discourages prohibition. Yet Gujarat state enforced prohibition even though it entailed getting less funds from the centre. There is a very strong message in this policy for all of us which is that health and education of the children and families are priorities over alcoholism among men which is encouraged by such a state policy and which impacts adversely on women who are the custodians of the well-being of the family. Such education is very important for taking decisions in the interest of the society. Further, women's education is very essential for women's empowerment and social reforms. There are three steps in empowerment.

- The first, when we depend upon and look up to elders in the family or mentors or leaders to take decisions on our behalf.
- The second stage, when we become self-dependent and self-reliant and able to take decisions on our own.

- The third stage is when we understand the importance of interdependence among various individuals of the society and work together as a community.

The third stage is very important because, we do not want self-dependency just at the individual level but we are working towards self-dependency at the level of the entire society. Women's education has a major role to play in achieving this level of interdependency. It is the responsibility of educated and empowered women to reform schools and school education. Moreover, we have to pay attention to make mother tongue and regional languages the media of instruction at primary school levels. Teaching in the mother tongue helps to enhance a child's understanding and grasp of subject matter.

Under adult education schemes, women can be provided with legal literacy, health education, etc., along with formal education as it helps in overall development of the family and village. Again, it has been generally observed that the standard of teaching has come down over the years. Teachers in village schools engage themselves in activities other than teaching and hence neglect teaching. Elected women panchayats members have to take the responsibility of monitoring teacher attendance and performance.

PRIs can Ensure Qualitative Improvement in Education **Poonam Batra**

Professor, Maulana Azad Centre for Elementary and Social Education, Central Institute of Education, Delhi University

Three major steps adopted by the Indian Government under the decentralization process of education, were: setting up of District Education Boards under the National Policy of Education, 1986; according constitutional status to local government institutions through the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, thus giving powers to Panchayati Raj institutions in 1992 to address issues of education at local levels; and reconstituting the CABE (Central Board of Education) Committee in 1993 under which Education Boards were established at the block and village levels. Apart from these, different states have adopted different approaches to make access to schooling and universal education possible in all villages and rural areas, in an attempt to fulfill the constitutional obligation of providing Universal Elementary Education.

Access to schooling and the concept of universal education are both very closely related and are in fact inter-dependant. While access to schooling implies the physical availability of schools even to the hitherto un-reached, universal education implies the provision of quality education

that ensures learning amongst children. It is important to recognize that mere physical access to schooling without ensuring learning amongst children fails to reach the objective of universalisation of education. It is therefore argued that a focus on quality education is a necessary pre-requisite to the task of providing universal education.

Many research studies conducted on the issue of universal schooling support the argument that issues such as quality of education in the classroom, teacher recruitment and teacher training require urgent attention. It has also been generally observed that standards of learning and achievement are declining in many government schools. While this may be attributed to many reasons, the issue of qualified and trained teachers remains a primary concern. Apart from the acute shortage of teachers a key problem has been one of large-scale placement of poorly trained or untrained (para-teachers) teachers in schools. Declining standards within government schools have led to a situation where a large number of children have moved from government schools to private schools. It is also a matter of great concern that children who cannot afford the fees of private schools stay on in government schools. These are largely from marginalized sections of society, including dalits and girl children.

There is a prevalent notion that training is not necessary for teaching at primary levels of schooling. As a result, many states as also the central government have grossly neglected pre-service training of teachers in their efforts towards school reform. Madhya Pradesh for example, has not made any fresh recruitment of trained elementary school teachers in two decades. Most of its primary school teachers are para-teachers who have neither the requisite qualification nor the training required as per the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE, formed by an act of Parliament) norms.

Large-scale government programmes of school reform through short-term in-service packages of teacher training have not been able to engage teachers with the real issues of classroom transaction. New ways of thinking about children have been imposed upon teachers without adequate time and fora for self-reflection. The teacher has once again been denied the opportunity to play an active and meaningful role in the reform process. In this context the PRIs have the mandate of assuming the responsibility of ensuring accountability and transparency in the manner in which the state education system functions and delivers. PRIs can play a significant role in closely monitoring schools and teaching-learning activities and suggesting reformative action in keeping with the demands and requirements of the community.

The PRIs were conceptualized to be autonomous institutions with an independent and exclusive set of functions. They were not meant to become

a mere agency of the state governments. It is important that as members of the Panchayat we assert the roles envisaged for us. The PRIs provide a tremendous opportunity and are in a major way a liberating force for women, dalits and many other exploited sections of society. It is heartening to see such large numbers of women panchayat members here, who have taken upon themselves the task of increasing people's participation in issues of development and education. Let me share with you this copy of the book titled 'Panchayat' published by Ekalavya, an NGO based in Madhya Pradesh, which provides very useful information on how the panchayat functions and how as panchayat members we can make our efforts more constructive and result oriented at the local level.

Theme IV

Law and Women's Political Empowerment

Chairperson

S V Sharan

Senior Fellow, ISS

Empowerment is a Process that Comes from Within
Vasudha Dhagamwar

Founder President, Multiple Action Research Group (MARG)

Law provides protection to the society. As long as the law and order situation is under control nobody realizes the importance of law. People talk about law only when the situation goes out of control. Law is very essential for proper functioning of the society. Although law by itself may not bring any change in the society, it definitely provides power to people working towards that change.

By making reservations for women in local government institutions alone, women will not be empowered. Empowerment is a process which comes from within the individual. Empowerment happens when women start believing in themselves and develop self-confidence. Confidence comes when women possess knowledge and awareness. In this context, having knowledge about different laws not only about Panchayati Raj institutions but also about property laws, marriage laws, labour laws, rights to common property resources, etc., and knowledge about various schemes and programmes initiated by government is very essential for women's empowerment. Elected women representatives of panchayats often feel that training will help them become empowered. However it is really the growth of self-confidence that enables us to make our own decisions. When we

develop that level of confidence in ourselves, the law becomes an instrument that helps us to exercise our powers. Many examples come to mind, such as that of Gulbasia Bai Gond, a tribal woman who has been twice a sarpanch, the first time through the reservations and the second time by contesting a general seat.

Elected women representatives do not show interest in attending the proceedings of gram panchayat and gram sabha. Yet the gram sabha has been given supervisory powers over gram panchayat, and it can raise questions about the way the gram panchayat disburse its functions. The process of women's empowerment starts from the gram sabha. Once women start taking active part in gram panchayats and gram sabhas, they will be in a position to demand their citizenship rights.

S. K. Sharma

Trustee, People First

In Hindu philosophy and religion women are given equal powers and scriptures describe women as 'Ardhangini', meaning the better half. That being the status given to women in India, it is a pity that women today are struggling for their basic rights. One of the factors responsible for this situation is the way the laws were made immediately after Independence.

India got political freedom from the colonial rulers. However, the people of India could not get real freedom. Politicians, while making the laws of independent India, borrowed most of the ideas regarding legal, judicial and constitutional procedures from the British, neglecting the idea of Gram Swaraj, advocated by Gandhi.

According to the concept of Gram Swaraj, gram sabha has full rights over, natural resources like forests, and water, and local revenue. It has powers to appoint and supervise the functioning of teachers, doctors and even local administrators. Under the supervision of gram sabha, gram panchayat has to give a portion of its revenue to the state government. It can spend the rest of the revenue on development of the village. However this could not be realized, and instead, centralized rule had come into place.

Due to the initiatives of late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Panchayati Raj system was brought into focus. But still there was not much change in the power structure. We have to work towards establishing Gram Swaraj with the help of law. People should demand that the State governments provide copies of panchayat and related laws in each and every panchayat office.

Theme V

Electoral Process and Political Empowerment

Chairperson

Kumud Sharma

Centre for Womens Development Studies, New Delhi

Chairperson's Remarks

In her introductory remarks, **Dr. Kumud Sharma** said that the first issue that needs to be discussed is that although the Amendment Act says 'not less than one-third' of the seats to be reserved for women, none of the states thought fit to reserve more than 33 per cent of the seats.

Secondly, she felt women need to have faith in their own capacities and abilities. In the last ten years there have been many instances of where elected women have shown that they have the capacity to get things done.

The third issue was that of political affiliations. If you are a non-political party candidate at village level and the block and district level contestants fight elections on a party basis, does this create a problem for those who are contesting on a non-party basis at the village panchayat level?

International & Constitutional Obligations to Eliminate Gender Discrimination

Amita Punj

Partners for Law in Development, New Delhi

Generally speaking, the idea of power connotes the ability to change one's own status as well as that of others. Participation in public policy making through membership of elected bodies is thus seen as a step towards empowerment. The participation of women in the decision making process is absolutely essential in order to ensure that policy making takes into account women's perspectives and experiences and is thus gender just. Exclusion of women from the process more often than not results in policies and schemes, which are at best indifferent to women's realities and at worst contribute towards their further marginalisation. Inclusion of women in political institutions furthers inclusion of women's voices in decision-making. However, there is a chasm between rhetoric and reality emanating from circumstances that severely restrict the exercise this power on account of a number of factors.

Factors like socio-economic barriers, cultural stereotypes, limited access to information about political process, party politics, voting procedures, financial constraints etc., thwart participation of women in public and political life. Taking into consideration these factors, the Convention on

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (hereinafter referred to as CEDAW) imposes an obligation on the States Parties to identify and overcome barriers to women's participation, not just by enacting legislation but also by addressing social and cultural attitudes and encouraging women to be active in public life. It also calls for the adoption of temporary special measures to encourage equal participation of men and women in public life.¹ Temporary special measures include measures like recruiting, financially assisting and training women candidates, amending electoral procedures, developing campaigns directed at equal participation, setting numerical goals and quotas, etc.² Having ratified CEDAW in 1993, India is under an obligation to eliminate discrimination and secure equal participation of women in, inter alia, political life.

Even the Constitution of India, enshrines the principle of substantive equality. It enables the government to make 'special provisions for women'³ in order to ensure that there is no discrimination against them. In keeping with this spirit of equality, the Constitution through its 73rd amendment provides for reservation of 33 per cent seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions. This amendment was not only a step towards decentralisation of democracy but also one, which is aimed at empowering women. There is no doubt that it seeks to create enabling conditions for securing greater participation of women in politics. As mentioned earlier, despite quotas a number of other barriers restrict participation of women in public life. Caste hierarchies, economic relations, gender stereotypes are some of the major obstacles in this context. There have been instances of husband's of panchayat members participating in the proceedings, the women members themselves acting just as rubber-stamps. More explicit suppression of women have been physical assaults to restrict them from performing their functions, their removal on the pretext of certain disqualification provisions, etc.⁴ Instances of backlash of upper castes against lower caste women panchayat members have been many. All this brings forth the fact that providing quotas to women at panchayat level to secure their political participation, though essential, is not sufficient to secure real empowerment of women. Empowerment remains a distant dream where the actual enjoyment and exercise of one's rights is nullified or restricted by the prevailing circumstances. Thus the process of empowerment requires a holistic approach. The quotas for women in panchayats have to be supplemented with proactive steps towards elimination of discrimination based on caste, gender stereotypes as well as steps towards building capabilities of women in terms of information about their rights and duties as panchayat members, support through women's groups, etc.

Women's groups can play a major role in this direction by organising women, and by offering support at the time of election so that women are not deterred by the sheer modus operandi of elections and electoral politics. Furthermore, even after the elections they can carry on capacity building programmes to enable women to understand and exercise their rights and their authority as panchayat members, to put forth their opinions and work towards upliftment of all. It is this enhancement of their capabilities both in terms of internal capability, i.e., through dissemination of information and training about political processes and external capability⁵, i.e., creation of conducive atmosphere through organisation of women's groups which provide support to women contestants during elections and then to women panchayat members, that the process of empowerment, initiated through the 73rd amendment will be taken to its logical goal.

Making Informed Choices in Elections

Ginny Shrivastava

Coordinating Director, ASTHA, Jaipur

There are two categories of people involved in the electoral process,

- a) The Candidates — those who are contesting the elections, and
- b) The Voters — those who are not contesting the elections but electing the candidates for panchayats by casting their vote.

In our male dominated society, men may try to restrict women to contest only from the constituencies reserved for women and many object to women contesting from general/unreserved constituencies. However this is against the constitutional amendment — women can even contest from unreserved/general constituencies if they want to.

While contesting for panchayat posts, interested candidates have to keep certain points in mind, such as,

- They should ensure that their names are in the voters' list.
- Contesting women should be very clear about the issues they want to work on, if they get elected. They should meet all the villagers and inform them about their election agenda.

In our democracy citizens bring into political power those persons whom they vote for. The voter therefore must be active and aware, and both men and women must make informed choices and vote for the person they think will make the best choices for all of the citizens. Voters, responsible for electing the candidates, also have to keep certain points in mind.

- They have to ensure that their names are there in the voters' list.
- Voters have to be self-controlled and independent; they should not get influenced by factors like caste or community loyalty, bribery,

etc. Women must decide for themselves who to vote for, and not just vote for the candidate they are “told to vote for” by their husbands.

- Village people have to decide upon the issues that need immediate attention for the development of the village. They should elect only those candidates who are committed, sincere and willing to work for the development of the village.
- Villagers should form committees and support groups and listen carefully to the election agenda of all contesting candidates. Sometimes, the village voters can get the candidate to sign a pledge, like “If I am elected, I will make sure a new school room is built”. If the village committee takes along such a statement, gets the candidate to sign it, and if he or she is elected, then later, the village can make the elected representative do what he/she had agreed, *in writing*, to do if elected.

Fortunately the intervention of political parties is negligible at panchayat level. Hence villagers can elect candidates based on the qualifications and capabilities without any fear and influence of political parties.

In the state and general elections, the voter, aside from seeing that her or his name is on the voter’s list, they must have some knowledge of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). They should have hands-on experience of casting votes using such machines. To avoid rigging and any such malpractices during elections, voters should ensure that the EVMs are in proper working condition prior to casting their vote. Lastly, they should not take anyone’s help in the polling booth while casting their vote — sometimes the ‘helper’ shows the voter where to put their finger, or pushes one of the buttons saying, “this is how it’s done”— but then, the ‘helper’ has in fact voted! Get information about the voting machine before entering the polling booth. Both voters and candidates must be aware, to perform their democratic responsibilities well.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. General Recommendation 23 clause 15.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ Article 15 (3), Constitution of India.
- ⁴ Mayaram, S. (2002) “New Modes of Violence: The Backlash Against Women in the Panchayat System,” in Kapadia, K. (ed.) *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*, Kali for Women
- ⁵ See Nussbaum, M. (2000) *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Theme VI

Role of NGOs in Women's Political Empowerment

Chairperson

Rita Sarin

Country Director, The Hunger Project

NGOs/Women's Organisations as Catalysts in Building Panchayat Capabilities

Rita Sarin

Due to the 73rd and 74th Amendments, 10,00,000 women have got a chance to enter into politics. With women coming into politics, development has been given a new direction. During the last three years, under the aegis of The Hunger Project, 15,000 women elected representatives of panchayats were given training. These training programmes provided an opportunity to understand the development issues that interest women. Women work for basic and fundamental issues like health, water, sanitation, education and food security, all vital issues for the development of any constituency.

The Hunger Project only works through rural women panchayat members and leaders. Many other NGOs have taken up the cause of women panchayat representatives and supported leadership development programmes in PRIs. Civil society organizations in turn need to know what role these women representatives would assign to NGOs.

Syeda Hameed

Social Activist and Founder of Muslim Women's Forum⁶

Practices such as *talaq* and polygamy give the impression that Muslim women got a raw deal in marriage and divorce laws prevalent in the Islamic religion. Today Islam is considered as anti-women. However, the original Islam formulated around 1400 years ago has the highest regard for women. The Quran mentions that women have property rights and should be given a share in the parental property. It is against the tradition of taking dowry. However, over the centuries the patriarchal system slowly denied Muslim women their rights. The Muslim Women's Forum is committed to improving the situation of Muslim women in the country, through initiatives such as:

- Creating awareness among Muslim women panchayat members about their rights, and providing support to the elected women members.

⁶ Ms. Syeda Hameed, former member of the National Commission for Women, is the author of the book titled "*Be-awaazon ki Awauz*", on the problems experienced by Muslim women.

- Developing a dialogue with conservative persons and other members of the society, to change their attitude towards women's role in development and the leadership qualities of women
- Creating awareness on problems of Muslim women at various levels of decision making.

Mamata Jaitley

Women's Documentation and Resource Centre, Jaipur⁷

During the struggle for independence women came out of their homes and took an active part in bringing freedom to our country. However, as soon as India got independence, the same women stayed back in their homes and men took all major positions in politics and government. As a result women's status in society has slowly deteriorated.

The political culture has also deteriorated. Fundamentalists today are trying to divide women based on family relationships, religion and caste. But women should come together and work for the upliftment of themselves and for the uplift of people belonging to lower and backward castes. Today there is a growing tendency to convert our nation into a Hindu nation, which will benefit the upper castes, the rich and urban people.

NGOs have a major role to play in creating awareness among people to demand the policy makers to make people friendly policies. NGOs can help panchayat members by providing information about various government schemes, and on their rights and information on various development issues. NGOs can also demand for transparency and accountability in government spending. They can act as a liaison between government and panchayat members.

Through publishing news and articles about panchayats and its members, NGOs can create awareness in the wider society and among urban people about PRIs. They can act as the voice of panchayats.

Incidents like the *sati* (self-immolation of a widow) of Roop Kanwar and Sathin Bhanwari Devi's gang rape got wider attention through out the country mainly because of the efforts taken by NGOs in Rajasthan. As a result of the awareness created by the NGOs as well as the media, laws against sati have been strengthened. Though the Supreme Court has given a judgment against Bhanwari Devi, still it was instrumental in making a law on sexual violence against women. The *Ujala Chhari*, a women's newspaper published in Rajasthan, has been instrumental in highlighting problems of women including those in PRIs.

⁷ Ms. Mamata Jaitley is a recipient of the Sarojini Naidu Award instituted by The Hunger Project for mediapersons who highlight issues concerning women in local governance.

The Role of Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka

*Revathi Narayanan, National Project Co-ordinator, CHARCA (Joint United Nations Project on Women's Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS)*⁸

The Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme was launched in Karnataka in 1989, when Karnataka government had created 25 per cent reservation for women in panchayats, much before the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution. The main strategy of the MS programme was the formation and strengthening of women's collectives or *sanghas*. The sanghas were forums where women met regularly, discussed their problems and planned collective action for redressal. These problems ranged from violence against women and alcoholism in families to poor access to resources like education, health and livelihoods. Sangha women were encouraged to contest the gram panchayat elections. Those who became panchayats members were able to place issues of concern to women on the panchayat agenda. The training provided by Mahila Samakhya included not only functional issues like rules and regulations and the various government schemes but also issues like gender discrimination and legal literacy.

Sangha women provided support to the elected women representatives (EWRs) and helped ensure that women's viewpoints were heard at the gram sabhas. Earlier women wouldn't attend the gram sabha meetings. The sangha's also demanded the setting up of Nari Adalats or Women's Courts.

Following the Mahila Samakhya training programmes, EWRs began to insist on the setting up of the Panchayat Standing Committee on Social Justice. These committees are mandated in the Panchayat Raj Act but had hardly ever been set up before. The Standing Committees began to take up cases of violence against women such as harassment over dowry and property.

Since most sangha women belong to the Dalit community, they were not able to contest from general seats. Here they adopted the interesting strategy of waiting until the election was over and then persuading the EWRs, regardless of caste and economic status, to join the women's sangha.

Mahila Samakhya also supports the formation of federations of EWRs across the nine Mahila Samakhya districts. The Federation in Karnataka is now establishing linkages with similar federations in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. These federations also serve as a forum where former members share their learning and experiences with newly elected women.

The Mahila Samakhya approach has demonstrated that women's reservation can be meaningful only if women's concerns, viewed through a gender perspective, are placed on the governance agenda.

⁸ Dr. Revathi Narayanan was formerly Director of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka. (the Ministry of Human Resource Development's programme for empowerment of poor rural women).

PLENARY SESSION III

25 April 2004

Ten Year's of Women's Political Empowerment: The Journey Ahead

Chairperson

B.D. Sharma

President, Bharat Jan Andolan

Towards Self-rule in Tribal Areas

B. D. Sharma

Today panchayats are bound by rules, regulations and law. They have no freedom to prioritize issues based on the real situation of their respective villages. To cite an example, in Sarguja panchayat, Madhya Pradesh, there was a proposal to construct slides for children in the village. However, villagers felt that children may jump over the slides and may tear their clothes or even injure themselves, so they decided against constructing the slides. But as it was the decision of the state government, overriding the decision of the panchayat, the contractors went ahead and started constructing slides. Villagers protested and tried to halt the construction work. For the last two years villagers of Sarguja are facing legal charges for obstructing and posing problems to the government work.

The objective of Panchayati Raj system is to entrust self-rule to panchayats. But today panchayats are seen as implementing agencies for various government schemes. This is a major drawback of the present day system. Panchayati Raj Acts in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, have given all powers to gram sabha and gram panchayat on all matters related to villages. And the panchayats in Adivasi and tribal areas in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh are specially empowered, as was the basic intention of Article 40, to conduct all the affairs of panchayat according to their traditions and customs. There is also an important provision in the PR Acts of MP, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand stating that a gram sabha quorum will not be complete unless there is one-third representation of women in the meeting. In fact, you can have a gram sabha in which there are no men! Women can use this provision to set the agenda of any gram sabha meeting.

Overcoming Social Disabilities and Constraints

Sudha Pillai

Secretary, Department of Finance, Government of Kerala

Very often women tend to move about in groups, even in panchayats, because they feel secure or empowered when they are in groups. This is understandable as until the 73rd Amendment there was hardly any space for women in the political field. Ten years have passed since the 73rd constitutional amendment was made. It is the time for women to feel empowered from within as individuals. Through the 73rd amendment they got political empowerment, now they have to get administrative efficiency and empowerment for administering the panchayats. There are a lot of self-help groups and other NGOs helping women in their administrative tasks. However, the majority of the women have yet to gain administrative efficiency or the ability to articulate their concerns and get a firm foundation for their political empowerment.

In some communities women often experience social and cultural constraints that limit their functioning. In a study carried out on women panchayat representatives in Northern Kerala, the women highlighted certain marriage rituals, and rituals observed at the time of attaining puberty, as well as the insignificant role given to women during religious festivals, etc., as some of the social disabilities that are responsible for low confidence in women about their capabilities. Even common proverbs and idioms often depict the low status of women in the society. All these factors work at subconscious levels of the society, putting obstacles in the path of women's empowerment.

Other studies on women panchayat representatives in Kerala reveal that women face a lot of problems when elected to the panchayats. It has been generally observed that in panchayats where a woman is the president of the panchayat, the vice president will always be a man and he will be the chairman of the standing finance committee with all powers over financial matters. However if a man is the president of the panchayat, there is no instance of women being elected as a vice president of the panchayat with powers bestowed on her over financial matters. This effectively disempowers women panchayat presidents.

Similarly, the panchayat meetings have a predetermined agenda. Often it has been observed that male members of the panchayat, discuss over the issues in informal gatherings at places like liquor shops or other such places, where women generally don't go and they take decisions prior to the meeting date. As a result scheduled meetings will be very brief and get concluded very quickly. Women members are not given any chance to discuss the issues at length.

Studies point out that the election of a panchayat president is an indirect process. That is, the panchayat president gets elected by the members of the panchayat, instead of through direct voting of all the villagers. The ideal condition will be getting elected through direct voting as this ensures that the president will be accountable and responsible to the entire village instead of limiting himself/herself to one ward. The Karnataka model is a better model, and it should be followed.

On the positive side, there is a strong feeling in Kerala, that women panchayat members are more compassionate, and sincere. Women don't politicize issues and manipulate them for self-benefits.

By gaining administrative efficiency they will be able to perform their panchayat duties much more confidently.

An Opportunity that Should Not be Wasted

Dolma Gyari

Vice-Chairperson, Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies

In India through 33 per cent reservation in local governance institutions women got a very significant political right. Upon getting this right it is the responsibility of women to utilise it for the development of women and for the development of the society. Women in India are very fortunate as the Constitution has given this right to them.

Often women are criticized for their lack of knowledge. But nobody is born with knowledge. Knowledge comes through education and experience. So women have to educate not only themselves but also their children, so that the future generations of women need not suffer due to lack of education.

Women have a forum to express themselves due to this reservation. Do not waste this opportunity. Don't give a chance to anybody to say that women could not do any thing even after getting the reservation.

Unity is the strength of women. Take back the spirit of unity with you to your respective villages. As elected members of panchayats, try to know thoroughly your duties, limitations and responsibilities. You have to make the process easy for future generations of women. You have achieved a lot in the past ten years and you have a lot to achieve in future.

Census Data Reflect Serious Gender Bias in India

Jayant K. Banthia

Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India

The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India is the organization responsible for conducting the population census of the

country. Recently we could complete the census for 2001 successfully with the help and support of all panchayats in the country. Another important duty of our organisation is registration of births and deaths in the country.

The census data for 2001 indicate the status of women in the country. The population of India is now about 109 crores. The number of women is, however, less than 50 crores. There are only 933 women for 1000 men in India, leaving apart Kerala which reports 1033 women for every 1000 men. In all other states the ratio of women to men is less than one. Compared to the western countries, where there are 1050 women per 1000 men, India has 66 women less per 1000 men. These figures are a sure sign of discrimination and a good indication of women's health status.

As far as the girl child ratio in age category 0-6 years is concerned, the all India ratio stands at 927 girls for every 1000 boys, which is very low. It should have been equal or at least around 980 to 990 girls per 1000 boys. The sex ratios of the 0-6 age group were 962 in 1981 and 945 in 1991. This decline can be attributed to the practice of female foeticide and female infanticide. The situation is most serious in the prosperous states like Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana and Tamil Nadu.

District level census data of 2001 and 1991 indicate that in all districts in Punjab, Haryana, Northern Madhya Pradesh (including Gwalior, Bhind, and Morena districts), Mehsana district and areas surrounding Ahmedabad in Gujarat, Jalgaon to Kolhapur belt in Maharashtra, western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Rajasthan districts, the situation is very critical with evidence of high female foeticide and infanticide. Likewise, Salem district in Tamil Nadu has a high rate of female foeticide and infanticide. A disproportionate number of girl children die within one year of birth in all these districts.

Gender bias is also very pronounced in some states. That is one of the main reasons for not registering the birth and death of a girl child. In 1989 the United Nations passed a resolution stating that registering birth is a fundamental right of every child. There are about 72,000 births per day in India, but *less than 55 per cent of births and 47 per cent of deaths get registered*. This figure includes both males and females. As far as the female birth and death registration is concerned, *less than 50 per cent births and less than 30 per cent deaths get registered*.

However, registration of births and deaths vary greatly among various Indian states. The birth/death registration is more—around 90 per cent—in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, West Bengal, Goa, Pondicherry, Andaman & Nicobar, and Lakshadweep Islands.

Birth/death registration figures stand at around 40-50 per cent in states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Assam. The situation is very bad in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttaranchal,

with registration being less than 30 per cent here. This is inspite of the fact that a birth certificate is a very important document to prove the existence of an individual. It is essential for school admissions, in property rights, and even for contesting in elections, etc. Male deaths are usually registered because of property inheritance requirements. Since most women do not own landed property, no one bothers to register a woman's death when it occurs. Neither registered at birth, nor at death, women become 'invisible.' They do not enter the official records. Should they need a birth certificate in later life they have to make many trips to block authorities and pay for costly affidavits to prove that they exist.

In rural areas it is the ANMs duty to register all births in a village. Even in states like Bihar and Jharkhand where 80 per cent of deliveries take place at home, provision has been made to get these births registered subsequently.

Recently, the Union government has given gram panchayats the power to register births and deaths in their localities. Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, West Bengal, and Bihar have already implemented this provision in their respective state policies. With this provision villagers can register the births and death in their locality itself. Panchayats thus have a major role to play in encouraging people to register the births and deaths in their families.

The Government of India is going to issue multipurpose identity cards to every citizen of the country. This 'I-card' will be helpful in various administrative tasks.

I request you to create awareness about birth/death registration in your panchayats and encourage people to register the births/deaths, especially of girl children.

**Sex Ratios of Total Population and
0-6 Age Group in Indian States**

| States | Sex Ratios 1991 | | Sex Ratios 2001 | |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | Total Pop. | 0-6 | Total Pop. | 0-6 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 972 | 975 | 978 | 961 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 859 | 982 | 893 | 964 |
| Assam | 923 | 975 | 935 | 965 |
| Bihar | 907 | 953 | 919 | 942 |
| Chhattisgarh | 985 | 984 | 989 | 975 |
| Goa | 967 | 964 | 961 | 938 |
| Gujarat | 934 | 928 | 920 | 883 |
| Haryana | 865 | 879 | 861 | 819 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 976 | 951 | 968 | 896 |
| Jammu and Kashmir | -- | -- | 892 | 941 |
| Jharkhand | 922 | 979 | 941 | 965 |
| Karnataka | 960 | 960 | 965 | 946 |
| Kerala | 1036 | 958 | 1058 | 960 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 912 | 941 | 919 | 932 |
| Maharashtra | 934 | 946 | 922 | 913 |
| Manipur | 958 | 974 | 978 | 957 |
| Meghalaya | 955 | 986 | 972 | 973 |
| Mizoram | 921 | 969 | 935 | 964 |
| Nagaland | 886 | 993 | 900 | 964 |
| Orissa | 971 | 967 | 972 | 953 |
| Punjab | 882 | 875 | 876 | 798 |
| Rajasthan | 910 | 916 | 921 | 909 |
| Sikkim | 878 | 965 | 875 | 963 |
| Tamil Nadu | 974 | 948 | 987 | 942 |
| Tripura | 945 | 967 | 948 | 966 |
| Uttaranchal | 937 | 949 | 962 | 908 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 876 | 927 | 898 | 916 |
| West Bengal | 917 | 967 | 934 | 960 |
| India | 927 | 945 | 933 | 927 |

Source: Jayant Kumar Banthia, Census of India 2001, Primary Census Abstract - Total Population: Table A-5. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India

OPEN SESSIONS

The Open Sessions provided a forum for the elected representatives to narrate their experiences and voice their doubts and grievances. They spoke in many regional languages and dialects. A few excerpts from queries and comments made in Hindi and English have been reproduced below along with the comments of resource persons.

Session I Resource Persons

Manu Kulkarni

HopeAid Foundation

Gopal Iyer

Panjab University

Bidyut Mohanty

National Coordinator, WPEDC

Manu Kulkarni

Members of legislative assemblies, members of parliament, ministers and political parties are acting as enemies of the Panchayati Raj system. They are not interested in making panchayats self-reliant by giving powers. It was the dream of late Rajiv Gandhi to rejuvenate Panchayati Raj in India. However, the election manifesto of the Congress party talks about issues like secularism, employment to youth, rural development, economic liberalization, and equal opportunities, but not about decentralization of power. On the other hand, foreign funding bodies are also trying to supersede panchayats by encouraging parallel structures.

Elected members of panchayats have to work towards achieving self-reliance. Education, and capacity building are the two important tools which will enable panchayats to get this.

Complaints, Suggestions and Comments of Participants

Delegates from Jharkhand: Panchayat elections have not yet been held in Jharkhand state since it was formed in 2000 and 20 years before that when it was part of Bihar. Thus the Panchayati Raj act has not been implemented in Jharkhand. Panchayat elections have been announced and postponed many times since 2000. There are no teachers in rural schools and in most

remote areas there are no schools. Women agitating against liquor vends face a lot of problems. There is rampant killing of women, particularly widows, in the name of witch hunting in tribal districts.

Sarpanch from Assam: In lower primary schools in the panchayats the teaching is so poor that the children have to take private tuition.

Jaywanti of Chindwara, M.P.: We have a Siksha Guarantee school in our village. We don't want to send our children out of the village to attend high school. How do we get one?

Session II Resource Person

B.S. Baviskar

Institute of Social Sciences

B.S. Baviskar

It's very important to know the real meaning of women's empowerment. Just by becoming a member of a panchayat or Sarpanch through election, can a woman be said to be empowered? This is not empowerment. Empowerment means to possess the power to make a decision and possessing the capability of implementing that decision.

There are cases where there is nil or zero per cent empowerment of women even after getting elected to panchayats. In such cases, elected women remain confined to their houses. Only male members of the family like father, brother or husband take decisions on behalf of the women. These women are neither aware of their duties as elected members nor do they have the power to make decisions.

At the other extreme there are women with 100 per cent empowerment. These women are fully aware of their duties, they can read official documents, talk to officials, chair panchayat meetings, conduct proceedings and take decisions. But such cases are few in number. Majority of women are at various levels of empowerment. Some are able to take decisions but hesitant to go out to BDOs and talk to outsiders like government officials, contractors, etc. In such situations they often depend on the male members of the family.

Prevalent social taboos, traditions and cultural practices are responsible for this situation. Elected women representatives have to face a lot of pressure from society and family. In certain cases, if a deputy Sarpanch comes from an upper caste and Sarpanch happens to be a lower caste woman, often the deputy tries to remove the woman from the post of Sarpanch

through a no-confidence motion. Lack of awareness and education is another handicap in the process of women's empowerment.

Suggestions, Complaints and Comments from Participants

Representatives from Jharkand: State government is not conducting panchayat elections for the last few years, what should be done?

Representative from Maharashtra: What are the steps to be taken to counter no-confidence motions against women representatives.? Government should provide protection to women members in such situations.

Representatives from Haryana: Most of the time, women members are not even informed about panchayat meetings. Often they are not allowed to attend the meetings.

Representatives from Bihar: From the funds available to Panchayats, 22 per cent have to be spent on Harijans. 22 per cent percent is not sufficient to provide houses to Harijans under Indira Awaas Yojana. Harijans don't have enough land to give for tanks and wells. Required information about various schemes is not available at the information centres in villages.

Session III Resource Persons

Shalini Rajneesh

Private Secretary to the Minister of State for Finance, Government of India

D.N. Gupta

Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences

Lopamudra Mohanty

Former Chairperson, State Commission for Women, Orissa

After 57 years of independence, it was realized that the development of society means the development of women because women are an integral part of the society. Women empowerment is a process of evolution. It has been observed that even after the 73rd amendment to the Constitution of India in 1992, women still face immense hurdles due to oppressive male dominating norms like

- Women sarpanches are not allowed to take any decisions without consultation of male family members.
- Their illiteracy is often cited as a drawback and disadvantage.
- They are considered as passive and disinterested in political institutions and hence could be at best projected to work in proxy.

Having observed the women political empowerment process for the past ten years, I feel that not enough has been done in to identify and redress the

social norms, taboos, etc., that have been obstructing women in the performance of their duties as elected representative of Panchayati Raj institutions. Whatever efforts have been made so far, such as training programmes, etc., have been half-hearted measures, with no follow-up evaluations to find out the effectiveness of initiatives taken. There is no co-operation from the bureaucracy.

I would strongly recommend providing professional training to all EWRs on the lines of the training given to civil servants. Civil servants also have to be given training to change their attitude towards women representatives and to make the working environment comfortable for women to perform their roles effectively and efficiently.

Suggestions, Complaints and Comments from Participants

Representative from Anand District, Gujarat: Panchayat members know only Gujarati language, they face problems in reading and understanding the estimates prepared in English. We request that such estimates be prepared using the local language.

Response from Shalini Rajneesh: You don't have to present this as a complaint or a request. You can pass an order to that effect. All panchayat members should prepare a resolution asking for estimates to be prepared in the local language and submit the resolution to officials at district level, and higher levels, even to the Chief Minister, and they will have to take action. Officials are always scared of written applications. They have to attend to them.

Khrieleno Terhuja, Naga Mother's Association, Dimapur: In Nagaland, there is the Village Development Block, which is the equivalent of Panchayati Raj system. At the village level many things are happening. Villages are totally independent from one another and they are able to take decisions on their own. But due to the local political situation we face many problems. When the Prime Minister visits our state and we want to meet him, officials ask us, 'Are you Indians?' Some of our elders reply, 'We are Nagas.' Then they shake their fingers at us and say they won't talk to us. That's not the way to communicate with one another. We may be very different from one another, but willingness to listen to each other as human beings is so important. We are learning through suffering the necessity of negotiating with one another because when a stone is thrown here in Delhi, its ripples are felt in Nagaland.

Women too have a common language born out of their common suffering. Problems of Naga women are the same as in the rest of the country. Women of Nagaland also want to be empowered. We find that the necessary information on programmes and policies does not reach Nagaland and it

takes a minimum of ten years for policies made in Delhi to get implemented in Nagaland. NGOs like Institute of Sciences can help a lot in reducing this information gap.

Representative from Assam: I come from a very poor village. There is no problem of corruption, as there are no rich people in the village. To implement certain schemes such as the Swajal Dhara, 10 per cent of the money has to be contributed by villagers. As they are very poor, they are unable to contribute that money. As a result they are facing problems in implementing those schemes.

Response from other delegates: They can utilise, panchayat funds for this purpose. Also there are micro-credit schemes, which will enable villagers to save in small amounts and utilise the savings for implementing those schemes.

Aswathama Narayana Reddy, Bangalore Rural District: Work doesn't get done because the money is siphoned off at each level and very little reaches the village panchayat.

Response from Shalini Rajneesh: Everyone has a fixed percentage. When I was the Chief Executive of a district I had a defective road dug up in front of me and I ordered the engineer to deposit the amount sanctioned in the government account. He reported this to the MLA and the MLA told the MP. The matter went up to the Chief Minister after which an enquiry was instituted against me!

Dipali Hembrom, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal: We want to know about BPL, who decides about BPL? Only the rich people in our panchayat have BPL certificates.

Representative from Karnataka: The lists of beneficiaries of all government schemes for the poor are made beforehand. The gram sabha and the panchayat have little role to play in deciding who is a deserving beneficiary.

Representative from Orissa: Earlier Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) houses were only given to men in our village. Since I have become a sarpanch I have distributed some 4-5 houses to women. Villagers have tried to bribe me to give them the IAY houses.

Dalit ward member, Arrah, Bihar: We don't get anything from the panchayat in terms of welfare schemes. They keep putting us off with excuses.

Gram Sabha Adhyaksha from Jharkhand: There is an environmental crisis in our area. The rainfall is decreasing. Even tubewells have to be sunk to

150-160 feet because the ground water level has fallen. Programmes to help tribal families dig their own wells are therefore not very useful.

Shalini Rajneesh: Regarding BPL, the BDO, who does a survey with the help of the Panchayat Secretary, makes the BPL list, on the basis of various economic criteria, like annual income, whether they have TVs, cycles, other appliances in their houses, etc. In the gram sabha meeting you can demand a proper listing of the BPL households.

Regarding allocations for programmes, we should get a map of each panchayat, place it before the panches and make an inventory of infrastructure and facilities available. Then we can prioritise so that everyone knows which area or section or person needs assistance.

D.N. Gupta: Whenever we talk about Panchayati Raj, our attention goes towards constituting panchayats through elections, and the problems related to devolution of funds to panchayats. Although these issues are very important, we have to remember that the real objective of panchayati raj is to involve the villagers in the process of development.

Awareness and education are two vital factors, which enable people to take an active part in village development. Lack of awareness of governmental procedures and their own powers and lack of information on government programmes are some of the main reasons for problems like

- officials not paying attention to panchayat members needs, complaints and suggestions;
- officials not involving panchayat members in matters relating to the development of their villages and over riding their suggestions.

Although government has an important and crucial role to play in the development of villages, villagers by themselves can take the initiative in matters related to education, agriculture, health, etc., and work towards development of their respective villages. Barring a few districts in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Jharkhand, most of the villages have enough resources to contribute for development activities.

Education and awareness building, will enable villagers to utilise these resources in a better way and be self-dependent.

Shalini Rajneesh: On the issue of corruption, I feel that if there are bad politicians, that is mainly due to some bad officers. Officers have misguided the politicians and as a result the whole system has become corrupt. Due to rampant corruption in the government administration, India still remains a developing country despite having enough resources and knowledge. This is the biggest problem before us. If people at all levels work with honesty and commitment then there would be no lack of financial resources. We could have water, electricity, sufficient food for every village and hamlet.

The centre collects revenues of Rs 2.5 lakh crores per annum. Our population is about 100 crores, out of which 35 per cent or 35 crores are below the poverty line. Why are they poor? Where does the money go that is meant for them? If we could all sit together and discuss this problem, I'm sure we could find a solution to it.

However, I do feel that in spite of all these obstacles, there is no need to be pessimistic, if political leaders at every level, be it at the centre, or state or panchayat level, are determined, they can correct the system.

1

VALEDICTORY SESSION

Strategies for the Future

Chairperson

Dr. George Mathew

Director, Institute of Social Sciences

Increasing Women's Representation in Parliament and the Judiciary

M.S. Gill

Member of Parliament and former Chief Election Commissioner of India

I am very happy to be here with you because I am an ardent supporter of women's empowerment. I have three daughters, and my only grandchild is a girl. I am a minority in my own home! So I have to support the cause of women as a personal necessity and responsibility.

No country will progress in the real sense unless the women in that country are educated, healthy and have a major share in governance. India has progressed a lot in the last 50 years, but there are certain shortcomings also. Even today women's representation in Parliament is just about 8 to 10 per cent, which is very low, amounting to 30-40 in a house of 540. In Pakistan's Parliament of about 340 members, about 70 women have suddenly entered. Very few of them are elected but even if they are nominated, once they sit in parliament and attend the debates, gradually their strength will grow.

In India, women's representation has to grow up to at least 25 per cent percent. If there were even 100 women MPs among the 540 odd MPs sitting in the Lok Sabha the proceedings would be much more orderly. They would also bring in a sea change in the way policies are made, as women work with a different perspective on various issues of development. This cause must be fought for. There has to be greater representation in the state assemblies and Parliament.

In terms of women's status, today all over the country the girl child is considered as a burden. She is killed even before she is born. Female foeticide and infanticide have grown to alarming proportions especially in north Indian states like Punjab and Haryana. In these states first they get rid of the female child, and then they go to states like Bihar or Orissa to buy girls to marry their sons to. I feel disturbed when I read about this. Punjab was thought to be progressive, with greater egalitarianism, and the Green Revolution and other innovations. There are now less than 800 women for

every 1000 men in Punjab. All the social evils that Guru Nanak had eradicated like dowry and alcoholism are returning with a vengeance.

Female literacy is also very low in India. Even in Iran which is considered a conservative Muslim country, female literacy is much higher than in India, almost 75 per cent. In India only Kerala and north-eastern states like Nagaland, Mizoram have attained 100 per cent literacy. In Punjab, which is not considered a backward state, female literacy is low.

Due to lack of education there is internal oppression of women by women in families. Women are entangled in various negative social customs like dowry, etc. In this context, providing 33 per cent reservation to women in local governing institutions through the 73rd constitutional amendment is indeed a significant step in the process of women's empowerment. For every one lakh seats in the PRIs there were 5 lakh candidates, belying fears that women wouldn't come forward to join politics. There is bound to be an impact if there are 2000 women chairpersons and elected representatives in the 6000 odd Panchayat Samitis. Karnataka has achieved 44 percent women's representation in PRIs, similar to Scandinavian countries.

Women-run panchayats focus on health, schools, and toilets, and they fight against alcoholism in an environment where the the main revenue of the state government, no matter what party is ruling, is from liquor sales. I support the women in this effort to combat this major problem.

There is another empowerment beyond political empowerment. That is empowerment in the judiciary. Ultimately that's the institution that dispenses justice. If the strength of women in the judiciary reaches around 20-30 per cent, it will have a positive impact on legal issues related to women. Many of the social evils like domestic violence, dowry deaths, sexual harassment will be reduced if not removed altogether.

Elected women representatives require support and recognition from the government. Government should constitute a prestigious national award to recognize and encourage the women for their achievements at panchayat level.

Panchayats: Vital Links between Villages and Nodal Agencies

Poornima Advani

Chairperson, National Commission for Women, New Delhi

Congratulations to all elected women representatives who have gathered here and also congratulations to ISS for bringing together these women at one place and providing a forum to share their experiences.

The Charter of Demands prepared by you has a demand for increasing the reservation from 33 per cent to 50 per cent in local governance institutions. But our Parliament is still debating on providing 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament. In fact none of the political parties are interested in giving 33 per cent representation to women in Parliament.

Likewise, there is a demand for providing training to elected women representatives of panchayats. This training is not only required for women representatives but for male representatives also. It should be a holistic training program providing awareness on legal, administrative and socio-cultural issues. It should also cover the duties and responsibilities of elected members. An important point of your charter is the demand for refresher courses on gender sensitiveness to all bureaucrats, MPs and MLAs. In addition to organizing these courses, Parliament should also consider devoting certain sessions to discuss women's problems at length.

Panchayats are the eyes and ears of institutions like the National Commission for Women and the National Human Rights Commission. So all women panchayat representatives should be vigilant about atrocities inflicted upon women in their respective localities and should bring such cases to the notice of these commissions. The National Commission for Women is committed to help women in distress as much as possible and is willing to extend its full support for the cause of women's empowerment. Whenever and wherever there is violence against women, women panchayat members have to help the women victims in lodging FIRs promptly in the nearest police stations because FIRs are very essential for providing justice to women victims.

Every right has an associated responsibility. While demanding your rights you also have to be committed to performing your duties. The society has lot of expectations from you.

Vote of thanks

Dr. Bidyut Mohanty, National Coordinator of the Celebrations, gave the vote of thanks at the end of the Valedictory Session. She said that the experiences recounted by the elected women panchayat representatives and many speakers over the three days of the conference showed that in the journey ahead, the road was strewn with both roses and thorns. She thanked all the speakers and chairpersons, and the research, administrative and support staff of the Institute of Social Sciences for making the event a great success.

Finally she thanked all the participants who had come from the far corners of India and expressed her belief that they would actively participate in the Celebrations in the future.

BACKGROUND PAPER

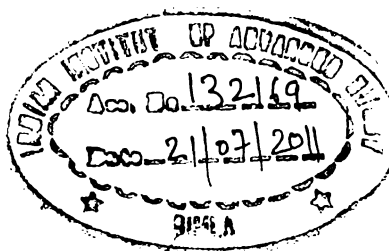
**Women's Empowerment in the Context of Seventy-third
and Seventy-fourth Constitution Amendment Acts**

Bidyut Mohanty & Vandana Mahajan

Executive Summary

In the last fifty years the Government of India has been trying to mainstream gender issues through its various economic-socio-political policies and programmes. It can be argued that among those the most empowering policy act has been the thirty-three per cent seat reservation for women in local government institutions, the panchayats and municipalities, through the Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Constitution Amendment acts. As a result of the above acts, the process of institutionalizing grassroots democracy has been set in motion and a new elite has emerged who have the responsibility for supervising as well as implementing development programmes relating to health, education, employment, shelter and the anti-poverty schemes.

The elected women representatives are engendering the development process at the grass root level with enabling support and capacity building by civil society agencies and women's groups. Despite the deep-rooted systemic, cultural and political resistance, the above assessment shows that women have shown the potential of challenging the iniquitous power relations in the public domain. Six million women's representation in the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) directly and indirectly has given an impetus to the processes of social mobilization and women are reinventing the gender roles in the private and public spaces. Interestingly, due to their increased visibility the gender based distinction between the private and public space is getting blurred. Women's representation in the PRIs as a critical mass has enabled us to look at a synergistic framework for understanding empowerment, which builds on the capabilities of the women, their families and the larger communities. At the same time there are many challenges manifested through systemic backlashes that should not be overlooked.



The only **five-lane** bridge
that connects rural India to the rest of the globe

**PANCHAYATI RAJ
UPDATE**

Study reports state government for neglecting panchayats.
The Union Ministry of Rural Development, in its report

**पंचायती राज
अपडेट**

यह जायदादी से न्यायदादी का विषय है कि सुपरी ट्रेडिं का समाप्त
करने के संदर्भ में कृषि साकार, राज्य सरकार, सेवा, नीतिगत

**পঞ্চায়তী রাজ
अपडेट**

उत्पत्ति एवं विकास के संदर्भ में कृषि साकार, राज्य सरकार, सेवा, नीतिगत
करने के संदर्भ में कृषि साकार, राज्य सरकार, सेवा, नीतिगत

**ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ರಾಜ್
अपडेट**

ಈ ಸಂಶೋಧನಾ ವರದಿಯು ರೂರಲ್ ಇಂಡಿಯಾ
ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಮತ್ತು ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ನಡವಳಿಗಳನ್ನು

**পঞ্চায়তরাজ
अपडेट**

ରାଜ୍ୟର ବିକେନ୍ଦ୍ର-ବିକେନ୍ଦ୍ର ଶରଣାର ମାର୍ଗ ଖୋଲିବାର
ପ୍ରସାରଣ ବିବରଣୀରେ ପାଠକ ବୁଝିବେ

India lives in its 600,000 villages
Panchayats are their most authentic voice
Panchayati Raj Update
carries this voice to legislators, policy makers,
development planners, activists, scholars, researchers,
grassroots workers and, above all,
elected panchayat representatives

Every month since 1994
in English, Hindi, Kannada,
Oriya and Bengali
Now also in Urdu and Dogri



An indispensable companion
with a keen eye on urban governance

Bilingual (English and Hindi) bi

Library IAS, Shimla
305.420 954 M 725 W
 00132169

For subscription and other details, contact



Institute of Social Sciences
8, Nelson Mandela Road, New Delhi - 110 070
Tel: 011-26121902, 011-26895370 Fax: 011-26137027
E-mail: issnd@vsnl.com Website: issin.org