

A DECADE OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

Workshop Report
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Institute of Social Sciences



South Asia Partnership Canada

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Bidyut Mohanty and Veena Gokhale

Sixty people converged at the ‘Women’s Empowerment in the Context of Local Government in India’ workshop in New Delhi on October 20-21, 2003. Ottawa-based SAP Canada and Delhi-based Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) organised the workshop with the sponsorship from the Ottawa-based International Development Research Centre (IDRC). SAP Canada and ISS have worked extensively on the women and local government theme. More information on these organisations can be found in the Annex.

Workshop participants came from non-government and community based organisations, funding agencies, research institutes and universities, from across India. A few delegates from Canada, Germany, Nepal, and the United States, also attended.

The two-day workshop included four panel presentations, small group discussions that took up the themes presented by the panelists, and two evening programmes - a “meet the elected women leaders” event and a feature film screening, on the woman and local government theme.

The workshop added substantial content, which is summarised in this report, to the rich discourse that is evolving on this issue, at an Indian, South Asian and global level.

Workshop Context

In 1992, the Indian government passed the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts which unleashed a process of decentralization and paved the way for democratic grassroots governance. The amendments gave constitutional recognition to the executive and administrative councils in the villages, towns and cities (called *panchayats*, *nagarpallikas* and corporations). These councils were assigned various subjects ranging from agriculture and resource management to poverty eradication, health and education. The Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts are Central government laws which have been enacted by all the states and union territories in India.

The most striking feature of these amendments is the provision for reserving at least 33 per cent seats at the local government level for women. This provision applies to all the three tiers of local government in both rural and urban areas. The three tiers in the rural areas are village panchayats, Block panchayats and District panchayats.

Since the enactment of these amendments, a million women have been elected to public office every term. In India, a term in local government extends over 5 years. So

far, this process has brought an estimated 5 million women into the sphere of local politics, given that each seat is contested by more than one candidate, and the candidate's family and community members also get involved in the campaigning. The amendments have thus led to a tremendous mobilization of women, particularly in rural India.

There are other factors that have helped mobilise women in large numbers in rural India. We mention two important ones here. One, women have been motivated to participate in the gram sabha or village assembly. The panchayat or village council is accountable and answerable to the gram sabha, which is supposed to hold regular meetings. Since the beneficiaries of the various poverty alleviation schemes of the government of India are identified by the gram sabha, women have a stake in participating here.

Second, through state and civil society efforts, millions of women's self help groups (SHGs) have been formed in rural India. They work collectively on an anti-poverty platform. This has also led to the social mobilization of poor rural women. This interaction between the implementation of the reservation policy and the poverty alleviation schemes is potent in terms of women's empowerment.

Women's empowerment and constitution amendments

There is little doubt that despite many constraints, one of the positive impacts of these amendments has been on the empowerment of Indian women, particularly the rural poor. How have women been specifically empowered? One indicator is the visibility and numerical strength of women in local institutions. Other indicators are: change in self perception and an evolving self confidence; economic and social empowerment, which has given them space for negotiation within the family, and has led to an enhanced status in the family and community, and a growing socio-political vision. It is also to be noted that a larger number of women are now playing a greater role in public life. Also, women who did not contest or win in the second term, are still engaged in public affairs e.g. in developmental activities.

Another factor to be noted is that younger women and girls now have non-traditional role models in the elected women representatives. In the second term, younger and more educated rural women came forward to complete and won the reserved seats. Equally significant phenomenon is the participation of formerly elected women contesting from unreserved seats and many of whom are winning.

UNDP's Human Development Report 2002 singles out the quota system as a key factor for enhancing women's political participation. But the reservation of seats is not enough, the report says. Creating an enabling environment for women is of equal importance.

Indian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community based organizations (CBOs), including women's groups, have been active in helping to create an enabling

environment for women's political participation, in particular the participation of marginalized rural women, who are poor and belong to the lower castes. International donors are also investing in promoting Indian women's political empowerment. Research institutes – academic and non governmental – as well as universities, have taken up study and research on the wide ranging impacts of these historic amendments.

The workshop organizers, and the partners they worked with, conceived the workshop as a stock taking exercise - a review and assessment of the ten years of work on this issue.

The expected outcomes of the workshop were to:

- Gather together current, cutting-edge research and showcase innovative practices on this theme.
- Provoke discussion and a cross fertilization of ideas.
- Come to a better understanding of the concept of women's "empowerment" within the context of these amendments.
- Understand the factors enabling and disabling women from entering and being effective in local government.
- Create an annotated bibliography of the research done so far on this theme in India.
- Disseminate the workshop proceedings to the larger pool of stakeholders in India, South Asia and else where in the world, so as to use the feedback to consolidate the body of knowledge on this theme.



CHAPTER 2

A SNAPSHOT OF THE WORKSHOP

Veena Gokhale

Dr. George Mathew, Director of ISS, inaugurated the workshop. He said that over the last 25 years, there has been a notable shift in the thinking on women's empowerment, from the welfare approach to the rights-based approach. He based his presentation on the workshop's background paper written by Dr. Bidyut Mohanty and Ms. Vandana Mahajan of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Delhi.

The phenomenon of 'proxy women' was discussed in particular by two panelists – Prof. Mary E. John from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Ms. Stefanie Strulik, Lecturer and Research Fellow at the University of Bielefeld, Germany. Proxy women are defined as figurehead elected women representatives who are supposed to do the bidding of male members of the family, rather than take their own decisions. They are seen as one of the key reasons for the less than satisfactory empowerment of women within the context of the Constitutional Amendments.

Prof. John said that elected male representatives are also influenced by certain groups or individuals and are not as autonomous as they are made out to be. "Successful male politicians require connections and are indebted to leaders... One might say that 'proxy' women have rather too few such connections and those they have are overwhelmingly mediated by male family members." She did not see 'proxy' as a static state of being but rather a condition subject to change as the woman gained political experience.

This opinion was shared by Ms. Strulik who said that women had difficulties becoming actively involved in local government because of the way gender was constructed in society and also because politics itself was a highly gendered construct. She was critical of the 'deficiency approach' that some NGOs and the government took towards elected women. This approach focuses on women's shortcomings rather than their strengths. As an antidote to 'proxy', she suggested the use of gendered support systems.

The NGO and civil society panelists – Ms. Benita Sharma from UNIFEM, Ms. Medha Kotwal Lele from Alochana, a Pune-based women's group and Dr. V.S. Badri from the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation, Bangalore, discussed such support systems. Ms. Sharma talked about a successful UNIFEM project in Southern India which had trained women in gender-based budgeting. Ms. Kotwal-Lele spoke about two networks which have been developed as support structures for elected women in the state of Maharashtra concluding that networks can play an important role in mobilizing, training, and building the capacity of women. Dr. Badri also spoke about the benefits of women's

networks, gender budgeting and engaging women representatives in public policy making, based on his NGO's work experience in Southern India.

Dr. Thomas Isaac, MLA from the south Indian state of Kerala, who was intimately involved with the 'People's Plan Campaign,' a unique example of democratic planning in that state, spoke about the gender justice component of the process. Other valuable contributions were micro-studies on women's participation in panchayats (the lowest tier of local government unit in India) in tribal areas, and in specific districts and states in India.

The Delhi-based NGO, EKATRA, presented a study conducted in northern India on how women understood governance, politics, government and the state. Professor Jean Dreze of the Delhi School of Economics spoke on legislation, on the right to information in India and its potential for empowering women in panchayats. Dr. Joy Deshmukh Ranadive from the Centre for Women's Developmental Studies spoke about the complex and at times contentious relationship between women's economic and political empowerment through an exploration of the concept and practice of women's micro-credit groups.

The workshop had a more social dimension as well. On the first evening, some of the foreign participants had a chance to talk about the work they were doing in the field. This session was followed by presentations by three dynamic, elected women panchayat leaders from rural Rajasthan. Accompanying them was an NGO representative from the same state.

Rajasthan is a western Indian state with low development indices, particularly as they relate to women. The three women leaders, however, had overcome social and personal barriers to make substantial contributions to community development. They had all variously addressed women's welfare and women's issues in the villages where they worked.

The desert state of Rajasthan was also the backdrop of the feature film, "Swaraaj: The Little Republic", screened on the last day of the workshop. It tells the story of a determined local woman panchayat leader who brings water to her village. The film is produced by ISS. Please refer to the annex for more information on the film.

The workshop fulfilled the goals it had set out to achieve. The main criticism was that there was too much packed in just two days! The organisers were trying to keep the panels slimmer, but they had an overwhelming response from people who wanted to present their papers. All this goes to show that a lot of good work is being done on this issue and it needs to be nourished further. This workshop was planned and organised by Dr Bidyut Mohanty, Head, Women's Studies, ISS and Ms Veena Gokhale, SAP Canada. Ms Vandana Tripathi was the rapporteur for the workshop and the final report was written by Ms Victoria Walker in liaison with Ms Gokhale. Many staff members at ISS and SAP Canada contributed to make this workshop a success, particularly Ms Bharati Mahapatra and Ms Achan Mungleng, of ISS, who helped in organising the workshop.

Electronic copies of this report, and some of the papers presented, are available by e-mailing vgokhale@sapcanada.org Panelists can also be contacted directly. Their e-mails are in the annexe.

Comments and feedback on the contents of this report would be welcome and should be directed to either Ms. Gokhale or Dr. Mohanty.



"Normatively, the distinction between public and private should be questioned because, as this argument has illustrated, it has typically been used to insulate bad behaviour from scrutiny".

Martha Nussbaum
Gender and Governance, 2003

CHAPTER 3

SETTING THE CONTEXT: CONCEPTS AND MODELS OF EMPOWERMENT (PANEL 1)

Keynote Presentation - Women's Empowerment in the Context of the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992: An Assessment

George Mathew

Dr. George Mathew based his keynote presentation on women's empowerment on a paper of the same name co-authored by Dr. Bidyut Mohanty and Ms. Vandana Mahajan.

In the last 50 years, approaches to women's empowerment have evolved markedly, drawing on a variety of policies and influences. From India's independence in 1947, to the Declaration of the International Decade of Women in 1975, the government's approach towards women was predominately welfare-oriented. Women were treated largely as aid recipients, rather than participants in their own development.

This started to change during the international decade of women when it became increasingly clear that empowering women was about more than just improving their material conditions. The concept of 'women in development' emerged at that time, shifting attention to enhancing the role and status of women. This was closely followed by a greater emphasis on equity, which recognised that women needed equality in three primary areas: reproduction, production and as members of the community. Increasingly, activists sought state intervention to increase equality for women. This however caused a backlash in some quarters because of the potential implications for traditions and customs. Thus, for a time, governments moved away from the equity approach and back to anti-poverty programs.

From this background, the 1980s saw the rise of the 'empowerment approach' towards women. This approach had three main features: it recognised the practical needs of women while focusing on their strategic needs; it viewed improvements in the condition of women's lives to be an end in themselves, rather than a means to broad development goals; and it emphasized the importance of participation and self-reliance in women's development.

Together the 'equity' and 'empowerment' approaches merged to form the 'gender and development' concept. By the 1990s, the debate on women's empowerment moved into the realm of human rights. This 'rights-based approach' (RBA) brought together concepts of welfare, anti-poverty and equity with women's empowerment. Within this

RBA, the state has a critical role in ensuring that human rights are enforced and upheld thereby creating an enabling environment for people-centred development. This approach is not without its critics.

Empowerment has been defined as a change in the context of a woman's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected in external qualities such as health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision-making, and also at the level of material security. It also includes internal qualities such as self-awareness and self-confidence.

From "Human Development in South Asia 2000"

Some argue that the RBA lacks sufficient emphasis on individual responsibility. Others are concerned about potential clashes between individual and community rights. Recently, the RBA concept expanded to take in normative and capability aspects. The 'capability approach' is defined as entitlement to gainful employment opportunities and access to health care and education, leading to an enhanced social status.

Overall, these various approaches have yielded mixed results for the status of women in India. The publication of "Towards Equality Report – 1974" by the Government of India was an important benchmark. The Sixth Five Year Plan Document contained a chapter on women in development, placing special emphasis on education, access to health and family planning, employment and economic independence. The Eighth Five Year Plan Document (1992-95) focussed on women's empowerment and emphasised sectors such as employment, education and health. A National Commission for Women was established in 1992. The Ninth Five-Year Plan Document (1997-2002) devoted a full chapter to women's empowerment. Features included finalisation of a national policy for empowerment of women; commitment of a percentage of development funds to women; formation of self-help groups (SHGs); universalisation of midday meal programs for women and children; and increased access to credit.

Within this larger context however, the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992 have had the most profound impact on the socio-economic and political empowerment of women (see Annex 4 for information on the Amendments). Because of the 33 per cent reservation, local government institutions now include one million women. While many of these women are inexperienced, a process of social mobilization, particularly among women in the countryside, has begun.

A range of factors continue to limit women's ability to participate fully in the political process. These include societal attitudes towards women and the girl child and various institutional barriers. Nevertheless, the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts, combined with other measures such as literacy campaigns

and access to micro-credit, are creating synergies that have the potential to transform Indian society and bring about greater gender equality.

Women have shown the potential of challenging the iniquitous power relations in the public domain. Six million women's representatives in PRIs, directly and indirectly, have given an impetus to the processes of social mobilization and women are reinventing gender roles in private and public spaces. Interestingly, due to their increased visibility, the gender based distinction between the private and public space is becoming blurred.

From "Women's Empowerment in the Context of the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts: An Assessment" by Mohanty and Mahajan

Women's Empowerment in the Urban Context

Mary E. John

Empowerment is a term which is increasingly finding favour in numerous contexts concerning women. It is used loosely across a range of institutional contexts and by different actors including the state, NGOs and women's organisations. Yet this concept of empowerment has some shortcomings.

Discussions of women's reservations in local bodies are practically synonymous with the revival of the Panchayati Raj. While understandable, this has led to a comparative neglect of the urban situation where a similar provision reserving one-third of seats for women was brought into force with the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act. Indeed, many urban citizens are not even aware of this Act. A closer study of the urban situation can help identify some problems with the assumptions underlying the current use of 'empowerment'.

The idea that one-third reservations for women would enable a 'critical mass' of women to represent women's interests politically as a group is a flawed concept. Existing studies and project work on urban local government suggest that it is simply not the case that women candidates perceive themselves as representing or empowering women.

'Proxy women' is the shorthand term used by some who perceive that women elected to panchayat bodies are merely 'proxies' or 'puppets' in the hands of their husbands, relatives or other male panchayat members.

The emphasis placed by many academics and others on the problem of 'proxy women' being a major obstacle standing in the way of women's empowerment is also questionable. The problem of proxies has been overrated and, more importantly, it has provided a misleading image of male political empowerment as being independent and autonomous. In fact, successful male politicians require connections and are indebted to leaders of their own. One might say that 'proxy' women have rather too few such connections, hence a reliance on male family members. Moreover, at least in urban situations, but probably elsewhere, being a 'proxy' is rarely a static condition. It is a point of departure whose outcome five years down the line is bound to be significantly different. Women's relationships with family members also differ widely, and cannot be reduced to that of 'proxy'.

In order to grasp the complexities of women's positions in the political arena, more work is needed on the culture engendered by political parties. This is particularly important in the context of the multi-party system in India. Both men and women are profoundly affected by what happens in their parties. The powerful influence of parties has not yet been well studied.

This is not to say that the concept of empowerment holds little meaning in the urban context. Rather, it is important to pay more attention to women's varying relationship to power. This includes political power. Recent studies have found that women relate strongly to wielding power in the public realm to a remarkable degree. This includes women with no prior experience of politics. The most significant differences in women's relationship to power relate to their individual social location, based on class, caste and community. This is a further reason why there is no such thing as a unified critical mass of women.

Reservations for women have undoubtedly changed the face of India's town-halls and municipal committees, sometimes in surprising ways. Through this experience of changing electoral politics, a more robust notion of 'empowerment' will evolve.

Main points emerging from group discussions on women's empowerment in the urban context:

Greater attention has been paid to rural local institutions, neglecting urban local institutions because of the larger population, more poverty and lack of resources in rural areas.

- The Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act 1992 has not brought any revolutionary changes.
- Participation in urban areas is comparatively difficult because there is no cultural bonding among the people in urban areas whereas traditional bonds are stronger in rural areas.
- Capacity and awareness is relatively better in urban areas than in rural constituencies.

Gender Budgets: The ‘Water for Life’ Campaign

Benita Sharma

An important new initiative in gender budgeting that has emerged in India is the ‘Water for Life Campaign’. Gender budgeting involves using a ‘gender lens’ when developing public sector budgets to ensure that they promote gender equality and poverty alleviation. Gender budgeting is an important part of capacity building to empower women, as money is an important factor in their empowerment.

The ‘Water for Life Campaign’ involves women gram panchayat members and water committee members in three villages in the Bijapur district of Karnataka. These women have received gender budget training from the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation (SSF). SSF is the local partner of UNIFEM in Karnataka, and it provides gender budget training in the context of its ‘Building Budgets from Below’ initiative in Karnataka.

Gender budget training includes awareness raising and capacity building. Training tools included videotaping the proceedings of crucial meetings and discussions, and playing these tapes back to the women participants to build their confidence and capacity to articulate and present issues and concerns.

Although the women in the ‘Water for Life Campaign’ stressed water as being their priority in the gram panchayat meetings, the budgetary allocations do not reflect their concerns. In the 2002/03 budget, only fourth of the resources that went into construction efforts were dedicated to water infrastructure and needs. The Chief Executive Officer for Bijapur voiced his support in mobilizing women gram panchayat members and other women leaders from these three villages around a water campaign. If this succeeds, it would be a concrete step toward awareness raising and advocacy around budget issues. It will be launched in coordination with the Bijapur zilla panchayat. UNIFEM and its partners will use the example of this effort as a case study for providing training to other gram panchayats in Karnataka and other states in India.

New areas in gender budgeting that could be explored in the future could include a ‘spending impact study’ as this would be a useful means to generate data to guide gender responsive allocation in gender budgeting. Other areas for further analysis could include studying what proportion of resources actually reach women and whether the resources are meeting women’s real needs.

Main points emerging from group discussions on women’s budgeting:

- The concept of ‘gender budgeting is relatively new. Therefore, it will take time for the concept to percolate down and to be understood and used.
- Gender budgeting involves a technical process. Therefore, policy makers and planners across different departments and levels of government need to be educated about this type of budget.

- A specific amount (10% for example) of the budget should be earmarked for the women's component in the budget of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).
- There should also be a gender evaluation of the budget in the gram sabha (Village Assembly).
- A chapter on 'women's development' should be included in the annual report of panchayats and urban bodies.
- Elected women representatives (EWRs) should be given practical, one-on-one training in budget preparation immediately after their election.

Women's Participation in Panchayats in Scheduled Areas, with special reference to Madhya Pradesh

Abha Chauhan

The enactment of the Panchayati Raj Act (1992) provided for one-third reservation of seats for women in panchayats, including those belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. (Refer to glossary in the Annexe.) This provision was formally extended to the scheduled areas (areas other than the North-East India that have a majority tribal population) through a 1996 Act, giving more powers to the tribal people as well as tribal women. The 1996 Act recognizes the important role of village communities, giving wide-ranging power to the gram sabha in the scheduled areas.

Drawing on this background, the experience of tribal women vis-a-vis men and other non-tribal women participating in PRIs in the scheduled areas of Madhya Pradesh, is instructive in a discussion of empowerment. Madhya Pradesh is a particularly appropriate state for this study as it has the largest population of tribals in India.

When examining their profile, performance and needs as political representatives, tribal women should be looked at as a part of the tribal community, which has suffered at the hands of non-tribal people and been marginalized in the process. Tribal women should also be seen from a gender perspective because, although it is difficult to generalise about their conditions, many tribal women have been denied power and decision-making positions as well as control over resources. As such, tribal women are in a unique position, and this needs to be taken into account, both analytically and substantially, when examining their situation.

Women are dependent to a large extent on the support of their husbands and other family members. Further, certain influential families continue to dominate political life and their influence is getting further entrenched. That said, the provisions of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 has given space to a much larger and diverse group of people, including women and members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The reservation of seats for women in panchayats and other political bodies is the most viable and appropriate method in current circumstances to ensure

women's representation. Despite significant opposition to the reservation system, studies have demonstrated that a large number of women from poor families with no political connections have entered panchayats.

Overall, there appears to have been an improvement in the awareness of women's involvement and work in panchayats. This has brought about a positive change in tribal women's image and the respect they receive from others. However, some areas require greater attention. These areas include irregular attendance by some women, reticence to raise issues, and dominance of male members of the family in the panchayat work.

Major constraints facing women, in addition to family problems and traditional attitudes inhibiting their participation, include their general lack of education, training, financial resources and non-cooperation by government officials.

The particular circumstances applying to tribal women need to be recognised in order to strengthen their capacity to perform their functions and roles in the PRIs. Moreover, tribal people need more education and training in panchayat work, and tribal women require these even more than tribal men or other non-tribal women.

Summary Points from the Panel on Concepts and Models of Empowerment

- The Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992 have had a profound impact on the social, economic and political empowerment of women as over six million women, directly or indirectly, are now involved in local government. This has changed the face of India's town-halls and municipal governments, sometimes in surprising ways.
- It is however important to recall the many changes in approach to women's empowerment in the period since India's independence in 1947. These models of empowerment continue to evolve and their results have yielded mixed results for women overall.
- 'Empowerment' is a term which is used loosely across a range of institutional contexts and it has some shortcomings. The concept and practice have evolved over the last five decades to move from a welfare oriented approach to women in development, to the empowerment approach, and more recently the rights based approach, which has now expanded to the capability approach. These approaches have influenced the Indian government policy with regard to women and have yielded mixed results for the actual status of Indian women.
- The idea that reserving a third of seats for women in local government would enable a 'critical mass' of women to represent women's interest politically is a naïve concept. The most significant differences in women's relationship to power relate to their class, caste and community. It is simply not the case that most women candidates see themselves as representing or empowering women.
- The emphasis placed by many academics and others on the problem of 'proxy women' being an obstacle to women's empowerment is also overrated. It also

provides a misleading image of male political empowerment as being independent and autonomous.

- New and innovative ways to promote empowerment have been developed such as gender budgeting. This however is a relatively new tool and its success requires awareness raising and capacity building. It will take time for the concept to percolate through government and the community.
- Any discussion of empowerment needs to take into account the additional complexity of women belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Additional education and training in the work of government is important to ensure the effective participation of tribal and low caste women in PRIs.



"To strive toward capabilities is precisely to strive toward empowering people to choose a variety of functionings that they consider valuable, not to coerce them into a desired total mode of functioning".

Amartya Sen
Development as Freedom, 2000

CHAPTER 4
**APPROACHES AND TOOLS
FOR EMPOWERMENT (PANEL 2)**

**State Initiatives in Gender Empowerment:
A Study of Uttar Pradesh**

Artee Agarwal

‘Empowerment’ is the new buzzword in the development dialogue today. It appears to have supplanted ‘emancipation’ which used to be the most common objective of national and international policies, development programs and NGO activities. Empowerment is a dynamic process without a uniform definition. It has been variously described as economic independence, social transformation, a process, a means and an end. Empowerment is not something that can be transferred from one segment of society to another. It needs to be acquired and once acquired, must be preserved, exercised and sustained. Therefore, women themselves have to realize their ability to become empowered at all socio-economic and political levels. Laws, policies and technologies can only provide an environment to facilitate empowerment. Women’s development is primarily a socio-economic project; while women’s empowerment is essentially a political project. Empowerment particularly emphasizes gender equality.

“To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves.” Jawaharlal Nehru

Since India’s independence, the government has made various efforts to empower women including constitutional provisions, laws, designating years and decades to celebrate women’s empowerment, as well as other programs by the central and state governments. Despite these efforts women still face severe development problems as reflected in UNDP’s Human Development Reports.

Focusing on Uttar Pradesh, various human development indicators show that there has been some improvement in the lives of women over the last decade based on factors such as life expectancy, female infant mortality and literacy rates. However, women are still lagging behind men in Uttar Pradesh which is highly patriarchal in structure. This fosters the oppression of women in different ways. Development indicators for women in Uttar Pradesh are still considerably below those for men and behind many other states in India. While the female work participation is rising, it is low compared to male work

participation. Despite all efforts, violence against women – including crimes such as dowry death, abduction and rape – are on the rise in Uttar Pradesh.

Areas in which government policies could be strengthened to foster the empowerment of women include the following:

- Education programs to improve knowledge about critical issues such as health, hygiene, sanitation, purity of drinking water, use of modern contraceptives and the legal age of marriage.
- Development of innovative and replicable health programs using the assistance of NGOs and the private sector
- Increased efforts to universalize primary education for girls and to retain girls in schools up to secondary level.
- Formation of self-help groups (SHGs) for women.
- Enhancement of women's income and earning opportunities through improved access to credit, training, technology, market support, etc.
- PRIs should be strengthened to focus on women and children.
- Policies and laws should be strengthened to deal with violence against women.

Main points emerging from group discussions on state initiatives in gender empowerment:

- Gram sabhas should be made accountable, including accountability on women's issues. Moreover, it is important to work out strategies to make gram sabhas more democratic and assertive in order to promote community priorities.
- Gram sabhas should be convened in reality, not on paper. To begin with, one can convene gram sabhas in wards and clusters of houses, etc. where some common issues could be discussed. Community agencies, such as NGOs, could sensitize citizens and gram panchayats in this regard.

Human Rights Education (HRE):

A Collaborative Tool for Gender Empowerment

Sajni M. Thadhani

The importance of human rights education has been proclaimed in successive global and regional legal instruments since 1945, when the UN Charter called for cooperation “in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights (HR) and fundamental freedoms”. This made the state responsible for teaching its citizens about their human rights.

Initiatives in the field of HR and human rights education have grown with the proliferation of NGOs. NGOs are increasing their educational work both as a strategy to prevent HR violations and as a technique to empower people to address their own needs. Empowerment is the main goal of human rights education which is concerned with

people learning their rights, and moving on to voice, protect and advance these rights. This leads to the issue of gender empowerment as the more marginalized the women, the greater risk they face in terms of human rights violations.

Human rights education is particularly important in rural areas as the majority of the rural population is ignorant about human rights and this ignorance itself constitutes a human rights violation. Human rights education is linked to gender empowerment because women's rights are human rights and women experience more violations of their rights than men. Human rights education should result in systematic analysis and viable action. Human rights law also provides a framework from which a number of important principles can be extracted when promoting the empowerment of women. These include respect for human dignity; rule of law; right to freedom of thought and expression, and right to take part in the government of his or her country. Women need to be educated about their rights and to use this information to help the advancement of other women. Used in this way, human rights education is an excellent tool for promoting gender empowerment.

Networks as a Support Structure for Women in Panchayats in Maharashtra

Medha Kotwal Lele

Drawing on lessons learned from two regional networks in the state of Maharashtra (one facilitated by Alochana and the other by another NGO), there is clearly a need for alternative support structures to facilitate women's empowerment because they need training, capacity-building and a viable peer support system.

While women already have some networks in place including family and friends, there is a need for broader networking as an alternative support structure. Alochana's networking project found a strong demand for training and support structures in rural areas. Even groups not involved with women's issues or local governance wanted to be involved in networking.

The first aspect of training under the project consists of information on PRIs. Training moves on to perspective building (why do women go into politics, discussion of caste, class, gender). These discussions are then linked to each woman's own experiences. The focus then moves to skill building, including practical steps such as how to fill out a form. Every three months an overnight camp is held to review experiences and further develop skills.

In the intervening time, participants are expected to build networks within their villages, communities and organisations. These include self-help groups (SHGs), youth and sports groups. The aim of this networking is to build some cohesion between all

community organisations, make them comfortable with each other, and encourage cooperation. In the first year, much of the networking focuses on providing tools to encourage networking. The second year looks at more specific issues such as developing gender budgeting targets. Some networks have a newsletter as a means of communicating between network partners.

Some lessons from the two networks established in panchayats in Maharashtra include:

- Networking plays an important role in mobilizing, training and capacity building through sharing of information and experiences among the members.
- The main obstacle faced by these networks are financial as they depend upon grants from donors. Once a funding source dries up, they can experience sustainability problems. That said, the network participants are keen to continue networking by raising their own resources. Those involved in the project found that even poor women were willing to keep these networks alive through financial contributions. This shows how important these networks are for these women.
- Networking helps women by increasing their assertion skills, boosting their confidence, and by bringing them together across class and caste affiliations.
- NGOs can play an important role in facilitating networking.

Main points emerging from group discussions on networks as a support structure for women:

- Some existing informal networks, like youth clubs and sports clubs, are often not used for networking. They should be tapped into and strengthened as they have the capability to influence decision-making.
- These small networks should be linked with larger ones, where WERs could share their experiences and problems and could utilize these networks in times of crisis. This might open up space for furthering the issue of empowerment.
- Taking advice from others – be it a husband, brother or someone else with political experience - is not necessarily a bad thing. Women may take such advice and still act independently, i.e. consultation is not necessarily a sign of dependency.

Deconstructing ‘Proxy’ Women

Stefanie Strulik

Portrayals of women in local government as ‘proxies’, ‘puppets’ or ‘male equivalents’ start from a male-centered perspective. Such portrayals deny women any individual rationale for joining local politics. In fact, difficulties encountered by women in becoming actively involved in local government have much to do with how gender is constructed in society. Politics itself is a highly gendered construct.

Many studies have been undertaken to examine the successes and failures of the reservations for women's political participation in local governance. Even the most skeptical studies concede that not all women politicians are puppets, unable to advocate their electorate's interest. Yet, a general perception now exists that, despite a few success stories, women still haven't captured the political arena, and that the reservation of seats in PRIs for women has failed to meet expectations.

Most analysis of the 'mal-implementation' of women's reservation in local governance very often concentrates on the failures, democratic loopholes and participation traps of the re-invented panchayat system. Most of these critical studies do not question the desirability of the reservations, but instead seek to highlight the system's shortcomings through their evaluations.

This perspective, which underlies many initiatives run by states and NGOs to build elected women member's capacities, tend to start from what could be called a 'deficiency' approach. They focus on women's deficiencies such as their lack of education, information, economic resources, time, experience, toughness and integration into political networks. These deficiencies are then cited as reasons for women failing to become actively involved in local self-governance. They are also used to explain why in many cases elected women are seen as 'proxies' for their husbands or other male relatives, and why they are bullied around by male panchayat members or state officials.

While there is clearly a need for training programs for elected women, training alone will not address the root cause of women's difficulties in becoming accepted in the field of politics. These obstacles stem from the ways that gender is constructed in Indian society and politics.

Instead of this proxy perspective, perhaps a more nuanced view is to acknowledge that the entry of women into the political arena will inevitably transform politics in new ways. Thus it is not about changing women to make them fit into the political arena, it is about the feminization of the political space and redefining politics.

Drawing on 15 months of ethnographic field research, mostly in Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, a better alternative to the notion of 'proxies' may be the notion of gendered support systems. In order to become active and fully participate in government, women have to expand their networks, both male and female. Men are not independent and autonomous agents, but they also have to coordinate their action with many other people around them. Women often use alternative, sometimes covert, strategies to gain information and to assert themselves.

The concept of empowerment is linked to the concept of agency and gender-relations. Empowerment is about extending one's own scope of action, making choices and developing strategies to attain one's goals. It should be interpreted in relation to social actors, and not in statistical parameters. Thus, in order to analyse empowerment, it is important to acknowledge that women are capable and rational agents, and not

ignorant and dependent victims as assumed by the ‘proxy’ concept. Empowerment is about giving new meaning to local realities and about transforming dominant discourse. Therefore, women are not proxies, but are agents of transformation, even though these changes might not be sweeping.

Women should not be seen as ‘deficient’ or as ‘political misfits’. Instead, the political participation of women, including even the most modest first steps into the new arena by women in *purdah* from Uttar Pradesh, can transform politics and lead to emerging female political spaces and with it a re-interpretation of politics.

Main points emerging from group discussions on proxy women:

- Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) at first instance, might seem like proxies of their male relatives or counterparts, but mere election to panchayats enhances their awareness and capacity and they perform relatively better during subsequent terms.
- Providing adequate training and opportunities to EWRs will open up possibilities for new perspectives and alternative discourse.

Summary Points from the Panel on Approaches and Tools

- Empowerment is a dynamic process without a uniform definition. It is not something that can be transferred from one segment of society to another. It needs to be acquired, and once acquired, must be exercised and sustained.
- Despite the many programs and policies designed by government to encourage women’s empowerment in India, women still face severe problems as reflected in a broad range of development indicators. Women score low on education, income, health status, etc. Government efforts to promote empowerment need to be continued and strengthened. There is no time for complacency.
- Human rights education is an important facet of women’s empowerment as human rights education is about people learning their rights, and moving on to voicing, protecting and advancing those rights. Human rights also provides a framework from which important principles can be extracted when promoting the empowerment of women.
- While women often have some networks in place to support them, including family and friends, alternative support structures and broader networking can facilitate women’s empowerment. Networking can play an important role in mobilization, training and capacity building. It can also help women to develop their confidence and bring them together across class and caste affiliations.
- Instead of the viewing women elected representatives as mere ‘proxies’ for men, a more nuanced view is required that acknowledges that the entry of women into the political arena will inevitably transform politics in new ways. Women should be seen as capable and rational agents, not ignorant and dependent victims as assumed by the ‘proxy’ concept.
- The political participation of women in local government in India, even in its most modest form, has the ability to transform and re-interpret the practice of politics.



CHAPTER 5

MICRO STUDIES AND CASE STUDIES FROM THE FIELD (PANEL 3)

Women and Governance: Reimagining the State - Micro Study on Obstacles and Factors Mediating Women's Political Participation

Chanda Rani Akhouri

EKATRA, a Delhi-based NGO, conducted a research study in north India in 1998-1999, covering the states of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi. The study focused on how women understood governance, politics, government and the state. The framework for the study was provided by a larger research project also titled “Women and Governance: Reimagining the State”. This larger study covered five South Asian countries: Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India. Ekatra’s research forms one chapter in the study.

In India, given the context of women’s contribution to the national independence movement and in sustaining post-independence struggles, the continuing gender bias challenges rational analysis. Today, political participation is an essential issue in the discourse on human rights and equitable, sustainable development. EKATRA’s study attempted to understand the nature of political culture in North India: specifically the mediating factors and obstacles to women’s political participation. It also sought to understand women’s vision of a just and gender sensitive state.

...out of the five participating countries (in the larger research project), four had women heads of state at some point of time in their recent past or currently as in Bangladesh. Despite this fact, women’s voices are largely missing from political discourse, and their experience of governance, visions of a state that would empower them and recommendations for political change are rarely articulated.

Rekha Bezboruah, one of the authors of “Women and Governance: Reimagining the State: Micro Study on Obstacles and Factors Mediating Women’s Political Participation.”

Some of the main findings from study include:

- The fact that women have held the most senior positions in government, including that of Prime Minister and Chief Minister, has no direct impact on women in India apart from the realization that women can reach certain heights and do certain things.

- Case studies of various female leaders in India show that generally, they were not particularly gender-sensitive. They were more bound by political affiliations and party policies.
- Most women came to power in the PRIs because of the reservation. In a few places in Himachal Pradesh, like Kangra, however, a good number of women were personally motivated to fill the quotas as well.
- In the mountain areas of Himachal Pradesh, there is a lot of dependence on government with unemployment being a particular problem.
- A major issue now confronting all the states surveyed is that of alcoholism. Corruption is also an issue to which women are not immune.
- Caste can obstruct in political performance, especially among women belonging to other backward castes (OBC) and scheduled castes (SC). Caste was often a facilitator for upper caste women and an obstruction for OBC and SC women.
- Most women surveyed were aware of new economic policies, but awareness of political developments was lower. This was particularly so in Punjab where education rates are high, but other adverse indicators such as female infanticide are also high.
- Just sensitizing women and building up their capacity through training was not enough to promote empowerment. The bureaucracy also needs to be sensitized.
- Most of the women in the study considered the state to be synonymous with government. Their aggregated vision of what the state should be was that of a gender-sensitive, secular, participatory, democratic body. They thought that it should be an efficient provider of services; work for the upliftment of weaker sections of the community: promote a society free from exploitation; and move to a system of governance that was 'transformed and transformational'. The experience of the state is that of a large, complex, contradictory entity, unfriendly and even hostile at times.
- The study found that women were anxious to know about not just their rights, but about their responsibilities to the state and community as well. One may infer that when women feel they are decision-makers, both rights and duties are defined and a sense of responsibility grows. Women have to shoulder all kinds of responsibility from a very young age. When treated with a welfare mentality and handouts, they are deprived of the right to decide their priorities.

Main points emerging from group discussions on obstacles and factors mediating women's political participation:

- A range of factors hinder women's participation in politics including:
- Inexperience in politics and lack of exposure to it.
- Illiteracy.
- Family responsibilities and objections from family members.
- Restrictive social norms.
- Lack of an enabling environment for women.

- Lack of confidence interacting with the public.
- However there are factors enabling such participation including:
- Capacity-building measures that are being undertaken.
- Support systems for women.
- In 2002 – the International Year of Mountains – a group of 250 mountain women (and some men) attended a conference in India where they said equitable representation of women in decision making was an essential need in their society. The needs of these women in more remote, geographic locations also need to be addressed.

Impact of Women’s Participation in Local Governance in Rural India

B.S. Baviskar

Drawing on a study examining the experience of three villages headed by women from different caste groups, there was no uniformity in the participation and empowerment of women representatives in terms of the extent of their participation and performance in local government. Cultural, educational and caste factors all had some bearing, but none were conclusive. In his presentation, Prof Baviskar described at some length the three case studies he documented in Maharashtra, describing each woman’s behavior within the panchayat and drawing some conclusions from it.

The extent of participation of women in local governance varies from state to state. Even in tribal states, where women generally had greater economic freedom, men often dominated the councils in some way or other. In leftist states including Kerala, the state did not play such an important role in empowerment of women since relevant political decisions were taken at the party level and then delegated to panchayats. In relatively underdeveloped states including Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, discrimination against women was more pronounced and women in government had difficulty being taken seriously. In progressive states including Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the participation of women in government had served to improve their family’s status.

There is no doubt that women have been empowered following their participation in panchayat work. But the degree of empowerment varies from region to region and situation to situation. If a woman conducts panchayat affairs on her own, fully participates in the decision making process and gets things done for the community by interacting with outside agencies, she is almost fully empowered. At the other extreme, if a woman does not come out of her house or remove her veil and signs on the dotted line (or gives her thumb impression) as directed by her husband acting as "Pradhan Pati," it is a case of zero empowerment. In between there are many cases of varying degrees of empowerment.

Prof B.S. Baviskar “Impact of Women’s Participation in Local Governance in Rural India”.

Overall, while women have been empowered through their participation in PRIs, there is inevitably considerable variation in the degree of empowerment. Therefore, different kinds of strategies need to be developed to facilitate their empowerment further. Indian women are on the road to increasing empowerment following the ‘silent revolution’ ushered in by the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992. As time goes by, women will acquire the skills, learn the rules of the game and work according to their own agendas. Whenever this happens, women would have helped create better village communities based on harmony and cooperation achieved through gender balance and justice.

Main points emerging from group discussions on the impact of women’s participation in local governance:

- In the last decade there has been some progress on the status of women including the establishment of a national women’s commission; passing of Acts dealing with property and inheritance; and the establishment of a Department for Women and Children. There has also been progress on social issues including education and health. But in terms of economic empowerment women are still lagging far behind men. With the introduction of economic reforms, women’s status in the family may also rise.
- Funds for various schemes, from central and state governments, are released in installments. This piecemeal approach hampers work. Project and program funding should be released in a more comprehensive manner at the beginning of the process.
- Wage rates for EWRs are much lower in comparison to market rate; they need to be revised and brought on par.
- Women sarpanches (Head of the panchayat) should be paid salary, allowances and development funds (as is the case for MPs).
- For real empowerment of women, the government should issue clear instructions to all elected representatives to come in person to meetings. Otherwise there is danger of them being represented by their male relatives.
- Meeting venues for the gram sabha should be rotated so that every constituent village gets the opportunity to host meetings. This would also help boost women’s active participation.

**Women’s Participation in Panchayati Raj –
A Case Study of Gurgaon District in Haryana**

Pamela Singla

The study on which the presentation is based examines the nature and efficacy of the participation of women members in the PRIs, with specific reference to the Gurgaon District in the state of Haryana. The study profiles the elected women and men in terms of the level of awareness of rights and responsibilities; the concerns among EWRs on

issues pertaining to women and children; future aspirations of the women members; and public opinion regarding the participation of elected women members.

The study shows that the average age of the elected women members was 44.5 years. All the women were married. A large number (45%) had not attended school but 55% were literate and 2% were post-graduates. In contrast, around 90% of male members were educated. An almost equal number of women members were in a low-income bracket (Rs.20,000 per annum and below) as those in a high-income bracket (Rs.50, 000 and above per annum). The political profile of EWRs, assessed on the basis of broad parameters such as political affiliation, involvement in village activities and political awareness, shows that the majority of the women had entered politics for the first time. They were not very active in working towards village welfare activities before being elected. Most had little knowledge of politics including issues such as the Panchayat Raj Act, the operation of political parties in the village and the reservation of seats for women in PRIs. Elected men were much more aware.

The participation of women members in the PRIs depends on many factors including attendance of other women members; issues under discussion; support of the family; perceived gains; and political aspirations. A majority of the EWRs said that the decision to attend the meetings was their own. Overall attendance by the EWRs was good – this was confirmed by the community at large.

Issues handled most frequently by the women members were local disputes. The presence of EWR was beneficial for women in the community, who found it easier to approach other women with their problems. On average, elected women spent around two hours per day solving village problems. In tiers of government headed by women, other women were able to participate more effectively based on certain indicators. A majority of the male members, as well as the public, were positive about the contribution of EWRs claiming that they played a constructive role.

A large number of women representatives have the support of their families. They perceive respect, higher status and popularity as benefits of their positions. Many women members have higher political aspirations, which is a positive indication of their ability to relate to their portfolios, and shows that the process of empowerment has begun. Voluntary and governmental organisations have an important role to play in supporting and training elected women representatives by way of facilitating training and networking opportunities.

Main points emerging from group discussions on women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions:

- Women representatives now constitute a significant proportion of the membership of PRIs.
- Women's voices, needs, concerns need to be taken into account for panchayats to be gender sensitive.

- Gender issues should be mainstreamed into the planning process of panchayats.
- Budgeting should be gender sensitive.
- Timing of meetings should be convenient for women.

Grassroots Democratic Processes and Women: A Case Study of Panchayat Raj in Orissa

Sangita Dhal

The study which formed the basis of the presentation sought to explore the role of the rural women in the rejuvenated PRIs in the context of the mandatory one-third reservation for them in these bodies. It also sought to identify areas where women members faced difficulty participating in the political process. This was based on research conducted in two blocks of two districts of Orissa – Jajpur (progressive) and Keonjhar (backward).

In progressive areas, women adopted a more passive approach towards their political role. They were hesitant to assert themselves because of various factors such as feudal polity, social structure and political mechanisms. In tribal or backward areas however, women adopted a more aggressive approach to political participation as they were more mobile, came from a more egalitarian culture and had support networks behind them. As such, they shared a more equal status with male elected representatives. Gram sabhas were well attended and held on scheduled dates in tribal areas. District officials acknowledge that women's participation had brought about a qualitative change in society.

For instance, Keonjhar district's performance in public health drives has improved significantly for the last five years (1997-2001) as compared to earlier such efforts by the administration. The study appeared to demonstrate that economic backwardness is the main motivator for political participation as in the case of the sample district of Keonjhar. People in the backward region feel that through participation in the social, economic and political processes they may be able to bring about speedy development of their region.

Constraints facing women include socio-economic constraints like caste, gender and the lack of resources. Institutional constraints at the gram panchayat level include the non-cooperation of men, the fact that most of the manuals available are in English and the meagre payment they receive.

Substantive measures are needed to advance the empowerment process – not just the reservation of seats. Against the background of poverty and oppression facing many women, some of these measures include increased mobility of women, greater education, training measures including support of other elected women representatives and support network systems.

... the majority of the women leaders have exhibited their determination to occupy the public space, however there are hurdles in the process of empowering women. In order to overcome the hurdles the elected women representatives require the assistance of the state and various agencies to provide them proper orientation, information, counseling and training.

Dr. Sangita Dhal "Grassroots Democratic Processes and Women: A Case Study of Panchayati Raj in Orissa"

Summary Points from Panel on Micro Studies and Case Studies and the Group Discussion

- Political participation is an essential issue in the discourse on human rights and sustainable development. Given the contribution women have made to national independence and post-independence struggles, the continuing gender bias in India warrants close study.
- Recent studies indicate that the fact that women have held the most senior positions in government in India has had little impact on the status of women as a whole, other than demonstrating that certain women can do certain things. Moreover, women leaders were more influenced by party affiliations and party politics than gender issues.
- A study done in north India found that most women came to power in the PRIs because of the reservation. It also found that women's experience of the state is that of a large, complex, contradictory entity, unfriendly and even hostile at times. Even so, women are anxious to know not just about their rights, but also about their responsibilities to the state and community. One can infer from this that when women feel they are decision-makers, both rights and duties are defined, and a sense of responsibility grows.
- Factors obstructing women's participation were seen as: inexperience in politics and lack of exposure to it, illiteracy, family responsibilities and objections from family members, restrictive social norms, lack of an enabling environment for women and lack of confidence in interacting with the public
- Culture, education and caste can all have a bearing on the participation and performance of women in local government – but none are conclusive. Degrees of empowerment vary from region to region and situation to situation. Through their involvement in local government, women will gradually acquire new skills, learn the 'rules of the game' and further their own agendas.
- If a woman conducts panchayat affairs on her own, fully participates in the decision making process and gets things done for the community by interacting with outside agencies, she is almost fully empowered. At the other extreme, if a

woman does not come out of her house or remove her veil and signs on the dotted line (or gives her thumb impression) as directed by her husband, it is a case of zero empowerment. In between there are many cases of varying degrees of empowerment.

- The performance of women members of PRIs depends on a range of factors, including the presence of other women members, issues that arise, support by their family members and their political aspirations.
- One study found that the issues most frequently handled by elected women members were local disputes. The study also found that a large number of women representatives had family support and getting elected had enhanced their status. Many women has expressed higher political ambition indicating that the process of empowerment had begun.
- Women need more than reservation of seats in local government to advance their empowerment. They need more education, training, mobility and stronger support systems. Voluntary and government organisations also have an important role to play in supporting elected women representatives by way of facilitating training and networking opportunities.
- In an interesting development, some women in tribal or backward areas were found to adopt a more aggressive approach to political participation than those in more 'progressive' areas. Possible reasons: these tribal and disadvantaged women come from a more egalitarian culture with stronger support networks. There was evidence of a positive qualitative change in administration because of women's participation in this "backward" area. One could conclude from this that economic backwardness could be a motivator for political participation. It may be seen as a vehicle to bring development to the region.



CHAPTER 6

**CURRENT INNOVATIONS,
FUTURE STRATEGIES (PANEL 4)**

People's Plan Campaign (PPC) in Kerala and Women's Empowerment

T.M. Thomas Isaac

The People's Plan Campaign (PPC) was a unique experiment in democratic decentralized planning in which gender-justice was taken seriously. It was a movement to empower EWRs to prepare and implement local plans in a transparent, participatory and scientific manner and to generate attitudinal changes conducive to democratic decentralization. Kerala's PPC emphasised gender justice because, although Kerala is advanced in comparison to other Indian states on some other indicators, is as backward as any other in relation to the rights of women.

In March 1996, Kerala's Left Democratic Front won a solid 20 vote majority in the legislative assembly. As it was time for India's Ninth Five-Year plan to be developed, the new government focused their policy efforts around providing greater power for local communities. It launched a statewide movement for local planning and community development called the "People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan," (or PPC) covering the years 1997-2002. The PPC involved granting 35% of the state development budget to local elected councils to spend as they wanted on local projects. The PPC slogan was 'power to the people.'

- Thomas Isaac

Decentralisation in Kerala is distinguished by certain remarkable characteristics:

- Scale of funding, as nearly 40% of the annual plan outlay was devolved to the local self-governments;
- The autonomy of the process, the local governments were given complete freedom to do whatever they wanted to do with the money; and
- The emphasis on transparency and participation.
- The normal process is to build up capacity first then disperse money – the government just gave the money straight away.

The launch of the PPC in August 1996 had an electrifying impact on the local bodies as it involved mass participation. It ensured that the government could not go back on its word. The first step was the planning phase in which the process was as important as the outcome. Grassroots data was collected by local governments at different levels where communities were asked to prioritise needs and identify constraints. This information

was then translated into projects. Technical expert committees, consisting of volunteers, helped design the projects. All projects integrated a gender equity statement to remind participants of this factor. Participation of women was emphasised in the process and a chapter was devoted to women's equity in the annual report.

Voluntary organizations like members of Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad, a cadre of retired skilled personnel including engineers, doctors, professors and other professionals, assisted with the financial and technical needs of the villagers... Because of participatory planning at the local level, there was a ten per cent increase in the availability of financial resources since the material and labour became free to some extent. As a result, the funds allocated for shelter for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes increased by thirty per cent. In addition to a comprehensive total plan, the campaign also provided a forum for women known as 'Women Component Plan' in which ten per cent of every project was committed to projects benefiting women.

- Thomas Isaac

At the end of the first year, the implementation of the projects was disappointing. This was due to the lack of technical skills required to implement successive phases; increasing time demands; opposition from the patriarchal society; and hostility within the political system. In the second year, separate gender training was introduced to address the declining participation of EWRs in the administration stage of the plan. By the end of the third year, participants were in for a shock as it transpired that 12% of funds were being directed towards women (rather than 10% which was the original aim). The PPC was a great learning experience whereby the participants learnt by doing.

The experiment was cut short when the government lost the next election but the PPC brought a number of important principles to the fore. It enhanced the capabilities of a significant proportion of the EWRs by creating an 'enabling environment'. This included successful capacity building programs which worked particularly well because of the strong educational qualifications of EWRs in Kerala. Another major factor was the massive training program amongst the wider population undertaken as part of the PPC.

The Campaign's philosophy and interventions had been to institutionalise gender equity in planning as follows:

- Ensuring that greater numbers of women participate at each stage of the plan exercise, through the constitution and activation of poor women's self-help groups, neighbourhood groups, etc.
- Giving substance to women's nominal presence by devolving power and resources as well as institutionalising gendered planning procedures.

- Ensuring the participation of women in planning, implementation and execution, monitoring and audit.
- Building accountability and transparency into the system.
- Developing capacity-building measures.
- Demystifying planning and governance processes so that the myth of their inaccessibility could be broken.

The PPC was an extraordinary experiment which demonstrated that democratic decentralization can contribute to the empowerment of women by achieving gender-justice. This is because it creates more democratic space for activists to intervene in people's struggles. It also provides a new agency at the grassroots level, in the form of EWRs, who can be empowered to utilize this space.

Main points emerging from group discussions on the People's Plan Campaign:

- The model demonstrates that given certain conditions, people are capable of articulating their needs; identifying their problems and seeking collective solutions.
- The replicability of this model across India does not seem to be feasible at this stage. Conditions are not conducive, in most Indian states, to take on such a process. However, this process could be initiated, in some states, in a dialectical form to begin with.

Right to Information and Panchayats

Jean Dreze

Women's agency in panchayats has been, and will be, key to the transformation of society. On politically important issues, such as children's nutrition, health and education, the role of women is critical. A great challenge facing India is how to create an enabling environment for women to participate. If there is some hope of radical and rapid social change in the near future in India, particularly in north India, it is in the greater participation of women in the economy, society and polity.

“To provide freedom to every citizen to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, consistent with public interest, in order to promote openness, transparency and accountability in administration and in relation to matters connected therewith or incidental thereto...”

Preamble setting out the objective of *The Freedom of Information Bill 2002*.

The Right to Information (or Freedom of Information) Act is often seen as an anti-corruption tool. It is however, much more than that. While aimed at eradicating corruption, its broader objective is to restore public accountability and the credibility of democratic institutions such as government structures, the electoral system, judiciary and media. The overall aim is to set the conditions to allow democracy to evolve and flourish.

One of the key reasons for the disempowerment of women is that they are not adequately informed and, therefore, they are unable to participate in democratic structures and processes. Thus, the right to information can help create conditions that enable people, especially women, to participate in democratic institutions. Moreover, to ensure that community voices are heard, including those of women, it is important to foster 'right to information' habits with panchayats.

The right to information legislation is seen as being gender neutral without any specific focus on women's issues. In fact, the legislation should assist all segments of society in promoting basic needs. It is aimed at operationalising the fundamental right to information; setting up systems and mechanisms that facilitate peoples' easy access to information; promoting transparency and accountability in governance; and enabling people's participation in governance. It also presents the possibility of mobilising people around these issues, thereby fostering social change and the revival of democracy.

One possibility for future action is to have a separate electorate for women at the panchayat level for a certain period of time. This may help to ensure the adequate and effective participation of women and it will also create a strong pressure to respond to women's aspirations as voters. (The notion of a separate electorate was contested by other members of the panel. But it was decided that it would not be debated at this workshop as it would be a distraction).

Main points emerging from group discussions on the right to information:

- Right to information was a long felt need of people at all levels. It is a matter of satisfaction that legislation addressing this issue is now in place.
- The Acts need some modification to make them more transparent and people friendly.

After a long protracted battle, India finally saw the passage of the Freedom of Information Act 2002 (FOI Act). The Act was passed in December 2002 and received Presidential assent in January 2003. This legislation will be uniformly applicable all over the country. However, it is not yet operational since the Rules for this Act have not been formulated. Even before the Central FOI Act was passed some of the States introduced their own right to information legislation. The first amongst these was Tamil Nadu (1997) which was followed by Goa (1997), Rajasthan (2000), Karnataka (2000), Delhi (2001), Maharashtra (2002), Assam (2002) and Madhya Pradesh (2003).

Micro-Credit and Women's Empowerment: Is the Process Economic, Social or Political?

Joy Deshmukh Ranadive

Micro-credit is concerned with making very small amounts of credit available to poor clients. There is an acute need among the poor for credit that often forms the deciding line between survival and succumbing to poverty. This need for credit is both for consumption and production. The rationale for micro-credit is that the poor can be relied upon to return the money that they borrow. Moreover, the repayment will also be on time as the poor have demonstrated their capacity for thrift and savings. It is these qualities that are tapped by micro credit initiatives.

Among the real and potential clients of micro-finance, women are the most reliable in terms of repayment and utilization of loans. The gender dimension of micro-finance is that the entire household benefits when the loans are given to women. Further, micro-finance can empower women since it instills a perception of strength and confidence when the poverty traps are broken. Most micro-credit initiatives require the formation of small 'self-help groups' (SHGs) of 10-20 persons, who come together with the intention of saving and rotating loans amongst the members. Once these groups stabilize, they are provided support to widen their lending capacities. An important dimension of SHGs is peer pressure, which members exert among themselves. This peer pressure acts as a substitute for formal collateral and provides the guarantee for loan repayment.

At the World Micro-Credit Summit Campaign held in Washington DC in February 1997, four core themes were stressed - reaching the poorest; reaching and empowering women; building financially self-sufficient institutions; and ensuring a positive, measurable impact on the lives of clients and their families. Of these four themes, women's empowerment was emphasised most strongly. However, empowerment is often couched in terms of a goal to be reached. In reality, empowerment is a dynamic process that involves a struggle against impediments that stand in the way of equal participation. Women are not passive receivers of some commodity or service called 'empowerment'. They are active participants in the struggles and the processes involved.

Empowerment should be *of* women, rather than *for* women. Further, the role of collective action in women's empowerment cannot be understated. Social mobilization has long been the route through which women negotiate for equity. Even when women take action in their individual capacity, most often it is collective mobilization that has accorded them strength. Besides, empowerment cannot be seen separately from power. Understanding the processes necessary for empowerment requires knowledge of existing power structures within which women's lives are placed.

Grassroots experience suggests that the impact of micro-credit has mainly been about the generation of incomes and livelihoods. Consequently, economic empowerment has

received a thrust through micro-credit. However, other dimensions of women's lives have also been affected. Often gender hierarchies within households have altered due to the access of incomes by women. Workloads of women and violence towards them have also increased. It is therefore necessary to conceive of women's empowerment holistically.

- The entry point of micro-credit intervention is money; but the process of mobilisation of women in groups is social. It also takes on a political character when the groups take shape, such as in the selection of office-bearers as the chair and treasurer. However, most studies restrict their analysis of micro-credit to the economic character and social mobilization and neglect the political character of the process.
- On the question, what could be the synergic relationship between the PRIs movement and SHGs, there are some simplistic similarities. On a deeper level however, they are complex bodies that influence and interact with each other largely because they operate in the same arena.
- Women's empowerment is one of the mandates of the PRI movement. It has also become the mandate of SHGs.
- There is a certain amount of economy and politics involved in both the PRI and SHG movements. Therefore, there is a need for interface between the two. If women are successful in SHGs, they will have a role in Gram Sabhas because economic empowerment will help in political empowerment. Moreover, the more the two groups support each other, the more they are going to help women's empowerment. PRIs and SHGs should take up this challenge to cooperate further and develop greater synergies.

Main points emerging from group discussions on micro credit and empowerment:

- Often SHG membership can be a training ground for PRI participation.
- SHGs are potential fora for horizontal movements to PRIs. This may be truer of the states where the movement is strong.
- Such movements demonstrate that economic empowerment can lead to political empowerment.
- Apprehension that SHGs are a parallel movement to PRIs has to be dispelled, possibly through the process of networking at the village level.

Women's Empowerment: Current Innovations of the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation

V.S. Badari

Good examples of current innovations in the empowerment of women include three innovative project interventions by the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation (SSF). These projects focus on elected women in the context of local governments:

1) Associating Elected Women Representatives in Local Self- Government:

It was increasingly evident from the working experience of SSF and the feedback of the women at the grassroots level, that the promise of the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992 - the dream of having effective women's participation in local self-government - has failed to bear fruit.

Drawing on this background, a project evolved to provide women elected representatives in local self-governance with a support system - a formal collective identity that could enable their voices to be heard. The project 'Associating Elected Women Representatives in Local Self-Government' was initiated in 1999. It was implemented in all the four southern Indian states - Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The project enabled the formation of a Federation of Elected Women Representatives. The first phase of the project was completed in 2002 and the second phase is now in progress.

2) Building Budgets From Below :

Another SSF project attempted to build budgets in such a way that safeguarded the interests of women and other 'subordinate' groups. The project's premise was that the primary interest of gender budgeting was to remove poverty, especially women's poverty. Thus, the project focus was on developing mechanisms to enable poor women to move out of poverty.

It is possible to make such changes in the Indian context due to certain constitutionally mandated arrangements. Women can design and construct fiscal policy if given the exposure, training and opportunity. The project is an attempt to reorient the budget making process, rather than attempting to have the needs of women addressed within the existing budgetary process.

3) Engaging Local Women Politicians in Public/Macro Policy Making:

The project focuses on building up the capacity of a group of women politicians to enable them to participate effectively in policy making. It started with the local level and moved to the state and national levels. Various capacity-building measures undertaken for the women politicians during the project included:

- Providing spaces and fora where women could meet, and facilitating discussions on issues related to their participation in governance as well as social issues and policy matters.
- Using audio recordings, films, videos and videography as instruments of empowerment.
- Generating awareness through presentations of census data and other secondary data on the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the area.
- Providing information on Panchayat Raj Institutions, decentralization, electoral reforms, etc.
- Providing inputs on policy issues by experts.

- Helping women to identify resources within themselves to undertake their work.
- Organizing exposure visits to model gram panchayats to learn how improvements in local governance might be undertaken.

The capacity-building exercises enabled the women politicians to formulate meaningful policy recommendations, which covered a wide range of issues, from public health and education to women's welfare through social security and income generation.

These innovative projects are SSF's contribution to helping empower local women politicians to become effective people's representatives. Through these elected women, the voices of women in the wider community in India can be raised and heard.

Summary Points from Panel on Current Innovations and Future Strategies

- The People's Plan Campaign (PPC) in Kerala was a unique experiment in democratic decentralised planning in which an attempt was made to include gender-justice. It demonstrated that such a process can contribute to the empowerment of women by devolving powers and resources to them, developing the capacity of all the participants and demystifying the planning and governance processes. It also showed that training in gender issues needs to be incorporated in the process, otherwise it may fail to yield the desired gender-positive results.
- Since women lack access to information, the right to information legislation can become an advocacy tool in their hands. The legislation could assist all segments of society in promoting basic needs. It is aimed at operationalising the fundamental right to information; setting up systems and mechanisms that facilitate peoples' easy access to information; promoting transparency and accountability in governance; and enabling people's participation in governance. It also presents the possibility of mobilising people around these issues, thereby fostering social change and the revival of democracy.
- Right to information is a long felt need of people at all levels and it is a source of satisfaction that legislation is now in place to address this issue. That said, the legislation is not perfect and will need some modification.
- The gender dimension of micro-finance is that the entire household benefits when the loans are given to women. Further, micro-finance can empower women since it instills a perception of strength and confidence when the poverty traps are broken. Most micro-credit initiatives require the formation of small self-help groups. Women's empowerment was seen as an important goal at the Micro-Credit Summit Campaign held in Washington in 1997. However, empowerment is often couched in terms of a goal to be reached. In reality, empowerment is a dynamic process that involves a struggle against impediments that stand in the way of equal participation. Women are not passive receivers of some commodity or service called 'empowerment'. They are active participants in the struggles and the processes involved.

- While grassroots experience suggests that the impact of micro-credit has mainly been about the generation of income, in fact it has affected other dimensions of women's lives as well. Mobilisation of women in groups is social but it also takes on a political character once the group takes shape.
- There are some simplistic similarities between Panchayati Raj Institutions and self-help groups such as those formed for micro-credit programs. On a deeper level however, they are complex and different bodies that influence and interact with each other. That said, women's empowerment is enhanced the more the two groups support each other.
- NGOs have an important role to play in providing elected women with the skills and tools necessary to ensure their effective participation in local government. Some examples of these tools: training in budgeting, including gender budgeting, training in public policy making, and facilitating support networks for elected women. Thus the acquisition of "technical" skills go hand-in-hand with confidence building and drawing strength from peer support and experience, to enhance women's self esteem and empowerment.



The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women

- ❖ Equality before the law. *Article 14*
- ❖ Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State. *Article 16*
- ❖ Equal pay for equal work for both men and women. *Article 39(d)*

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dr. Bidyut Mohanty and Ms. Veena Gokhale brought the workshop to a close with some concluding remarks. Dr. Bidyut Mohanty summarized the workshop thus:

Several issues have emerged from these two-day deliberations on women's empowerment in the context of local government. Approximately five million women - directly and indirectly - have come into the arena of the grassroots democratic process in India, within a span of ten years, because of the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992.

Several innovations and interventions such as the Peoples Plan in Kerala, micro credit and Self Help Groups, the Right to Information movement, are operating at the same time as more women are entering local politics. The Peoples Plan deliberately tried to include a gender component and analysis in various development projects and encouraged women's participation. The Right to Information is not directly related to women's participation. But since women do not have good access to information, this movement can provide an opportunity for women to demand information from the administration, and their male colleagues in the panchayats. If women in Self Help Groups work alongside women in panchayats, there could be a coming together of economic and political power, leading to greater empowerment. Overall, the synergistic interaction between these various movements is magnifying their collective impact on Indian society.

In the first panel, various definitions of empowerment were thrashed out. It was realised that the rights based or the capability approach to empowerment is the most comprehensive, but it has to be bottom-up and not top-down. The Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992 did not come about in a void, but were the cumulative result of the women's movement, including the anti-arrack movement, the literacy movement, the environment movement and so on.

Dr. Mary John pointed out that the impact of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 (rural focus) has been studied more than that of the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act 1992 (urban focus). Similarly, it was noticed that not many studies have been conducted involving women's participation in tribal areas. The question of 'proxy women', quality of women's participation, the homogeneity of women's groups, the engendering of the development process and the challenges and possibilities for the sustainability of women's participation, were raised and debated at length.

Some success stories and approaches to increase and sustain women's participation involved developing women's networks, working on issues close to

women's concerns like access to water, training women in gender budgeting and policy making.

The workshop has looked at the impact of the Amendments on the lives of women who have been elected, and to a lesser extent, on the lives of other women, at the village or community level. Micro studies on the impact of the reservation policy showed that women's empowerment is taking place at a very rudimentary level. After 10 years there has been progress, but a lot still remains to be done and achieved.

Veena Gokhale spoke briefly about the global and Canadian dimensions of the women and local government issue. She said that the importance of having more women in local government is being recognized worldwide and many countries are taking different measures to ensure greater participation by women. It is important for people working on this issue in India and South Asia to understand this larger context and learn from it.

The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) is an international agency working on the women and local government issue. IULA's Global Programme on Women in Local Decision-Making aims to promote the equal representation of women and the mainstreaming of gender in local government policy-making. In 1998, IULA members adopted the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government. The Declaration has been ratified in over 28 countries, including by 23 national associations who have ratified it on behalf of all the members of worldwide local governments.

IULA is amalgamating with United Towns Organisation to form United Cities and Local Governments. These are the two largest, generalist international local government associations in the world. The new organization will be based in Barcelona, Spain.

Among other international organizations working on the women and governance theme are the New York based Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and the Huairou Commission, a UN creation. The women and local government issue was also addressed at the Global Governance (G02) Conference in Montreal, held in October 2002. All this underlines the importance of this issue at a global level.

Regarding Canada, Ms Gokhale said that while there is no quota system or any other official government policy measure in Canada to ensure greater participation of Canadian women in local government, Canadian municipalities and CSOs, often acting together, have worked on the issue of women and local government. For e.g. in the Canadian capital, Ottawa, a process is unfolding to look at how women in this city, particularly marginalized women, can have better access to services offered by the municipality.

The City of Montréal has pioneered a successful program called "A safer city for women." The initiative came about through a partnership between councilors, city

officials and women's groups and was inspired by the IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, which had been ratified by the City of Montreal. The goal of the program was to make the city's transport policy more gender sensitive and to make the subway and transit system in Montreal more woman-friendly.

Ms Gokhale said that SAP Canada and its South Asian partner organizations are executing a program called South Asia Regional People and Policy Program (SARPPP) in five South Asian countries – India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, as well as executing a South Asia-Canada Linkage component of this program from Canada. One of the goals of the program is to create an enabling environment for women in local government. For more information about this program please refer to the annex.

The workshop came to a close with these presentations and people went on to attend the screening of the film "Swarraaj: The Little Republic".



CHAPTER 8

OUTLINE OF THE FILM

“SWARAAJ: THE LITTLE REPUBLIC”

The feature film “Swaraaj: The Little Republic” (Hindi with English subtitles) was screened on the second evening of the workshop. The film is directed by Mr. Anwar Jamaal, an independent Indian filmmaker, and scripted by Ms Sehjo Singh.

The film reflects a fascinating reality of modern India – the official entry of poor, illiterate and low-caste women into Indian local politics. It was produced by ISS, and has been screened, in a limited way, in India and abroad.

Set in a remote village in the beautiful desert landscape of Rajasthan in western India, the film tells the story of Leela, an energetic and intelligent low caste woman, who gets one of the seats reserved for women, in the village panchayat. She is determined to bring water to her community, but vested interests – both rural and urban – stand in her way. Leela fights the system, with the help of her women friends, and finally succeeds. But there is a high price to be paid for this victory.

The film’s contemporary fusion music signifies the dynamism that marks the undercurrent of the Indian polity today. The theme song of the film uses the poetry of Kabir, a radical 15th century Indian saint-poet, whose irreverent verses ridicule all forms of oppression, upholding the power of truth and love. Another metaphor in the film is the martyrdom of Husain, the Prophet Mohammed’s grandson, who died for the sake of truth, in the battlefield of Karbala.

“Swaraaj: The Little Republic” is Jamaal’s first feature film. The film won a National Award in 2003 for the best feature film on “Social issues for its strong depiction of women’s empowerment in rural India”. His earlier documentaries on social issues have won the Special Jury Award in Tokyo, the Golden Conch, and the International Jury Award at the Bombay Documentary Festival, among others.

Please contact ISS if you want to arrange a film screening.



ANNEXE 1
WORKSHOP AGENDA

Monday, October 20, 2003, Day 1:

9.45-10.00am: Welcome and Introduction – Ms. Veena Gokhale, SAP Canada

10.00-12.30am: Panel 1: Setting the Context: Concepts and Models of Empowerment

Chair: Dr Manoranjan Mohanty,
Director, Developing Countries Research Centre,
University of Delhi

Speakers: Dr. George Mathew
Director, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS)

Keynote address - Women's Empowerment in the
context of the Constitution (Seventy-third and
Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992: An
assessment

Dr. Mary E. John
Women's Studies Programme, Jawaharlal Nehru
University, New Delhi

Women's Empowerment in the Urban Context

Ms. Benita Sharma
Programme Officer, Governance and Gender
Budgets, UNIFEM, Delhi

Gender Budgets: The 'Water for Life' campaign

Dr. Abha Chauhan
Department of Sociology, Jammu University

Women's Participation in Panchayats in Scheduled
Areas with special reference to Madhya Pradesh

Discussant: Dr. Joy Deshmukh - Ranadive
Senior Fellow, Centre for Women's Development Studies
New Delhi

1.30-3.00pm: Panel 2: Approaches and Tools for Empowerment

Chair: Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac
Honorary Professor, Centre for Development
Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Speakers: Ms. Artee Agarwal,
ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, Giri Institute of
Development Studies, Lucknow

State initiatives in Gender Empowerment: A
study of Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Sajni M. Thadhani
President/Director, The Thadhani Foundation

Human Rights Education: A collaborative
tool for gender empowerment

Ms. Medha Kotwal Lele
Project Coordinator and Trustee, Aalochana, Centre
for Documentation and Research, Pune

Networks as a support structure for women in
Panchayats, in Maharashtra

Ms. Stefanie Strulik
Lecturer/Research Fellow, Department of
Sociology, University of Bielefeld, Germany
Discussant: Dr. Mary E. John

Deconstructing "proxy" women

3.00-5.15pm: Small group discussions about the two panels and report-back.

5.15-5:45pm: Brief presentations by foreign participants.

5.45-7.00pm: Interactive session with some elected women representatives from Rajasthan.

Tuesday, October 21, 2003, Day 2

9.30-11.30am: Panel 3: Micro Studies and Case Studies from the Field.

Chair: Mr. S.V. Sharan,
Senior Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences

Speakers: Dr. Chanda Rani Akhouri
Consultant, Ekatra (NGO), New Delhi

Women and Governance: Reimagining the State-
Micro study on obstacles and factors mediating
women's participation

Professor B.S.Baviskar
Senior Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences

Impact of Women's Participation in
Panchayats: some case studies

Dr. Pamela Singla
Lecturer, Department of Social Work University of
Delhi

Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj:
A Case Study of Gurgaon District in
Haryana

Dr. Sangita Dhal
Lecturer, Khalsa College, University of Delhi

Grassroots democratic process and women:
A case study of Panchayat Raj in Orissa

Discussant: Dr Mahi Pal
Associate Professor, Haryana Institute of Rural
Development

2.00- 4.00pm: Panel 4: Current Innovations, Future Strategies

Chair: Dr. George Mathew

Speakers: Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac

People's Plan in Kerala and Women's
Empowerment

Professor Jean Dreze
Centre for Developmental Economics, Delhi School
of Economics, University of Delhi

Right to Information and Panchayats

Dr. Joy Deshmukh - Ranadive
Senior Fellow, Centre for Women's Development
Studies, New Delhi

Micro Credit and Women's
Empowerment: Is the Process Economic,
Social or Political?

Dr. V.S. Badari
Director, Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation
Bangalore

Women's Empowerment: Innovations of
the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation

Discussant: Professor B.S.Baviskar

4.15-5.30pm: Small group discussion about the two panels

5.30-6.00pm: Closing plenary

6.00-7.30pm: Film screening "Swaraaj: The Little Republic".

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ANNEXE 2
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Sl. No	Name & Address	Designation	Nature of Work	Phone & Email
1.	Dr. A.Rizwana Centre for Women Development, NIRD Rajendranagar Hyderabad-30 Andhra Pradesh	Associate Professor	Women Empowerment through training	P-040-24008445/24008598 F-24016500, 2400850, riz_namira@yahoo.co.in .
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5.	Dr. Sangita Dhal Khalsa College Delhi University	Lecturer	Grassroots Empowerment in the Post Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 Era: Case Study of Jajpur And Keonjhar Districts of Orissa	P-27115381 sangitadhal@hotmail.com
6.	Dr. Pamela Singhla 3, University Road University of Delhi Delhi - 110007	Lecturer Department Of Social Work	Doctorate on the theme Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj: A Case Study of Gurgaon District, Haryana.	P-27667881 (o) 27667555 @ pamelasingla@hotmail.com
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43.	Ms. Kusum Ghidiyal Emmanuel Social Association 28/2 Laxmi Road Dalanwala Dehradun, Uttaranchal			P-0135-2670239 F-0135-2670239

Sl. No	Name & Address	Designation	Nature of Work	Phone & Email
44.	Ms. Artee Aggarwal Giri Institute of Development Lucknow, UP	ICSSR, Doctoral Fellow	Working on the concept of empowerment and women empowerment in U.P.	P-0522-2321860, 2334059,2325021, F-2373640 arteepraveen@yahoo.com
45.	Dr.George Mathew Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi	Director		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
46.	Dr. Bidyut Mohanty ISS, New Delhi	Head, Women Studies Department		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
47.	Mr. S.V.Sharan ISS, New Delhi	Senior Fellow		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
48.	Prof. B.S.Baviskar ISS, New Delhi	Senior Fellow		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
49.	Ms. Bharati Mahapatra ISS, New Delhi	Research Assistant		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
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51.	Dr Mala Bhandari ISS, New Delhi	Research Officer		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
52.	Dr Paramita Majumdar ISS, New Delhi	Research Officer		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
53.	Dr Ramesh Nayak ISS, New Delhi	Research Officer		iss@nda.vsnl.net.in
54.	Dr. Achan Mungleng ISS, New Delhi	Research Assistant		amungleng@yahoo.com
55	Ms. Phuntshok C. Tshering C/o ICIMOD, POB 3226 Kathamandu NEPAL	Coordinator	Gender mainstreaming, Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance Integrated Programme (CEGG)	5525313 F-977-1-5524509 ptshering@icimod.org.np
56	Dr. Madan Pariyar SAP-International	Program Manager SAP-I		pariyar@htp.com.np
57	Ms. Veena Gokhale SAP Canada	India Program Manager		vgokhale@sapcanada.org
58	Ms. Raman Sohal IDRC 250 Albert St, Ottawa, ON K1G 3H9	Centre Intern	Research how the decentralisation and devolution of power at the local of government of Karnataka are affecting gender relations.	rsohal@idrc.ca

Sl. No	Name & Address	Designation	Nature of Work	Phone & Email
59	Ms. Stefanie Strulik University of Beilefeld Germany	Lecturer	Women's Political Participation in local Governance and Changing Gender Relation.	P-0049-521-106-4648 F-0048-521-106-2980 strulik@hotmail.com
60	Dr. Sajni M. Thadhani The Thadhani Foundation New York	Director		THADHANIFDN@aol.com smtglobal@hotmail.com
61	Mr. Shaikh Mujibur Rehman Bur:536 , GOV, The University of Texas at Austin, USA Zip: 78712	Research Scholar	Political Empowerment	MAJIBR@MAIL.UTEXAS.EDU

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ANNEXE 3 ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

(Speakers who sent information about them are included here. For names and titles of all the speakers please refer to the agenda.

Dr. Abha Chauhan, is a Reader in the Department of Sociology at the University of Jammu. Her responsibilities include teaching M.A/M.Phil classes and supervising research. She is also an Advisor to ADI GRAM SAMITI, an NGO based in Delhi working mainly for women's empowerment largely in tribal and rural areas of India. Dr Chauhan holds a M.Phil/Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (1994). She started teaching sociology in a college in Agra (UP) in 1987. She worked in the Centre for Women's Development Studies as Fellow between 1997 to 2001. Following that, she worked on an ICSSR Project "Tribal women in Panchayati Raj in Madhya Pradesh". She is presently writing a publication on "Armed Conflict, Migration and Peace Process in Jammu and Kashmir". Professional areas of interest include gender and tribal studies; family, marriage and kinship; Panchayati Raj Institutions; culture and community studies and migration; and conflict and peace studies. She has published 2 books and 11 research articles. Email: acju@rediffmail.com

Ms. Benita Sharma holds an MA. and M Phil from SNDT University Mumbai, and a BA English Honours from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University. Before joining UNIFEM as project officer for governance and gender budgets, she was Senior Fellow with the National Centre for Advocacy Studies; Consultant with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative for about 5 years; Consultant with Educational Consultants India; and trained women in micro enterprise. Prior to this, Ms Sharma taught at Ruparel College, Mumbai for 7 years. Her areas of expertise include governance and the right to information. E-mail: benita.sharma@undp.org

Dr. Bidyut Mohanty is a development economist who has been working in the area of women's studies for last 20 years. She joined the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, in 1988, after completing her Ph.D. in economics from the Delhi School of Economics. After the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 was passed, she started working as a Project Manager at ISS to build capacity of the elected women representatives in panchayats. Every year, she coordinates a national conference to celebrate Women's Political Empowerment Day on April 24. At this event, about 350 elected women representatives; non-governmental organisations, academics, and other political leaders congregate and interact with each other for two days. She has been editing the proceedings of the conference since 1995. She has spoken on this theme at various international conferences and has published papers in various Indian journals. E-mail: iss@nda.vsnl.net.in

Dr. Chanda Rani Akhouri is a consultant with the NGO EKATRA. She has more than ten years of teaching and research experience. She has been intimately involved with the 'Women and Governance: Reimagining the State' South Asia regional project. The results of this project were published in a book by the same name in March 2003. She is an Assistant Editor for the China Report, a quarterly journal brought out by the Institute of Chinese Studies, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. EKATRA, meaning 'together' in Hindi was formed in 1988 to work for women's advancement. Based in New Delhi, its focus is on underprivileged women and their families. EKATRA works in partnership with grassroots organizations and other NGOs in pursuance of its major activities of research, documentation, review and evaluation, facilitation, training and networking.

Dr. George Mathew is Founding Director of the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, which specializes in India's local government system (Panchayati Raj), decentralization and gender equity. He is a regular contributor to *The Hindu*, a national daily and a member of Committees/Task Forces constituted by the Government of India and the Planning Commission. E-mail: iss@nda.vsnl.net.in

Dr. Jean Dreze is a development economist with a special interest in India. He is currently Visiting Professor at the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad. He has written on a wide range of development issues, including famine prevention, basic education, health care, social security and militarism. He is co-author of "Hunger and Public Action" (with Amartya Sen); "Development and Participation" (with Amartya Sen); and the "Public Report on Basic Education in India" (with the Probe Team). Jean Dreze is also active in the right to information movement, the peace movement and the right to food campaign. E-mail: dreze@econdse.org

Dr. Joy Deshmukh-Ranadive is Senior Fellow at the Centre for Women's Development Studies, (CWDS), New Delhi. An economist by training, she incorporates a multi-disciplinary approach to theorizing issues in gender studies and has been researching the area of power for the past twenty years. Her book "Space for Power, Women's Work and Family Strategies" (Rainbow, New Delhi 2002), presents a conceptual framework to analyse power and empowerment from the context of gender. Her other areas of interest are economic social and cultural human rights. She is currently involved in the project, 'Beyond the Circle of Rights', and is preparing conceptual papers on the Right to Food and the Right to Housing. Dr. Deshmukh-Ranadive has also undertaken considerable work on micro credit and self-help groups in India, particularly in the state of Andhra Pradesh. E-mail: joy@cwds.org

Dr. Mary E. John is currently Associate Professor in the Women's Studies Programme at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. She is currently undertaking research in the history of women's studies and feminism in India; and a study of urban local government, reservations and issues of gender. She is also part of a team investigating the micro-politics of sex ratios in select districts in North India. Her publications include "Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories" (1996); "A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India" (1998;co-edited with Janaki Nair); and "French Feminism: An Indian Anthology" (2003;co-edited). E-mail: mas01@vsnl.net

Dr. Pamela Singla teaches at the University of Delhi's Department of Social Work. She has been teaching there for 12 years. Her fields of speciality include women's welfare and development; social development and social policy; and social statistics. A product of the same department, she graduated in Economics with B.A.(Hons) from University of Delhi's Lady Shri Ram College of Commerce. She received her Master's, M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Social Work from University of Delhi. She chose to work in the area of women for her research. While her M.Phil. dissertation was on job satisfaction among women executives, her doctoral work focused on studying the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions with reference to the state of Haryana. She has organised and participated in national and international seminars and has written on various fields of Social Work Practice. E-mail: pamelasingla@hotmail.com

Dr. Sangeeta Dhal teaches Political Science in Khalsa college, University of Delhi. She has done her M.Phil as well as Ph.D. from Delhi University on status of Women and PRIs in Orissa.

Ms. Stefanie Strulik is a lecturer and research fellow at the Department of Sociology and Sociology of Development Research Centre, University of Bielefeld, Germany. She recently undertook a total of 15 month of ethnographic field research, mostly in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, as part of her ongoing research project "Women's Political Participation

in Local Governance and Changing Gender Relations” (India). This research is part of her Ph.D. program. E-mail: strulik@hotmail.com

Ms. Veena Gokhale is the Program Manager at South Asia Partnership Canada for the South Asia Regional People and Policy Program (SARPPP). She also does India related programming. Under SARPPP, she is working to create an enabling environment for women to enter local politics in South Asia, and promoting linkages between Canadian and South Asian civil society on the women and local government issue. She has worked in international, national, provincial and local Canadian NGOs on development and environment issues. She came to Canada in 1990 as Distinguished Visiting Journalist at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of Western Ontario. She has a Masters in Environmental Studies from York University, Canada. Before immigrating to Canada in 1992, she worked as a journalist for various English language publications in Mumbai, India, for 10 years. E-mail: vgokhale@sapcanada.org

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ANNEXE 4
GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND INFORMATION ON
THE CONSTITUTION (SEVENTY-THIRD AND SEVENTY-FOURTH AMENDMENTS) ACTS, 1992

Glossary of Terms

Backward Classes: Citizens of India who are otherwise defined as members of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other low-ranking and disadvantaged groups (sometimes referred to as other backward classes or OBC). Discrimination against the backward classes is prohibited by Article 15 of the Indian Constitution (also see, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes).

Crore: A unit of measure equal to 10 million (or 100 lakhs).

EWR – Elected women representatives

Gram Sabha - Village Assembly: The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 defines a gram sabha as a body consisting of people registered in the electoral rolls of a village or group of villages within the area of a panchayat (also see Panchayat). The gram sabha provides a political forum for people in every locality to meet and discuss local development issues and aspirations. As such, it helps to ensure transparency and accountability in the Panchayati Raj system (also see Panchayati Raj Institutions).

Gramin – Rural

Indian National Congress: Founded in 1885 and popularly called ‘Congress’ or ‘the Congress’. A major force in the independence movement, the Congress has been dominant in Parliament and formed governments from 1947 to 1977, 1980 to 1985, and 1991 to 1996. In 1969 the Congress split, and the ruling party under Indira Gandhi became known as Congress (R)--R for Requisition--while the faction opposed to her was called Congress (O)--O for Organisation. In 1978 she renamed her party Congress (I)--I for Indira.

Lok Sabha: Lower House of the Indian Parliament (literally People’s Assembly)

Panchayat: Village council of five or more members found in villages. Also refers to an administrative grouping of villages under constitutionally mandated elected councils. While panchayats have existed in India since ancient times, major changes in local governance came only after Independence in 1947.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI): These bodies, which form the legal basis of local government in India have a pyramidal structure. At the base is the gram sabha—the entire body of citizens in a panchayat. This is the general body that elects the local government and charges it with specific responsibilities. This body is expected to meet at specific times and approve major decisions taken by the elected body. Above this basic unit of democracy, is the gram panchayat which is the first level elected body, representing a population of around five thousand people. It may include more than one village. At the district level is a zilla panchayat, which is the link with the state government. In between the two is often an intermediate body called the block panchayat, which play a co-ordinating role between the gram panchayat and zilla panchayat.

Pradesh: State

Pradhan: Head of the village council

Sabha – Assembly

Sarpanch: Chairperson of the panchayat, same as Pradhan.

Scheduled Areas: Article 244 of the Indian Constitution allows the government to compile a schedule (list) of areas of the country occupied by Scheduled Tribes. The Sixth and Ninth Schedules of the Constitution list the Scheduled Areas.

Rajya Sabha: Upper House of the Indian Parliament

Scheduled Castes: Article 341 of the Indian constitution allows the government to compile a schedule (list) of castes, races, or tribes or parts of groups within these groups that are economically and socially disadvantaged and are therefore entitled to protection under the constitution. Untouchables (also known as harijans or dalits) constitute the bulk of Scheduled Castes. The 2001 Census tabulated 166.6 million Scheduled Caste members throughout India, representing about 16.2 per cent of the total population at that time. The largest numbers were in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. The schedule in the constitution does not list the Scheduled Castes by name.

Scheduled Tribes: Article 342 of the Indian Constitution includes a schedule (list) of tribes or tribal communities that are economically and socially disadvantaged and are entitled to specified benefits. The tribes are listed in the Fifth Schedule. The 2001 Census tabulated 83.6 million members of Scheduled Tribes throughout India, representing 8.1 per cent of the total population at that time. The largest numbers are in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. (Manipur data, however, has not been included in the total figures).

SHG: Self Help Group: A term often used in the context of micro-credit schemes with self-help groups forming the support groups or cooperatives through which the credit is accessed.

Information on The Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992

Prior to the insertion of the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments) Acts 1992, the state governments were solely responsible for enacting laws on Panchayati Raj and holding elections to those bodies. The PRIs were ushered in, in the 1950s to realise the notion of making democratic institutions vibrant at the village, intermediate and district levels. After the initial euphoria however, almost all state governments ignored the PRIs. The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 deals with Panchayat Raj while the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act 1992 deals with municipalities. Both these Acts were introduced to enable people's participation in the preparation and implementation of development plans and to strengthen democratic institutions at a grassroots level.

The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992 makes it a constitutional obligation for the state governments to hold panchayat elections regularly once every five years. It has made provision for compulsory reservation for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women and for other backward classes of society. As a result, a minimum of 33 per cent of seats in PRIs have been reserved for women to ensure their active involvement in decision-making. For conducting elections in a free, fair and regular manner, it created an independent State Election Commission. It also made provision for the establishment of a Finance Commission at the state level to ensure the devolution of funds to the Panchayats. Identical conditions were introduced for municipalities through the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act 1992.

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ANNEXE 5 ORGANISERS

1. The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi

Who We Are

The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), established in 1985, is a non-profit centre for research, study and advocacy on decentralized governance, grassroots democracy and local government. The Institute seeks to strengthen grassroots governance through action research, capacity building and advocacy in close cooperation with local government representatives. By taking up relevant research agenda and consistent advocacy as also monitoring government's policy, the Institute has sought to bring to the centre stage the issue of participatory local self-government in the discourse on democratic governance.

Our Mission

The Institute envisions an India which promotes and safeguards political and socio-cultural pluralism, democratic values and institutions. The ISS believes that democracy can work for the common people only through decentralization of state power and institutionalization of viable and fully empowered local government bodies.

Areas of Activities

The Institute works in the following broad areas:

- As a resource centre and clearing house for information on decentralized governance, participatory democracy, federalism and related issues;
- Providing research support for building and strengthening local government institutions and community based organizations;
- Ensuring advocacy for decentralization, participation and local democracy;
- Making interventions to ensure compliance with human rights and strengthening democratic institutions from Gram Sabha to Lok Sabha (Village Assembly to Parliament); and
- Creating international solidarity in support of decentralized governance.

Focus Areas of Study

- Democracy Local Government
- Urban Studies
- Decentralization
- Women's Empowerment
- Human Rights
- Federalism

Action Projects

ISS is engaged in advocacy and awareness raising campaigns to promote grassroots democracy through holding of state, district and block level seminars, workshops, consultations, rallies and mock gram sabhas, involving local social activists and elected representatives, NGOs, educational institutions and artists in these efforts. Advocacy is an essential aspect of Institute's strategy to fulfil its mission objectives. It is through advocacy that a link can be established between the research findings of the Institute and 'public action' within the civil society for ensuring social, political and economic justice. Over the years, the Institute has kept constant vigil over the infringement of human rights and attacks on democratic institutions particularly institutions of local democracy.

For complete details please visit www.issin.org. E-mail: issnd@vsnl.com; issgen@vsnl.net



2. South Asia Partnership Canada

South Asia Partnership Canada is a coalition of Canadian organizations that, together and with South Asian partners, works for sustainable human development in the region. Established in 1983, based in Ottawa, SAP Canada encompasses a wide range of organizations among its 27 members, primarily international development non-government organizations (NGOs) working in South Asia. SAP Canada also has broad constituency consisting of NGOs, social justice groups, universities, research and policy institutes, South Asian Canadian groups, corporations and individuals in Canada.

SAP Canada's activities in Canada aim to increase learning and networking among organizations about South Asian development issues. Its public engagement and policy advocacy initiatives are designed to encourage Canadians to devote attention to, and act on, South Asian development themes.

Over the next five years, SAP Canada will focus its programs on three themes: governance and democracy, peace and security and sustainable livelihoods. SAP Canada's programming is solidly grounded in the work of partner organizations in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka.

For more information, visit SAP Canada's web site www.sapcanada.org or contact us at 1-613-241-1333 or e-mail: sap@sapcanada.org

SOUTH ASIA PARTNERSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Launched in 1995, South Asia Partnership International is a Southern-based, Southern-led federation of South Asian human development NGOs in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and Canada. The SAP-I secretariat is based in Colombo, Sri Lanka and responsible to an 11-member International Board of Directors of policy activists, scholars and development professionals from seven different countries.

For more information please visit <http://www.eureka.lk/sapint/>

SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL PEOPLE AND POLICY PROGRAM (September 2001- August 2003, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency)

The South Asian Region People and Policy Program (SARPPP) is managed by SAP Canada and the SAP-I Secretariat. It is executed in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan through national NGO partners. One of the aims of this program is to create a supportive and enabling environment in South Asia for increased women's participation in local government. To achieve this end, SARPPP is creating a South Asian body of knowledge on this issue. SARPPP enhances the capacity of CBOs and potential women leaders in South Asia by providing training for them on this issue.

SARPPP also facilitates linkages and learning on the women and local government issue between Canadian and South Asian civil society organizations (CSOs), with a particular focus on Canada-India linkages.

For more information on the South Asian aspect of the program please visit the SAP-I website and e-mail: sap-int@eureka.lk.

For more information on the South Asia-Canada linkages program please visit http://www.sapcanada.org/south_asia.html and e-mail vgokhale@sapcanada.org

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ANNEXE 6

SPONSOR

International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada

A public corporation, IDRC was created by the Parliament of Canada in 1970. IDRC's mandate is:

To initiate, encourage, support, and conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical, and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions.

In doing so, the Centre helps developing countries use science and knowledge to find practical, long-term solutions to the social, economic, and environmental problems they face.

Mission: Empowerment through Knowledge

The Centre strives to optimize the creation, adaptation, and ownership of the knowledge that people of developing countries judge to be of the greatest relevance to their own prosperity, security, and equity.

The Centre was named by Canada as a lead organization in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. IDRC retains the principles of sustainable and equitable development as a foundation for all its programming.

Goals

- IDRC will strengthen and help to mobilize the indigenous research capacity of developing countries. Especially directed at achieving greater social and economic equity, better management of the environment and natural resources, and more equitable access to information.
- IDRC will foster and support the production, dissemination, and application of research results leading to policies and technologies that enhance the lives of people in developing countries.
- IDRC will build selectively on past investments and explore new opportunities within its program framework.

Innovative Approach

The Centre values a multidisciplinary, participatory approach. This inclusive methodology helps to ensure that research is grounded in the needs of local people.

IDRC works in the following Program areas:

- Environment and Natural Resource Management
- Information and Communication Technologies for Development
- Social and Economic Equity
- Corporate Projects and Sites

For complete details please visit www.idrc.ca

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