

**PERCEPTION OF RURAL WOMEN ON  
PANCHAYATI RAJ**

BY

**S. RAMAPARVATHY**



**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE AVINASHILINGAM INSTITUTE FOR HOME SCIENCE  
AND HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN (DEEMED UNIVERSITY) COIMBATORE-43  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HOME SCIENCE EXTENSION EDUCATION**

**MAY 1996**

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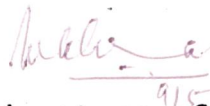
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Certified as Bonafide Research Work



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Department



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# Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

To awaken the people it is the woman who must be awakened. Once she is on the move the family moves, the village moves and nation moves.

- Jawaharlal Nehru

The progress of our country is bound up with the progress of our villages. If our villages make progress, India will become a strong nation and nobody will be able to stop its onward march.

Women are the vital human resource in improving the quality of life. The country's overall development depends greatly on the inclusion of women in its development. While the traditional roles of women need to be re-examined, their potential to actively contribute to socio-economic, cultural and political advancement must be fully explored (National Commission for Women, 1994). India will progress only when the people living in the villages, become politically conscious.

The position of women in any society is the index of its true civilization. Women constitute perhaps the most powerful resource that is yet to be tapped in this country. Restoring the balance in favour of women is sure to lead to a favourable sociological improvement (Devadas and Rajagopal, 1993).

The position women enjoy in a society is the indicator of the development of that society, which can be determined with the level of development and education for women (National Commission for Women, 1994). Development means sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and society through the equitable sharing of its benefits by all (Chandrashekar, 1991).

To make women self-reliant, she must be made economically independent, politically awakened and aware of their legal provision. Women's education has gained momentum and is fast proceeding. Empowering is to equip her to improve her living condition.

Devadas (1989) states that empowerment is building up potentialities for improving one's own welfare and bring about constructive change in the lives of other people. Empowering women can be brought through three important elements, they are education, income-generation and political participation. These three elements are interrelated and action on these dimensions lead to the integral development of women (Reddy, 1989).

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1992-2000 AD) aims at economic development and integration of women into the main stream of the country and equality and social justice for all women. The plan views women not as a weaker

section of a society, not as passive beneficiaries of the development process, but as a source of unique strength for attaining national goals (Misra, 1994).

Women contribute greatly to the economy. The work participation of female rose from 14.22 per cent in 1971 to 22.27 per cent in 1991. The raise in rural families is even steeper from 15.92 per cent in 1971 to 26.79 per cent in 1991 (Census, 1991). Use of available human resources is the most effective way to achieve poverty eradication, reduction in inequalities and sustenance of a reasonably high pace of economic growth.

Women's participation is a means to attain set goals of social, political and economic objectives. Participation of women can only bring up more changes, because more education cannot bring any change. Only application creates problem which needs solution. Participation slowly develops self-reliance, self-confidence, initiative accomplishment and sustenance. Only participation can bring social action and build up reinvigorate communities (Kochhar, 1986).

Political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to the role of women (Bhargava and Ragu, 1995). Women's

representation in politics is very important than in any field because without their voices heard at decision-making level, women cannot get changes and power. Women can bring out changes in employment, education, health and services only by participating willingly in politics. Though women have come out in many fields, they are still behind doors to politics and their role remains limited (Bhargava and Subha, 1994).

Women in rural areas, because of their low level of literacy, suppression, lack of self-confidence, economic dependence, male resistance and cultural inhibitions, do not participate eagerly in politics, they do not exercise their franchise. If they do also, they act as a rubber stamp of their husband, brother or father (Neela, 1994).

Panchayat has an ancient flavour. It is a good word which literally means, the assembly of five elected by the villagers. It represents the system by which innumerable village republics of India were governed. Today the Panchayati Raj Act is a revolution that will bring democracy to the door steps of crores of Indians. It is a revolution that will open doors of opportunity to millions of Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes and half the population of our country, the women of India (Gandhi, 1991).

India's democracy will be strong only when the democracy in the village is strong. The development in the villages is possible only when the people who live in the villages are involved in their own development. The prime objective of Panchayati Raj is to enable the people of each area to achieve intensive and continuous development in the interest of entire population (Rameshwar, 1993).

Women in Panchayat structure today have roots in the rural past. Participation of women in Panchayat bodies opens a way for them to make their voices heard and bring action for development (Balachandran, 1989).

Women of India have been denied of their due share in public decision-making bodies even though, there are some very prominent exceptions. The prevailing male dominated power structure in village is obviously not ready to accept women as the chairpersons of Panchayats (Mathew, 1994).

It is a path-breaking move, the Constitution Act 1992 reserved 33 1/3 percent seats for women in Panchayats. This Act is definitely a major move towards strengthening the position of rural women and requires many supportive forces. The strong move will facilitate the basic move of women like water, health etc. This will contribute a lot to the economic position and status of women in rural areas (Joshi, 1994).

Enhanced representation of women in Panchayats is likely to remove the isolation of women and give them power and strength to be more assertive and take part in decision-making (Nair, 1989). Leadership plays an important role to bring courage among women. This can be brought only through their participation in the Panchayats (Subha, 1995).

Perception is defined by Organ (1981) as how one feels about a thing and interprets in one's neural mechanism. The present study has been undertaken to read the awareness of women on Panchayati Raj and thereby understand their perception about Panchayati Raj System.

The objectives of the study are to,

1. Find out the awareness of rural women about Panchayati Raj,
2. Study the awareness of the rural women about their rights and responsibilities in Panchayati Raj System and
3. Find out the extent of women's participation in Panchayati Raj System.

# Review of Literature

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature pertaining to the study were reviewed under the following heads:

- A. Genesis and Growth of Panchayati Raj System
- B. 73rd constitutional Amendment Act
- C. Structural Pattern of Panchayati Raj
- D. Functions and Responsibilities of Panchayats
- E. Women in Panchayat and
- F. Related Studies

### A. Genesis and Growth of Panchayati Raj System

The system of decentralized administration is not new to the Indian soil. Even from the vedic period the system of decentralisation had prevailed in India. Due to foreign invasions, the system of Panchayats gradually diminished. The emphasis on centralised system of administration became popular (Venkataswamy, 1990)

Panchayat had become an integral part of our rural setup. Today they are facing new challenges which are more serious than what used to be in the past. Panchayat is the most important organ of the village Government (Indira, 1995).

### Panchayati Raj System in free India

Gandhi (1945) realised the importance of Panchayat in India's social and economic set up and the hold which it had

on Indian rural society. He was of the view that Indian Constitution should be enacted on the basis of Panchayati Raj System. Though this was not found feasible by our Constitutional fathers after independence. Yet in the Directive Principles of State Policy, it was provided that the State would strengthen Panchayati Raj System.

The Government proceeded in this direction and enacted the Panchayat acts and directed the States to take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them to function as units of self-government. As a first step, States started through legislation to renew the old concept of Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas, so that people's involvement in their affairs at the grass-root can be started. This approach was reflected in the first plan document itself. The process of transformation was initiated by the Central Government in the rural areas with the help of the local self-government. Yet, the whole nation was in the process of nation building by overcoming the communal feud and other divisive tendencies. The federal government did not give much attention to the establishment and effective functioning of local body institutions (Adishesaya, 1962).

#### **Committees on Panchayati Raj**

In order to strengthen the Panchayat System in the country several Committees were formulated. The Committees surrendered their recommendations on the basis of which

changes were implemented from time to time (Narayanan, 1989). The Committees and their recommendations are as follows:

#### **Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957)**

The study team on Community Development and Panchayati Raj popularly known as the Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957) recommended the establishment of a three-tier Panchayati Raj System with the middle tier viz., Panchayat Samiti being the key level in the scheme of decentralization. The samiti's jurisdiction was to be coterminous with that of the community development block, the members being directly elected. The Parishad was visualised as an advisory body at the district level. The village Panchayat would constitute the lowest level in the three-tier structure (Dubey, 1995).

#### **Ashok Mehta Committee (1978)**

The Ashok Mehta Committee was set up to examine the entire issue afresh. The Committee emphasised the importance of Panchayati Raj but in a significant departure from Balwantrai Mehta Committee's suggestions, recommended a two-tier structure - Zilla Parishad at the district level and Mandal Panchayat for groups of villages with population of 20,000 to 30,000. It also recommended that the district should be the first point for decentralisation under popular supervision below the State level and favoured the official participation of political parties at all levels of Panchayat elections (Desai, 1990).

**C.H.Hanumantha Rao Committee (1983)**

C.H.Hanumantha Rao Committee had suggested that the District Rural Development Agencies and similar other organisations at lower level should be formed to undertake poverty alleviation programmes. This would strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions (Sen, 1994).

**G.V.K.Rao Committee (1985)**

The G.V.K.Rao Committee strongly recommended the revival of the Panchayati Raj Institutions so that greater responsibilities of the planning, implementation and monitoring of the rural development programmes could be assigned to them. It also contemplated delegation of State's planning functions to decentralized planning units at the district level (Madan, 1986).

**L.M.Singhvi Committee (1986)**

This Committee was set up for revitalisation of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Committee recommended that the Panchayati Raj Institutions should be constitutionally recognised, protected and preserved by the inclusion of a new chapter in the Constitution. It also suggested constitutional provisions to ensure free, regular and fair elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (Joshi, 1994).

**P.K.Thungon Committee (1988)**

By the end of 1988 a sub-committee of the consultative Committee of Parliament under the Chairmanship of

P.K.Thungon, made recommendations on the Panchayati Raj System. One of its important recommendations was that the Panchayati Raj bodies should be Constitutionally recognised (Chatterjee, 1989).

#### B. 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

The 73rd Amendment Act came into force on April 24, 1993. This Amendment Act is culmination of various proposals made by the earlier Committees or sub-committees on Panchayati Raj bodies and thus given Panchayati Raj Institutions a valid shape (Mukherjee, 1993). The salient features of the Act are as follows:

- The Gram Sabha will be a body comprising of all the adult members registered as voters in the Panchayat area.
- There shall be three-tier system of Panchayat at village, intermediate and district levels. Smaller States with population below 20 lakhs will have option not to have intermediate level Panchayat.
- Seats in Panchayats at all the three levels shall be filled by direct election. In addition the chairperson of the village Panchayats can be made members of the Panchayat at the intermediate level and chairperson of Panchayats at intermediate level can be member of Panchayats at the district level; MP, MLA, MLC could also be members of Panchayats at the intermediate and the district levels.

- In all the Panchayats, seats would be reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population and one-third of the total number of seats will be reserved for women. One-third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs will also be reserved for women.
- Offices of the chairpersons of the Panchayats at all levels shall be reserved in favour of SCs and STs in proportion to their population in the State. One-third offices of chairpersons of Panchayats at all levels shall also be reserved for women.
- Legislature of the State shall be at liberty to provide reservation of seats and offices of chairpersons in Panchayats in favour of backward class of citizens.
- Panchayats shall have a uniform five-year term and elections to constitute new bodies shall be completed before the expiry of the term. In the event of dissolution, election will be compulsorily held within six-months. The reconstituted Panchayat will serve for the remaining period of the five-year term.
- It will not be possible to dissolve the existing Panchayats by Amendment of any Act before the expiry of its duration.
- A person who is disqualified under any law for election to the legislature of the State or under any law of the State will not be entitled to become a member of a Panchayat.

- Independent election commission will be established in the State for superintendence, direction and control of the electoral process and preparation of electoral rolls.
- Specific responsibilities will be entrusted to the Panchayats to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of matters listed in XI schedule. For the implementation of development schemes, main responsibility will be entrusted to the Panchayats.
- The Panchayat will receive adequate funds for carrying out their plans. Grants from State Government will constitute an important source of funding but State Governments are also expected to assign the revenue of certain taxes to the Panchayats. In some cases, Panchayat will also be permitted to collect and retain revenue it raises.
- In each State, a finance commission will be established within one year and after every five-years to determine the principles on the basis of which adequate financial resources would be ensured for Panchayats.
- The Panchayats existing on the 24th April 1993 will be allowed to complete their full term except when they are dissolved by the house by a resolution.

The revolutionary features of this Act would act as bulwark against exploitation and be a harbinger of equality

and social harmony. The feature of having Gram Sabha would unite the village and act against any exploitation of weaker sections (Thakur, 1994).

### **Eleventh Schedule**

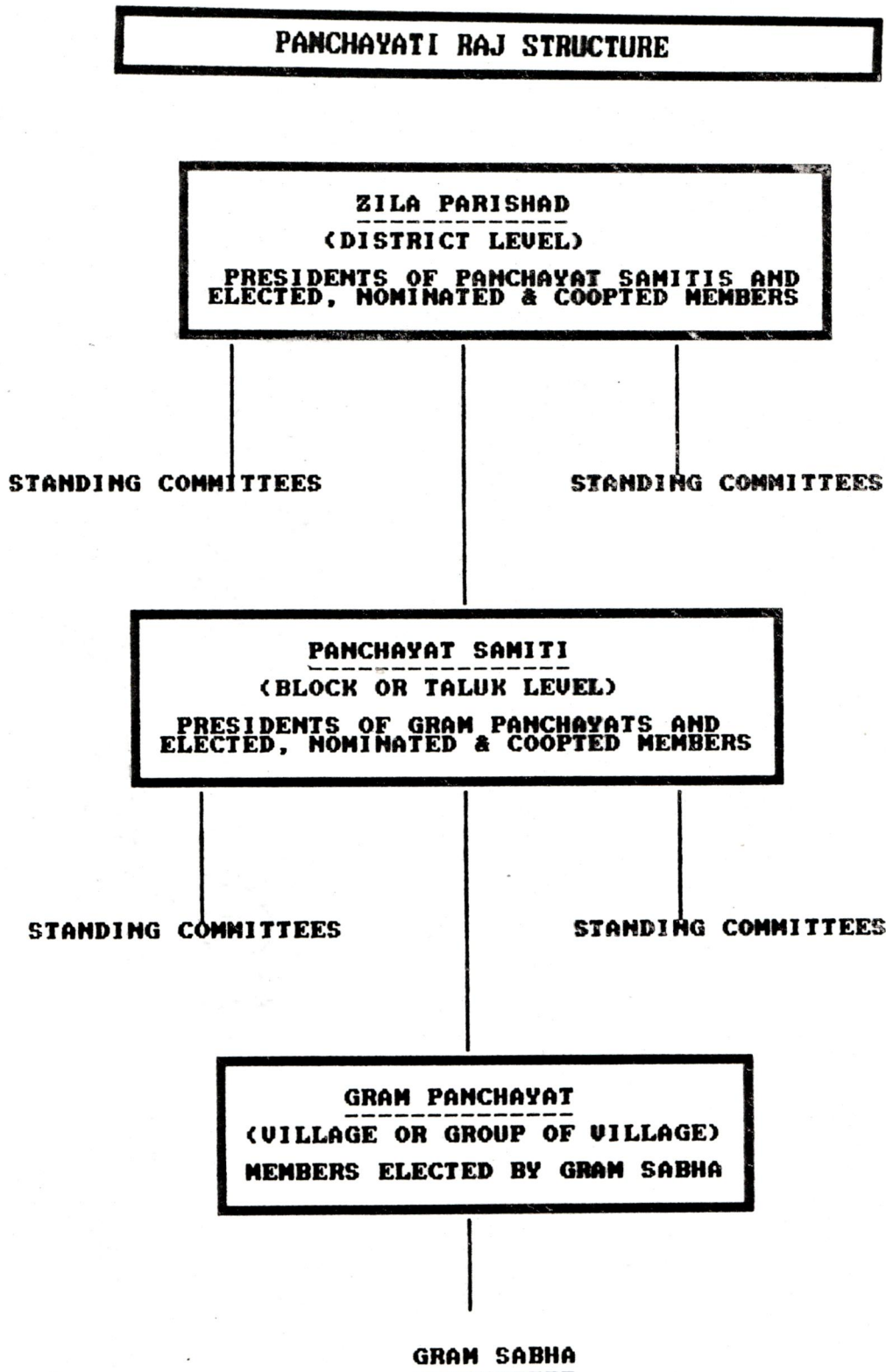
Article 243 G of the XI Schedule includes the following 29 activities.

- Agriculture, including agriculture extension
- Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation
- Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development
- Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry
- Fisheries
- Social forestry and farm forestry
- Minor forest produce
- Small-scale industries, including food processing industries
- Khadi, village and cottage industries
- Rural housing
- Drinking water
- Fuel and fodder
- Roads, culverts, bridges, water-ways and other means of communication
- Rural electrification including distribution of electricity

- Non-conventional energy sources
- Poverty alleviation programme
- Education, including primary and secondary schools
- Technical training and vocational education
- Adult and non-formal education
- Libraries
- Cultural activities
- Market and fairs
- Health and sanitation including hospitals, primary health centres and dispensaries
- Family welfare
- Women and child development
- Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded
- Welfare of the weaker sections and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes
- Public distribution system
- Maintenance of community asset (Mohanpuria, 1995).

### **C. Structural Pattern of Panchayati Raj**

Structural pattern of Panchayati Raj is varied and complex. The idea and basic objective are identical but shape and form are different (Fig. 1) (Desai, 1993).



ADULT RESIDENTS IN THE GRAM PANCHAYAT ACT

Fig. 1. STRUCTURAL PATTERN OF PANCHAYATI RAJ

## **Coverage of Panchayati Raj**

Almost in all the States, Panchayati Raj is being implemented in India. The number of village covered in the country as a whole is 5,53,688 with 2,17,300 Panchayats in the country. The population covered by these is nearly 4,618.56 lakhs, which forms 99 per cent of total rural population. As figures reflect Panchayati Raj has got universal coverage (Srivastava, 1995).

## **Composition of Panchayati Raj Institutions**

### **Gram Panchayat**

The general pattern of composition of the Panchayati Raj Institution's is based on the principles of democracy and the predominance of the elected members. The members are elected and provision is there for co-option of two women members and one member each from SC and ST. Election held in territorial basis and Panchayat area is generally divided into a number of wards. The prevailing system of direct election of Panchayats by secret ballot in most of the State has been regarded as the best method by various study team on Panchayati Raj (Bhargava and Venkatakrisnan, 1995).

### **Panchayat Union Council**

Panchayat Union Council generally consists of representative of the Panchayats, co-operatives, small municipalities and notified area Committees, members of legislative assembly and certain officers (Vithal, 1995).

### **Zilla Parishad or District Panchayat**

The composition of Zilla Parishad follows the pattern of Panchayat Samiti. The chairman is elected from among the members. The membership is fairly large. The MLAs, MPs and ex-officio members have voting rights, which is felt controversial to include the representatives of higher body in lower body (Dutta and Mitra, 1994).

### **Election for Panchayats**

The major failure with regard to the Panchayati Raj Systems throughout the country was non-conduct of elections and inordinate delay in conducting elections. However, this was sought to be overcome by ensuring regular elections to the Panchayats, Vide Article 243 (E) of the 73rd Amendment Act. The chart shows how the village Panchayats, Panchayat Union Council and the District Panchayats are elected (Fig. 2) (Hindu, 1995).

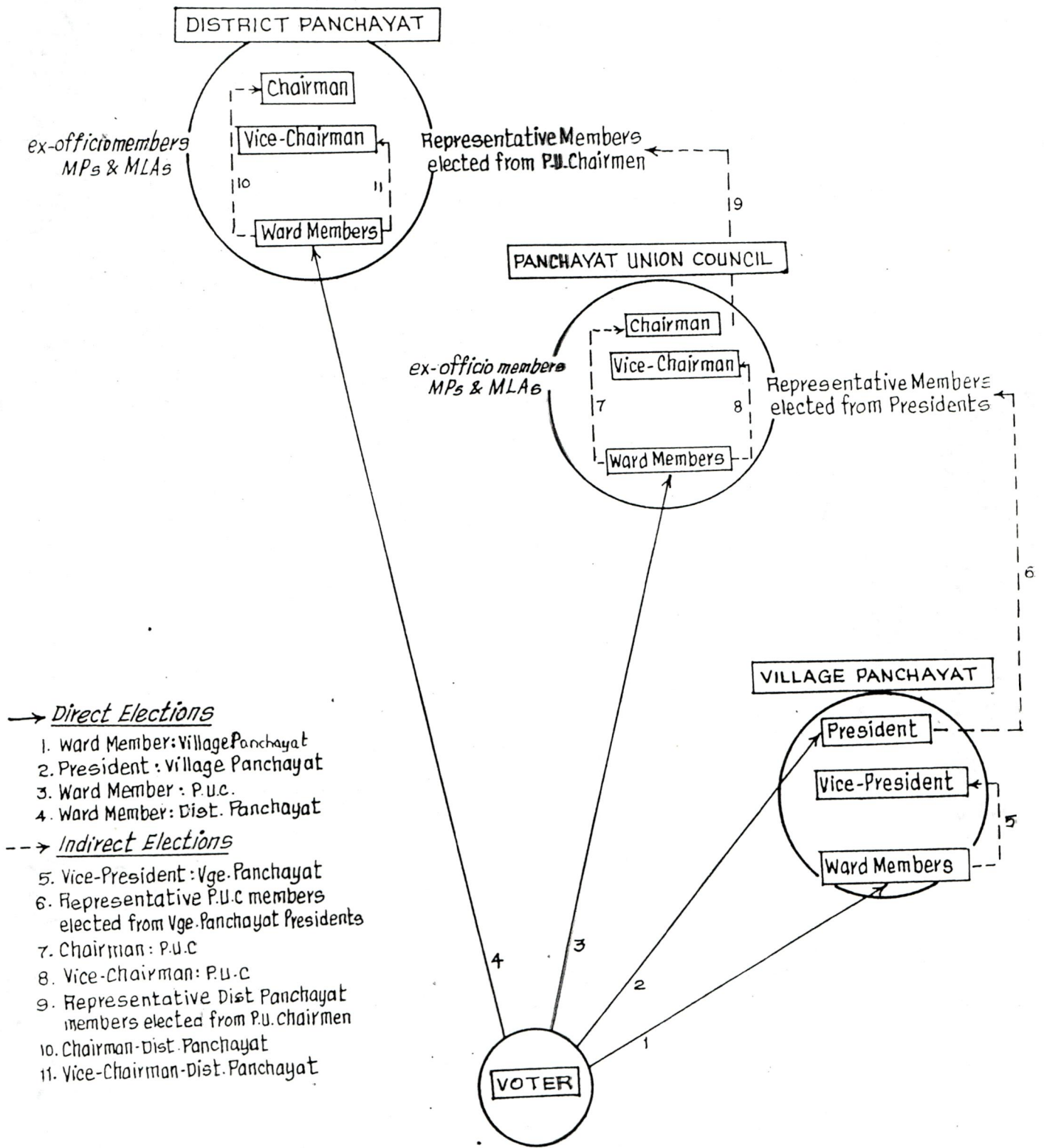


Figure.2. ELECTION FOR PANCHAYATS

## D. Functions and Responsibilities of Panchayats

### Functions and responsibilities of village Panchayats

#### Education

1. To run a Balwadi, Anganwadi and a Primary School.
2. To maintain a library and a reading room; the books should have a direct bearing on the social, economic, political and cultural activities of the village.
3. To run a night school for adults.

#### Recreation

1. To provide for gymnasium and playground where games and sports are encouraged.
2. To arrange art and craft exhibitions from time to time.
3. To celebrate collectively the important festivals of all communities.
4. To organise seasonal fairs.
5. To encourage folk-songs, folk-dance and folk-theatre.

#### Protection

1. To maintain village guardians for general protection of village against thieves, dacoits and wild animals.

#### Agriculture

1. To assess the rent of each agriculture plot in the village.
2. To collect rent from land holders.
3. To encourage and organise consolidation of holdings.

4. To ensure that extension training in all sectors/areas of agriculture are imparted to women.
5. To make proper arrangements for irrigation.
6. To provide for good seeds, manure, fertilizers and efficient implements through co-operative shops.
7. To see that as far as possible all the necessary food grains are produced in the village itself.
8. To check soil erosion and reclaim waste land through joint effort.
9. To review and scrutinize debts and regulate their rates of interests, where it is possible to organize co-operative credit banks, to plant trees in the village.

#### **Industries**

1. To impart training and skills to women and youth for running village industries.
2. To organize village artisans and upgrade their technical skills.
3. To organize village industries such as Khadi, training, agrofood processing, fisheries, etc.
4. To run a co-operative dairy.
5. To prevent child labour and out-migration.

#### **Trade and commerce**

1. To organize co-operative marketing of agricultural and industrial products.

2. To organize co-operative consumer's societies.
3. To export only the surplus commodities and import only those necessities which cannot be produced in the village.
4. To maintain co-operative godowns.
5. To provide cheap credit facilities to village artisans for necessary purpose.
6. To construct and maintain pathways, roads, national highways and water routes.

#### **Sanitation and medical relief**

1. To maintain good sanitation in the village through proper drainage.
2. To prevent public nuisance and check the spread of epidemics.
3. To maintain adequate arrangements for healthy drinking water.
4. To maintain a village hospital and encourage indigenous system of medicine, naturopathy and biochemistry.

#### **Justice**

1. To provide cheap and speedy justice to villagers.
2. To make arrangements for free legal aid and information.

### **Finance and taxing**

1. To levy and collect village taxes.
2. To encourage payments in kind and collect manual labour for village projects.
3. To maintain proper accounts of income and expenditures (Dhawan, 1994).

### **Functions of Panchayat Union Council**

1. Constructing and maintaining roads other than village roads and national highways.
2. Building and maintaining hospitals.
3. Building and maintaining Mother and Child Care Centres.
4. Building orphanage, appointing health workers to maintain good health.
5. Starting, maintaining and expanding primary schools and providing subsidy for private schools.
6. Eradicating leprosy.
7. Organising and conducting festivals.
8. Animal husbandry.
9. Starting and conducting shandy.
10. Maintaining birth/death records.
11. Helping in agricultural improvement.
12. Starting small scale industries.
13. Doing the functions that are handedover to them by Government.
14. Improving employment and increasing the standard of living (Singh, 1993).

**District Panchayat**

1. Providing consultation to Government in regard to income and finance of village Panchayat and Panchayat Union Council.
2. Providing advice to Government in regard to the departments in village Panchayat and Panchayat Union Council.
3. Helping Government department indulged in developmental works, and also in helping for improved functioning of Panchayats.
4. Providing consultation to the Government in
  - a. Demarcating village Panchayat and Panchayat Union markets
  - b. Giving advice to Government in all aspects regarding traffic and commerce
  - c. Helping Government and providing support regarding all rural development programmes (Madan, 1994).

**Powers and Responsibilities of Panchayats**

An effective devolution of power envisages a fair delimitation of the authorities and jurisdiction of the three-tiers.

1. Construction, repair and maintenance of village roads, bridges, culverts, dams and causeway on such roads.
2. Street lighting.
3. Maintenance of drains and disposal of drainage water.

4. Village cleaning.
5. Opening and maintenance of burial and burning ghats.
6. Collecting house, water and other taxes.
7. Implementing poverty alleviation programmes.
8. Public distribution system.
9. Prepare village plan for development of the village.
10. Attend to welfare of weaker sections (Manickam, 1995).

#### **Income of Panchayats**

The main source of income for Panchayat is as follows.

1. House tax
2. Professional tax
3. License fees for trades and industries
4. Seven per cent of land cess collected from Panchayat area
5. Five per cent of surcharge on stamp duty arising out of transactions of land and houses in the Panchayat area
6. Market cess
7. Vehicle tax and entertainment tax
8. Fisheries sales on leases of Tanks
9. Tax on cultivable lands (Satyam, 1994).

#### **E. Women in Panchayat**

That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, not will ever be in future - Vivekananda.\*

Women in India constitute 48 per cent of the total population but their representation in politics is very low. Political participation includes involvement in any organised activity that seeks to influence or alter the character, function, structure, policies, assignments, behaviour of any institution or power structure in any of the above spheres (Saxena, 1994).

Document on Women's Development (1985) recognised that despite the rapid growth of informal activity by women, their role in political structure is unchanged due to nexus of traditional factors. Consequently women are still left on the periphery of political process. Rural women suffer from double discrimination, they carry the burden of being women in the male dominated society. Women are ignored and neglected socially, marginalised economically and ignored politically (Seetharam, 1994).

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 which will be legislated upon in all States incorporates salient provisions concerning political participation of women in local Government.

1. In all the Panchayats one-third seats will be reserved for women.
2. One-third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs to be reserved for women.

3. One-third offices of chairpersons of Panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for women.
4. Women and child development forms part of newly added Xlth Schedule of the Constitution (Rao, 1994).

It should therefore be a matter of national pride that India is the only country in world today that has not only paved the way for the creation of institutions of local self-government, but has reserved one-third of seats for women on them (Narayanan, 1994).

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) states political powers and access to decision making and authority are critical prerequisite for women's equality in national building. There are many bottle necks for women to participate in local self-government like time, cultural inhibition, male resistance and caste. Literacy is acquiring a prominent place in this aspect, which creates problems in writing and reading endorsement because they are not trained for such acts (Subha, 1995).

Leadership is a very important requisite for women to succeed in Panchayat because they can raise voice against corruption and wrong doers (Adavan, 1991). Women are not well established in politics but will prove their ability taking this opportunity as a challenge. For this, training is very important (Gupta, 1994).

## F. Related Studies

Singh and Gill (1995) had analysed the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the development of villages and examines how far the Amendments helped in decentralisation of powers, accelerating the pace of development as well as strengthening the democratic process. The information is collected from 58 village sarpanches of 29 villages from four districts in Punjab through personal interview method. Ninety five per cent of respondents were not aware of the Amendments in Panchayati Raj Institution. Ninety per cent of elected leaders were not fully aware of legislative, judicial, administrative or financial powers provided under Panchayati Raj System. Block Development Officer and technical staff attached to Panchayati Raj created hurdles in the smooth functioning of Panchayati Raj and Panchayat elections increased political and caste base in villages. Though lot of drawbacks existed in the present Panchayat System it has solved many local problems at village level. Encouraging unanimous election system, checking the expenditure of contesters in village election, minimising the political and bureaucratic interference, simplifying the process of utilising the grants of Panchayats, improving the awareness among village leaders are major suggestions offered for the smooth functioning of Panchayati Raj System in the State.

Chandrasekhar and Inbanathan (1991) had done a study on profile and participation of women Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayat members - the case of Karnataka. The information is collected from 218 women members of Zilla Panchayat out of 231 in state. The factors which hampered 90 per cent of elected women were traditional status in society, economic dependence on men, also 85 per cent of respondents have received poor education, women faced constraints from male folk and also experience. The suggestions for future studies are education and training for women to take up their responsibilities and function well. Also creating awareness to women about their reservation.

Abraham (1993) had conducted a study on socio-economic and political status of Panchayats and the structure of Panchayati Raj leadership in Kerala. The informations were collected from all the Panchayats in the state with help of interview schedule. In Kerala all the Panchayat Presidents are literates. The study revealed that rural population in Kerala opt for highly educated youngsters as presidents of Panchayat, Nairs found more representation and SC/ST found under representation.

Roy (1995) had conducted a study on emerging Panchayat leadership and polarisation of political power at grass root level in Pudukottai District of Tamil Nadu. The sample

consisted of 450 rural poor, 137 ward member and 38 Panchayat presidents. The study confirmed that the backward caste had started emerging but not in very large number. The main suggestion for future studies were giving leadership training and motivating backward caste people to take part in Panchayat.

Ghosh (1995) had analysed the women Panchayat members as heads of office in West Bengal. It was found that reservation was made in favour of SC and ST and women with the objective of bringing them into the main stream of development process. In the 1993 election percentage of women member together in all three tiers was 35. But, there was no representation in Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti and only in 5.77 per cent of Gram Panchayats there were women heads. Also the situation reflects that the political parties were not ready to accept women heads. The suggestion given by the author for future study is to provide adequate and constant training support for reaping the benefits of 73rd Amendment.

# Methodology

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the study on "Perception of Rural Women on Panchayati Raj in Salem District" is discussed under the following headings.

- A. Selection of Area
- B. Selection of the Sample
- C. Selection of the Method and Tools and
- D. Collection and Processing of Data.

#### A. Selection of Area

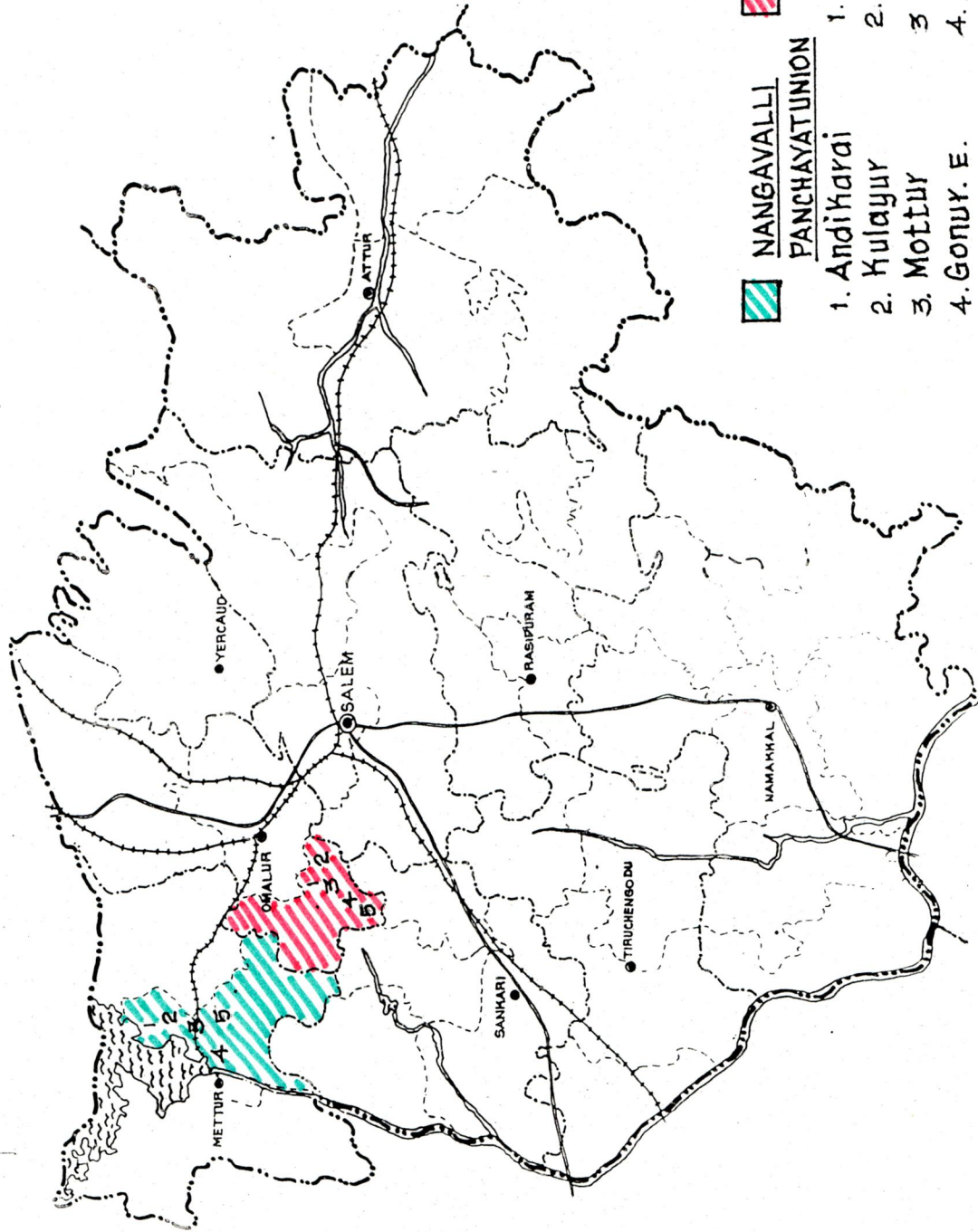
Nangavalli and Tharamangalam were the two blocks in Salem district selected, owing to their accessibility. Tharamangalam was near the district head quarters (13 kms) and Nangavalli was away from the head quarters (58 kms).

One village Panchayat from each block and five villages from each village Panchayat were randomly selected for the study, as given in the following Table I and Fig. 3.

TABLE I  
SELECTION OF THE VILLAGE FOR THE STUDY

Name of the selected block	Distance from district head quarters (Kms)	Name of the village Panchayat	Number of villages selected
Nangavalli	58	Gonur	5
Tharamangalam	13	Karukkalvadi	5

# MAP OF SALEM DISTRICT



**NANGAVALLI PANCHAYAT UNION**

**TARAMANGALAM PANCHAYAT UNION**

- |               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Andi Karai | 1. Topur              |
| 2. Kulayur    | 2. Kurukkalvadi. E    |
| 3. Mottur     | 3. Muthunayakan patti |
| 4. Gonuy. E.  | 4. Thadampatti        |
| 5. Kandapur   | 5. Alagapuram         |

Figure. 3 LOCAL F OF THE STUDY

## **B. Selection of the Sample**

A sample is the miniature picture of a cross section of the entire group of aggregate from which the sample is taken (Gupta, 1981). Since the study aimed at the general awareness of rural women on Panchayati Raj the sampling method was adopted for data collection from the rural women. According to Gupta (1981), sampling is the tool which enables us to draw conclusions about the characteristics of the population. For collecting the details about the villages, the Village Administrative Officers were contacted.

To study the awareness of rural women, from each of the ten villages, ten rural women in the age group of 18 to 60 years were selected at random. It made the size of the sample as 100.

## **C. Selection of the Method and Tools**

According to Gupta (1981), schedule is the device for obtaining answers to the questions in a form which is filled up by the interviewers or enumerators in a face-to-face situation with the respondents.

A detailed interview schedule was prepared for gathering informations from rural women (Appendix I). The general family background of the respondents, awareness of rural women about Panchayat election, voting in election, Panchayat administration, functions of Panchayats, 73rd Amendment, mahalir mandram and role of women in Panchayats.

#### D. Collection and Processing of Data

The rural women were approached in person by the investigator and data were collected after creating a good rapport with them. The data thus collected were analysed, processed and the results were tabulated. Chapter IV presents the results of the study.

## Results and Discussion

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study on "Perception of Rural Women on Panchayati Raj in Salem District" are discussed under the following heads:

- A. Background Information about the Respondents
- B. Perception of Rural Women about Panchayati Raj System.

##### A. Background Information about the Respondents

The background information about the selected respondents are presented in Table II.

TABLE II

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

S.No.	Aspects	Percentage (n:100)
1.	<b>Age (in years)</b>	
	Below 20	21
	20 - 30	33
	30 - 40	17
	40 - 50	16
	50 and above	13
2.	<b>Educational Status</b>	
	Illiterate	11
	Primary	24
	High School	27
	Higher Secondary	29
	Diploma/Degree	8
3.	<b>Occupational Pattern</b>	
	House wife	82
	Industrial labourer	5
	Teacher	5
	Noon meal organiser	4
	Typist	2
	Cooli	2
4.	<b>Marital Status</b>	
	Married	85
	Deserted	6
	Unmarried	5
	Widow	4
5.	<b>Type of family</b>	
	Nuclear	84
	Joint	16
6.	<b>Size of the family (no of members)</b>	
	1. 1 - 3	46
	2. 4 - 6	49
	3. 7 - 9	5

It is obvious that 50 per cent of the respondents belonged to the active age group of 20 to 40 years; 21 per cent were below 20 years and 29 were above 40 years.

It is clear from the table that 29 per cent of the respondents had higher secondary school education, 27 per cent had high school education, 24 per cent had primary school education and 8 per cent had college education. It was a welcoming fact that literacy rate was 89 per cent against the national literacy rate of 39.42 per cent (India 1992).

The study revealed that 82 per cent of the respondents were fulltime homemakers and of the others 16 per cent were employed in organised sector and two per cent were employed in unorganised sector, ie., coolies. The data also revealed that 85 per cent of the respondents were married, six per cent deserted, five per cent unmarried and four per cent were widows.

Eighty four per cent of the families of the respondents had shifted from the traditional joint family to nuclear family. It is observed from the data that a large percentage of 95 families belonged to small family ranging between 1-3 members (46 per cent), 4-6 members (49 per cent) and only a meager five per cent had large family size of 7-8 members. The average family size was 3.74 against national family

size of 5. The data revealed that 86 per cent of the respondents belonged to backward community, eight per cent Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe and only six per cent belonged to forward community.

The monthly income of the respondents family is presented in Table III.

**TABLE III**  
**DETAILS OF MONTHLY FAMILY INCOME**

S.No.	Monthly Income (in Rs.)	Percentage (n:100)
1.	Below 2000	58
2.	2001-4000	27
3.	4001-6000	15

The data revealed that 58 per cent families of respondents belonged to the income range of below Rs. 2000/month, 27 per cent belonged to the income range of Rs. 2001 to 4000/months and only 15 per cent of the respondents families belonged to income range of Rs. 4001 to 6000/month.

#### **B. Perception of Rural Women on Panchayati Raj System**

The perception of rural women on Panchayati Raj System was assessed by studying the awareness and opinion of women regarding the different aspects of the System. The aspects studied are discussed below:

1. Awareness of the respondents about their ex-Panchayat

Awareness of respondents about the Panchayat which prevailed earlier in their villages is given in Table IV.

TABLE IV

AWARENESS OF THE RESPONDENTS ABOUT THEIR EX-PANCHAYAT

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage (n:100)
1.	Name of their Panchayat	83
2.	Ex-president of their village Panchayat	52
3.	Visit of ward member	50
4.	Ex-chairman at block level	49
5.	Ex-woman member	20
6.	Panchayat ward number of the respondents	14
7.	Visit of the ex-president	14

A majority of 83 per cent of the respondents were able to name their Panchayat, 52 per cent were able to recollect the name of their ex-Panchayat president, 50 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the visit of their ward members and 49 per cent of the respondents recalled the name of their ex-chairman. Only 20 per cent of the respondents were able to recollect the name of the woman member in their Panchayat. It was alarming to note that 14 per cent of the respondents were only satisfied with the visit of ex-president and only 14 per cent of the respondents were aware of their ward number.

It was paining to note that not even a single respondent was aware of the 73rd Amendment. Only seven per cent of the respondents were aware of the percentage of reservation for women ie., 33 1/3 per cent.

## 2. Awareness of the respondents about the new Panchayati Raj System

Table V depicts the awareness of the respondents about the new Panchayati Raj System.

**TABLE V**  
**AWARENESS OF THE RESPONDENTS ABOUT THE NEW PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM**

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage (n:100)
1.	Duration of the Panchayat	44
2.	Hierarchies of Panchayat	39
3.	Leader of village Panchayat	26
4.	Leader of Panchayat Union Council	26
5.	Leader of district Panchayat	22
6.	Duration given for the elected members of the Panchayat to take up the charge	18
7.	Duration given for the elected Panchayat president to take up the charge	13
8.	Institution above village Panchayat	12
9.	Institution above Panchayat Union Council	10

It was sad to know that only 44 per cent of the respondents were aware of the duration of Panchayat (5 years) and 39 per cent were aware of the hierarchies of Panchayat (village Panchayat, Panchayat Union Council and district Panchayat). About 26 per cent of the respondents were aware of the leader of village Panchayat (president) and Panchayat Union Council (chairman) and 22 per cent of the respondents were aware of the leader of district Panchayat (chairman). Only about 18 per cent of the respondents were aware of the duration given to elected Panchayat members to take up their charge (ie., 3 months), and 13 per cent of the respondents were aware of the duration given to the Panchayat president to take up the charge (ie., 1 month). It was disheartening to note that only 12 per cent of the respondents were able to name the institution above village Panchayat (Panchayat Union Council) and only 10 per cent were able to name the institution above Panchayat Union Council (district Panchayat).

### **3. Awareness of the respondents about the election of representatives**

Table VI brings out the awareness of respondents about the methods of electing the different cadres of representatives in the Panchayat administration.

TABLE VI  
 AWARENESS OF THE RESPONDENTS ABOUT ELECTION OF  
 REPRESENTATIVES TO PANCHAYATS

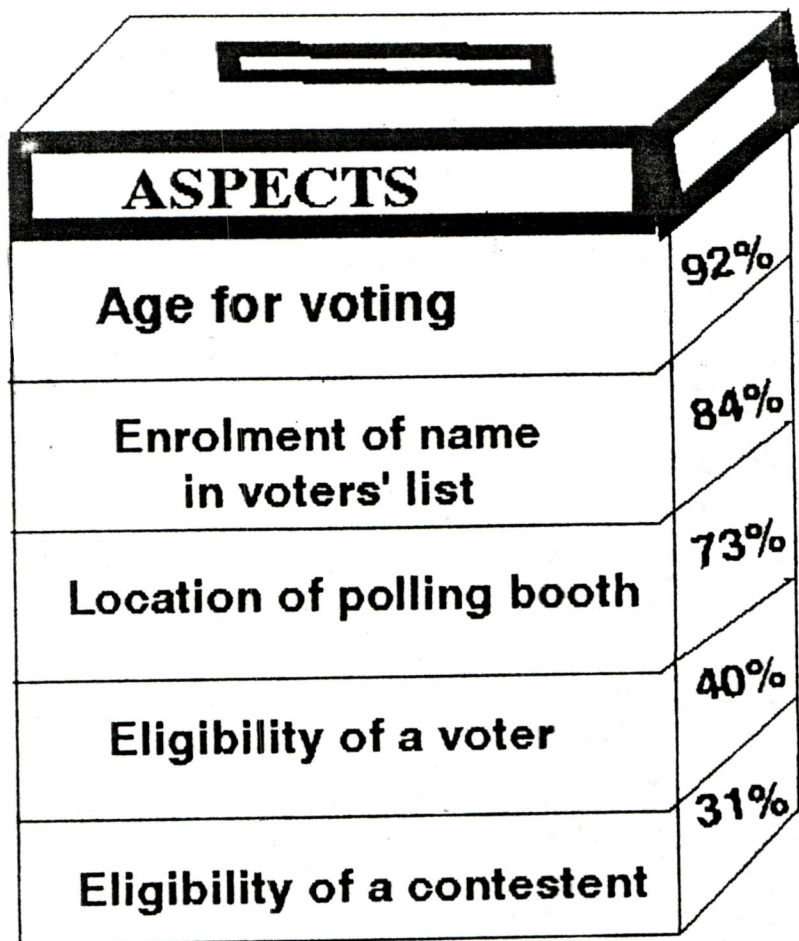
S. No.	Particulars	Percentage of respondents (n:100)
1.	Village Panchayat members	74
2.	President of village Panchayat	59
3.	Panchayat Union members	53
4.	Panchayat Union chairman	39
5.	District Panchayat members	24
6.	District Panchayat chairman	24

It is appreciable to know that majority of the respondents were aware of the methods of electing the Panchayat member (74 per cent), Panchayat president (59 per cent), Panchayat Union Council member (53 per cent) and Panchayat Union Council chairman (39 per cent). As the stages go up in the administration, level of awareness of the women was reducing, only 24 per cent were aware of the methods of electing district Panchayat members and its chairman. The study reveals that 69 per cent of the respondents were aware of the population of their hamlet in which they lived, 39 per cent were aware of the population of their village Panchayat i.e., (5000 and above), 12 per cent of respondents were aware of the population of

Panchayat Union Council (15,000-20,000) and district Panchayat (25,000 and above).

#### **4. Awareness of the respondents about the details of Panchayat Elections**

An analysis on the awareness of the respondents about Panchayat elections revealed that 92 per cent of the respondents were aware of the minimum age for voting (ie., 18 years), 84 per cent of respondents were aware of the need for enrolling their names in voters' list and 73 per cent of respondents were aware of the location of polling booths for exercising their franchise (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4. AWARENESS OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT ELECTION**

## Awareness of the respondents about a voter and a contestant

Table VII brings out a clear picture of the awareness of the respondents about the eligibility for a voter and a contestant.

TABLE VII

### AWARENESS ABOUT THE ELIGIBILITY FOR A VOTER AND A CONTESTANT

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage* (n:100)
1.	<b>Eligibility of the voter</b>	
1.	Should have completed 18 years	92
2.	Should belong to the same village	15
3.	Must be an Indian citizen	15
4.	Name must be enrolled in voters' list	10
2.	<b>Eligibility for a contestant</b>	
1.	Must have completed 21 years	49
2.	Should belong to same locality	12
3.	Should not be a Government employee	12
4.	Should be an Indian citizen	7
5.	No response	30

\* Multiple response.

It was satisfying to note that 92 per cent of the respondents were aware of the age for voting (18 years); 15 per cent were aware that the voter must belong to the same locality and be an Indian citizen and 10 per cent replied that their name must be enrolled in voters' list. This indicates that the voters are enlightened to cast their votes.

The data revealed that 49 per cent respondents were aware of minimum age for contesting (21 years); 12 per cent replied that the nominee should belong to the same locality; seven per cent replied that the contestant should not be a Government employee and 30 per cent had no reply. It reveals that the voters are able to judge the contestant for whom they have to vote.

#### Awareness of the respondents on the merits and demerits of election

Election is very important for a democratic country which has merits and also demerits. Table VIII brings out the awareness of the respondents on the merits and demerits of election.

**TABLE VIII**  
**MERITS AND DEMERITS OF ELECTION**

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage* (n:100)
<b>1. Merits</b>		
	1. Good leaders can be elected	89
	2. Abolishing corruption by electing proper leaders	44
	3. Better administration	42
	4. Proper functioning of the Government	32
<b>2. Demerits</b>		
	1. Corruption due to bribery	89
	2. Group clash	70
	3. Waste of money, energy and time	31
	4. Electing wrong leaders will lead to problem	20
* Multiple response		

According to 89 per cent of the respondents, election helps in electing good leaders, for their community, which would help in abolishing corruption (44 per cent), better administration (42 per cent) and proper functioning of the Government (32 per cent). As every coin has two sides the second side of election has demerits also. The respondents felt that the election could bring corruption due to bribery (89 per cent) and group clash (70 per cent) in the public.

**Awareness of the respondents about the functions of the president, vice-president and members:**

Table IX depicts the awareness of the respondents about the functions of Panchayat president, vice-president and members.

TABLE IX

## FUNCTIONS OF PRESIDENT, VICE-PRESIDENT AND WARD MEMBERS

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage* (n:100)
1	<b>President</b>	
	1. Preside over the village Panchayat meetings	40
	2. Carry out works related to village development	32
	3. Solving local problems	31
	4. Verify the income and expenditure of the village Panchayat	12
2.	<b>Vice-President</b>	
	1. Preside over the village Panchayat meetings in the absence of the president.	45
	2. Performing the functions of president in his absence	40
	3. Helping president in his work	30
3.	<b>Members</b>	
	1. Taking the village problems to the notice of the president	44
	2. Help in proper functioning of village Panchayat	40
	3. Cross checking ledgers	32
* Multiple response.		

The respondents were aware of the functions of the Panchayat president as, presiding village Panchayat meetings (40 per cent), carrying out works related to village development (32 per cent) and solving local problems (31 per cent). The functions of vice-president as per the respondents were, performing president's functions in his absence (40 per cent) and helping president in his functions

(30 per cent). The functions of ward members were, taking village problems to the president's notice (44 per cent), helping in the proper functioning of Panchayat (40 per cent) and checking the records and registers maintained at village Panchayat Office (32 per cent).

#### **Awareness of the respondents about Panchayat Meetings**

Table X gives a clear picture of the awareness of the respondents about the interval between the Panchayat meetings.

**TABLE X**  
**INTERVAL BETWEEN PANCHAYAT MEETINGS**

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage (n:100)
1.	Village Panchayat	14
2.	Panchayat Union Council	12
3.	District Panchayat	10

The awareness of the respondents about the interval between the meetings conducted at the different levels of Panchayati Raj System seems to be very meagre, as only 14 per cent were aware of the interval between village Panchayat meetings, (ie., one month), 12 per cent were aware of the interval between Panchayat Union Council meetings, (ie., once in two months) and 10 per cent were aware of the interval between district Panchayat meetings (ie., once in

three months). The majority ie., 86 per cent, 88 per cent and 90 per cent were not aware of the details of meetings of village Panchayat, Panchayat Union Council and district Panchayat respectively.

### Awareness of the respondents about the functions of Panchayats

Table XI brings out the awareness of the respondents on the functions of Panchayats.

TABLE XI  
FUNCTIONS OF PANCHAYATS

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage* (n:100)
<b>1.</b>	<b>Village Panchayat</b>	
	1. Constructing and maintaining roads	8
	2. Building drainage	65
	3. Building latrine	65
	4. Providing safe drinking water	35
	5. Establishing burial ground	13
<b>2.</b>	<b>Panchayat Union Council</b>	
	1. Building hospitals	75
	2. Establishing mother and child care centres	60
	3. Enrolling births and deaths	33
	4. Encourage to start small-scale industries	16
<b>3.</b>	<b>District Panchayat</b>	
	1. Supervising lower levels	61
	2. Providing consultation for rural development programmes	25
	3. Maintenance of schools	23

\* Multiple response.

It was satisfying to know that the respondents had good awareness about the functions of Panchayats. According to the views of the respondents the functions were to fulfil the basic needs of the public as shown in the above table.

#### Awareness of the respondents about the powers and Income of Panchayat

Table XII brings out the awareness of the respondents on the powers of the village Panchayat.

**TABLE XII**  
**POWERS OF VILLAGE PANCHAYATS**

S.No.	Powers	Percentage* (n:100)
1.	Collecting house tax and water tax	90
2.	Maintaining social justice	49
3.	Providing basic amenities and facilities to the village	43
4.	Implementing government programmes	29
* Multiple response.		

The respondents were aware of the powers of the village Panchayats, particularly collecting house and water tax (90 per cent).

Table XIII brings out the awareness of the respondents on the sources of income for the village Panchayat.

**TABLE XIII**  
**SOURCES OF INCOME FOR VILLAGE PANCHAYATS**

S.No.	Income	Percentage* (n:100)
1.	House tax	54
2.	Water tax	54
3.	Vehicle tax	49
4.	Occupation tax	49
5.	Land tax	40

\* Multiple response.

Fifty four per cent of the respondents were aware of house and water tax as the sources of income for village Panchayats and 49 per cent each were aware of the occupation tax and vehicle tax and 40 per cent were aware of land tax as the sources of income for village Panchayat.

#### **Awareness about the problems in the village**

Table XIV shows the awareness of the respondents about the problems prevailing in their villages and the ways of approaching the Panchayats for solving the same.

TABLE XIV

## AWARENESS ABOUT THE PROBLEMS AND APPROACHES TO SOLVE THEM

S.No.	Particulars	Percentage* (n:100)
1.	Problems prevailing	
	1. Inadequate drinking water facility	54
	2. Poor sanitation	51
	3. Lack of transport facility	49
	4. Not having adequate street lights	47
2.	Mode of Approach	
	1. Organising groups	84
	2. Individually approaching the Panchayat	48
	3. Submitting petitions to Panchayat	35

\* Multiple response.

The respondents were aware of the problems prevailing in the locality. It is interesting to note that 84 per cent approached the Panchayat as a group; 48 per cent approached individually and 35 per cent submitted petitions to find solutions to the problems.

#### Awareness of the respondents about the factors inhibiting the participation of women in Panchayats

Table XV brings out the awareness of the respondents about the factors inhibiting the participation of women in Panchayats.

TABLE XV  
FACTORS INHIBITING PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

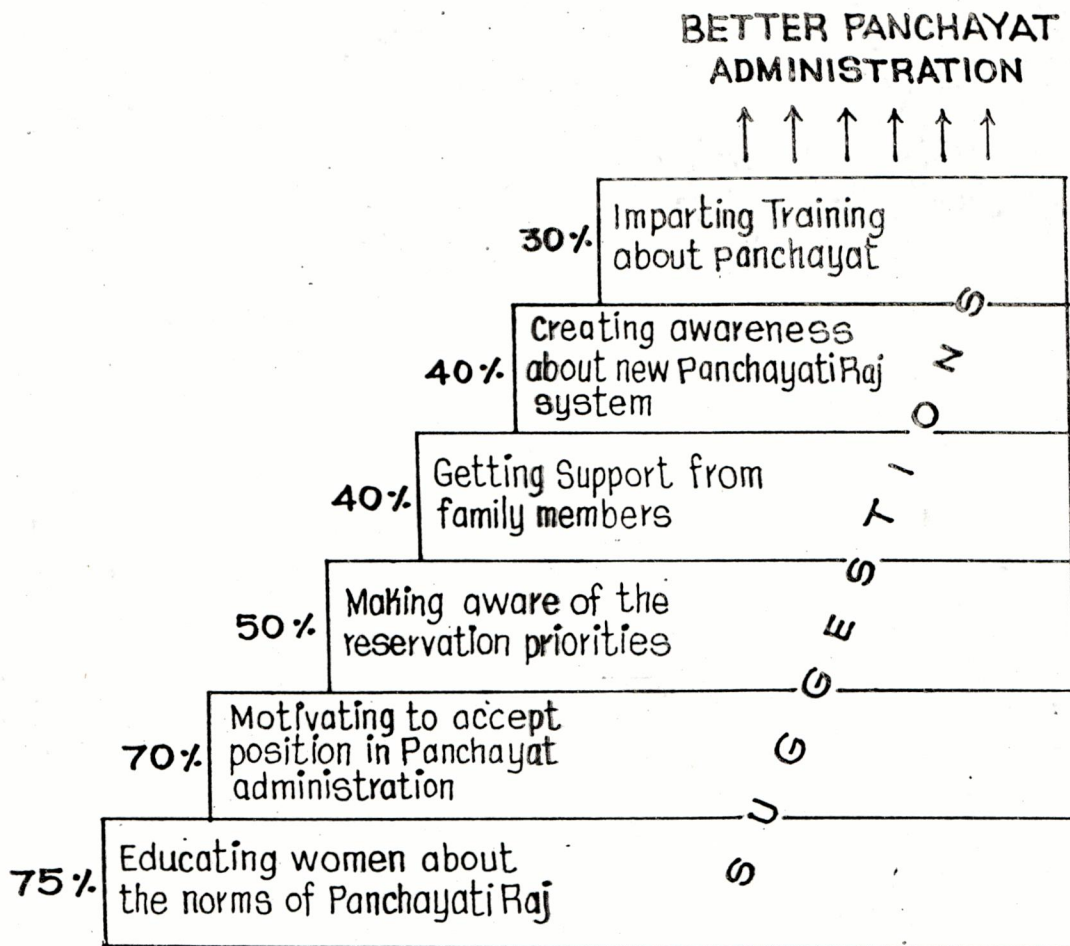
S.No.	Particulars	Percentage* (n:100)
1.	Lack of education for women	80
2.	Lack of awareness among women about public life	80
3.	Economic insecurity	75
4.	Suppression of women by men	70
5.	Dual responsibility for women	69
6.	Lack of support from family members for women's participation	64
7.	Lack of motivation for women from family members	64
8.	Social insecurity for women	59
9.	Women are not having courage to participate in public life	59

\* Multiple response.

The major factors inhibiting women's participation in Panchayat, as expressed by the respondents were, lack of education as well as awareness (80 per cent). It was stressed by them that the women should have economic security and motivation by the men as well as family members, to have public participation.

**Suggestions given by the respondents to increase the participation of women in Panchayats**

The major suggestions given by the respondents themselves to increase women's participation were imparting education about the norms of Panchayati Raj (75 per cent), motivating women to accept position in Panchayat administration (70 per cent) and making women aware of the reservation priorities (50 per cent) (Fig. 5).



**SUGGESTIONS GIVEN BY RESPONDENTS TO INCREASE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATS**

Figure. 5

**Awareness of the respondents about leadership qualities needed for women**

Table XVI brings out the awareness of the respondents about leadership qualities for women.

**TABLE XVI**  
**AWARENESS OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES FOR WOMEN**

S.No.	Qualities	Percentage* (n:100)
1.	Patience to listen to problems	68
2.	Punctuality in work	68
3.	Honest in all aspects of life	54
4.	Having great perseverance	54
5.	Good education	54

\* Multiple response.

Leadership is an important requisite to participate in Panchayat. The main qualities of a good woman leader as listed out by the respondents were, patience, punctuality, honesty, perseverance and having good education.

Mahalir mandram is a village level organisation, which aims to develop leadership among women. Forty per cent of the respondents were aware of the presence of mahalir mandrams in their villages and only 20 per cent had enrolled as the members of the mahalir mandrams.

## Summary and Conclusion

## V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The perception of rural women on Panchayati Raj in Salem district of Tamil Nadu was studied by assessing the extent of awareness of rural women about Panchayati Raj, their rights and responsibilities in Panchayati Raj System and the extent of women's participation in Panchayati Raj System. One hundred rural women from ten villages belonging to Nangavalli and Tharamangalam blocks of Salem district were randomly selected for the study. The data were collected by the investigator with the help of an interview schedule. The facts collected for the study are summarised below:

### **Background information about the respondents**

It was noted that 50 per cent of the respondents belonged to the active age group of 20 to 40 years. Eighty five per cent of the respondents were married. The size of the family was small (1-3 members) in 46 per cent of the families, average (4-6 members) in 49 per cent of the families and large (7-9 members) in five per cent of the families. Eighty per cent of the families had shifted from traditional joint family to nuclear family system. The literacy rate of respondents was 89 per cent against national literacy of 39.42 (India, 1992).

The occupational pattern of the respondents revealed that majority of women under study (82 per cent) were house wives, five per cent were industrial labourers, five per cent were teachers, four per cent were noon meal organisers, two per cent were employed as typist in organised sector and two per cent were employed in unorganised sector i.e., coolies.

Fifty eight per cent of the families of the respondents belonged to the income range of below Rs. 2000/month; 27 per cent of the families of the respondents belonged to the income range of Rs. 2000 to 4000/month and 15 per cent of the families of the respondents belonged to income range of Rs. 4000 to 6000/month.

About 86 per cent of the respondents belonged to backward community, eight per cent belonged to Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes and six per cent belonged to forward community.

#### **Perception of rural women about Panchayati Raj System**

##### **Awareness of rural women about the Panchayat**

It was satisfying to note that 89 per cent of the respondents were able to recall the name of the ex-presidents, 49 per cent recollected the name of ex-chairman and only 26 per cent of the respondents were able to mention the name of the women member in their Panchayat. Fifty per

cent of the respondents were happy to say that their Panchayat ward members had visited their wards.

Among the respondents, no one woman was aware of the 73rd constitutional Amendment. Only a meagre percentage of the respondents (7 per cent) were aware of the reservation for women ie., 33 1/3 per cent.

#### **Awareness of the respondents about the new Panchayati Raj System**

About 44 per cent of the respondents were aware of the duration of a Panchayat as 5 years. The hierarchies in the Panchayati Raj System ie., village Panchayat, Panchayat Union Council and district Panchayat were known to 39 per cent of the respondents. About 26 per cent of the respondents were aware that the Panchayat president is the leader of village Panchayat and Panchayat chairman is the leader of Panchayat Union Council and only 22 per cent of the respondents were aware that district Panchayat chairman is the leader of district Panchayat.

The data revealed that only 18 per cent of the respondents were aware of the duration (three months) given to the elected members of the Panchayat for taking charge of their postings and 13 per cent of the respondents were aware of the duration (one month) given to the elected Panchayat president for taking charge of their postings.

In the three-tier System of Panchayati Raj only 12 per cent of the respondents were aware of the institution above village Panchayat ie., Panchayat Union Council and 10 per cent were aware of the institution above Panchayat Union Council ie., District Panchayat.

**Awareness of the respondents about the election of leaders to the Panchayat**

More than 50 per cent of the respondents were aware of the method of electing members and leaders to village Panchayat and Panchayat Union Council. Only 24 per cent of the respondents were aware of the method of electing district Panchayat member and its chairman. It shows that when the stages in administration went up the awareness of the respondents was getting reduced.

The study revealed that 39 per cent of the respondents were aware of the population of a village Panchayat (5000 and above). Twelve per cent were aware of population of Panchayat Union Council (15,000-20,000) and 12 per cent were aware of the population of a district Panchayat (25,000 and above).

**Awareness of the respondents about Panchayat Election**

An analysis on the awareness of the respondents about Panchayat election revealed that 92 per cent of the

respondents were aware of the minimum age for casting the vote, 84 per cent were aware of the need for enrolling their names in voters' list and 73 per cent were aware of the location of polling booths.

About 92 per cent of the respondents were aware of the main requisites of a voter, which indicates that the voters are enlightened to cast their votes. About 49 per cent of the respondents were aware of the requisites of a contestant. It indicates that the women were in a position to judge the contestant in an appropriate manner.

According to the respondents, election helps in electing good leaders (89 per cent), abolishing the corruption (44 per cent) and having better administration (42 per cent). At the same time, the respondents viewed that the election might give way for corruption due to bribery (89 per cent) and create group clash (70 per cent).

#### **Awareness of the respondents about the functions of Panchayats**

The respondents were aware of the functions of the Panchayat president as, presiding over the village Panchayat meetings (40 per cent) and carrying out work related to village development (32 per cent). The respondents were also aware of the functions of vice-president as, presiding village Panchayat meetings in the absence of the president

(45 per cent), performing the functions of the president in his absence (40 per cent) and helping president in all his functioning in the Panchayat. The functions of ward members, according to the respondents were, taking village problems to the notice of the president (44 per cent), helping in the proper functioning of the village Panchayat (40 per cent) and checking the records and registers maintained at village Panchayat Office (32 per cent).

Fourteen per cent of the respondents were aware about the interval between meetings conducted at village Panchayat (ie., one month); 12 per cent were aware about the interval between meetings conducted at Panchayat Union Council (ie., once in two months) and 10 per cent were aware of the interval between district Panchayat meetings (ie., once in three months).

The respondents were aware of the functions of village Panchayat as, constructing and maintaining roads (78 per cent) and building drainage and latrine (65 per cent). The functions of Panchayat Union Council were building hospitals (75 per cent) and establishing mother and child care centres (60 per cent). The functions of district Panchayat were supervising lower levels (61 per cent) and providing consultation for rural development programme (25 per cent). Though there are many other functions for village Panchayat,

Panchayat Union Council and district Panchayat, the women were aware only of certain functions as above, which calls for creating awareness among women.

The powers of Panchayat as per the respondents were collecting house and water tax (90 per cent), maintaining social justice (49 per cent) and providing basic amenities and facilities to the community (43 per cent). The respondents were aware of the source of income of the Panchayat as house and water tax (54 per cent), vehicle and occupation tax (49 per cent) and land tax (40 per cent).

The respondents approached the Panchayats to solve the problems in the locality. The important mode of approach by the respondents were organising local people into groups (84 per cent); 48 per cent individually approached for help from Panchayats and 35 per cent expressed that they submit petitions explaining their problems to be solved.

The factors, as expressed by the respondents, which inhibited women's participation in Panchayat were lack of education and awareness (80 per cent), lack of economic security (75 per cent), suppression by men (70 per cent), dual responsibility (69 per cent), lack of support and motivation from the family (64 per cent).

To increase women's participation in Panchayats the suggestions given by the respondents themselves were, educating women about the norms of the Panchayats (75 per cent), motivating them to accept responsibilities in the Panchayat administration (70 per cent) and creating awareness about reservation priorities for women (50 per cent). They wanted support from the family members for taking active part in public life (40 per cent) and 30 per cent were ready to undergo training for accepting responsibilities in the Panchayats.

Forty per cent of the respondents were aware of the presence of mahalir mandram in their locality and only 20 per cent had registered as members in the mahalir mandrams. All the women need motivation to become the members of the mahalir mandram in their villages. According to the respondents, the leadership qualities needed for a woman were patience to listen to problems and punctuality (68 per cent), honesty and good education (54 per cent).

### **Recommendations**

From the data collected for the study and observations of the investigator, the following recommendations emerged:

1. For reaping the benefits of 73rd Amendment it is desirable that adequate and continuous training support is to be provided to rural women through the Government and voluntary organisations.

2. Motivation and support should be given to rural women to break open the shell and participate actively in public life. Women should be motivated to come forward to contest in the elections, since 1/3 seats are reserved for women in Panchayati Raj System.
3. Role of women in Panchayats can be included in the curriculum of Higher education, with special emphasis to teaching, research and extension.

### Conclusion

It is evident from the study that the awareness of rural women about Panchayati Raj was not satisfying. Rural women were aware of the general facts like election, powers of Panchayat and functions of Panchayat, only to certain extent. But their awareness about new Panchayati Raj System, functions of the elected leaders, features of 73rd Amendment and reservation for women need to be improved. They need motivation and training for better participation in Panchayati Raj System.

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# Appendices

APPENDIX I

AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE TO ELICIT INFORMATION ABOUT THE PERCEPTION OF  
RURAL WOMEN ON PANCHAYATI RAJ IN SALEM DISTRICT

I. General Information

1. Name Date :
2. Address
3. Age
4. Caste
5. Educational Qualification
6. Occupation
7. Marital Status Married/Unmarried
8. Type of family Nuclear/Joint

II. Family Background

S. No.	Name	Age	Sex		Relation to head of the family	Education		Occupation	Monthly Income in Rs.
			M	F		Illiterate	Literate		
						Under going	Completed		

### III. Awareness About Panchayati Raj

1. To which Panchayat does your village belong?

2. Do you have Panchayat Office in your village? Yes/No

If yes, have you visited it Yes/No

If yes, where is it located

3. Can you give the name of your previous Panchayat president?

4. What is meant by village Panchayat?

5. Do you know the hierarchy which we follow for Panchayati Raj in our country?

Yes/No

If yes, mentions

6. Can you mention the levels of Panchayat?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

7. Do you know which is the next higher level to village Panchayat?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

8. Do you know who leads village Panchayat?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

9. Do you know, who leads the Panchayat Union Council?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

10. Can you name the Chairman of Panchayat Union Council?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

**IV. Informations about Panchayat Election**

1. What is the interval between two elections?
2. How many wards are there in your village?
3. To which ward do you belong?
4. How is the village Panchayat member elected?
  - a) Directly
  - b) By president
  - c) By Government
5. How is the president of village Panchayat elected?
  - a) Directly by people
  - b) By the Panchayat Union Council chairman
  - c) By the Government
6. How is the Panchayat Union Council member elected?
  - a) Directly by people
  - b) By village Panchayat members
  - c) By Government
7. How is the Panchayat Union Council chairman elected?
  - a) Directly by people
  - b) By Panchayat Union Council members
  - c) By Government

8. How is the district Panchayat member elected?

- a) Directly by people
- b) By District Collector
- c) By Panchayat Union Council members

9. How is the chairman of district Panchayat elected?

- a) Directly by people
- b) By District Collector
- c) Selecting one among the district/Panchayat members

10. Do you know the time that can be taken by the elected Panchayat member to take charge?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

11. Do you know the time that can be taken by elected leaders to take charge?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

12. Do you know when the last Panchayat election took place in Tamil Nadu?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

13. Do you know what is the population of your Panchayat?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

14. Do you know what should be the population of village Panchayat?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

15. Do you know what the population of a Panchayat Union Council should be?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

16. Can you mention what should be the population of the district Panchayat be?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

**V. Administration**

1. List the functions of Panchayat President?
2. List the functions of vice-president of village Panchayat?
3. List the functions of village Panchayat members?
4. Do you know what should be the interval between two village Panchayat meetings?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

5. Do you know what should be the interval between two Panchayat Union Council meetings?

Yes/No

If yes, mentions

6. Do you know what should be the interval between two district Panchayat meetings?

Yes/No

If yes, mentions

7. Do you know who presides over the village Panchayat meetings?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

#### VI. Functions

1. What are the functions of village Panchayat?

- a) Constructing and maintaining roads
- b) Constructing drainage
- c) Constructing public latrine
- d) Cleaning the streets
- e) Providing safe drinking water
- f) Establishing burial grounds
- g) Any other

2. What are the functions of Panchayat Union Council?

- a) Building hospitals
- b) Building mothers child care centres
- c) Building orphanage
- d) Registering births and deaths
- e) Encouraging to start small scale industries
- f) Any other

3. What are the functions of district Panchayat?

- a) Supervising the works of other two levels
- b) Providing consultation for rural development programme
- c) Maintaining hospitals
- d) Any other

4. What are the powers of Panchayat?

- a) Collecting house tax
- b) Collecting water tax
- c) Maintaining social justice
- d) Fulfilling the necessities of the village
- e) Others

5. What are the source of income for Panchayat?

- a) House tax
- b) Water tax
- c) Land tax
- d) Vehicle tax
- e) Occupation tax
- f) Money from lease
- g) Others

6. Will the Panchayat president visit your village often?

Yes/No

If yes, how often

7. Will the village Panchayat member and president meet and know your problems?

Yes/No

If yes, how often

8. Will you take your problems to the Panchayat?

Yes/No

If yes, how?

- a) Individually
- b) By organising groups
- c) Through petition
- d) Any other

9. What type of problems do you take?

- a) Water
- b) Sanitation
- c) Transport
- d) Electricity
- e) Any other

#### **VII. Voting in Election**

1. Have you voted in Panchayat election?

Yes/No

If yes, how many times?

If no, why?

2. What is the minimum age for voting?

- a) 15 Years
- b) 18 Years
- c) 21 Years

3. Who is a voter?

4. What are the qualities of a voter?

- a) Should have completed 18 years
- b) Must be a Indian citizen
- c) Must be belong to the same village
- d) Name must be enrolled in voters' list.

6. Who is a contestant?

7. What are the qualifications of a contestant?

- a) Must have completed 21 years
- b) Must be a non-Government employee
- c) Must be an Indian citizen

8. How many times can a person vote in one election?

- a) Once
- b) Twice
- c) Thrice

9. Is your name and your family members name enroled in voters' list?

Yes/No

If no, have you taken the measures to enroll your name?

Yes/No

10. Do you know how to exercise your franchise?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

11. Is the polling booth located in your village?

Yes/No

If yes, where

12. Is election necessary?

Yes/No

Reasons

13. Can women take part in Panchayat elections?

Yes/No

If no, why?

14. List the advantages of election

15. List of disadvantages or illeffects of election

16. On what basis do you vote?

a) On your own wish

b) Because of duty

c) Force by husband

d) Threatening by politicians

17. Do you think that women should vote?

Yes/No

Reasons

18. Do you know what is the percentage of reservation for women in Panchayat?

Yes/No

If yes, mention

#### **VIII. 73rd Amendment**

1. What are the important points of 73rd Amendment?

2. What are the previleges for women in the 73rd Amendment?

3. What are the problems without the existence of Panchayati Raj?

3. Do you wish to undergo training to improve your leadership quality?

Yes/No

4. If yes what all do you wish to have as the content?