



**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
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Engendering Local Governance:

A Case from Rural Karnataka

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Foreword

Decentralization is the key to the speedy, effective and participatory process of delivery of public services to the needy through development programmes of the Panchayat Raj System. The system was revived in 1994 through the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution introducing the three-tier local self-government at the village, block and district levels. This prescribes reservation of seats for women at all levels and all positions. This has launched a silent revolution in the social fabric of rural, tribal and urban population with women from all castes, religions, classes, ages and literacy levels being elected to Panchayat as members and heads of local bodies.

The inclusion of women's representation in the Panchayats is in itself the *prima facie* indicator of their political empowerment, a step towards improving the gender relations in the household. This is enabling the process of release from the patriarchal order to provide economic, emotional and legal support to women through grassroots leaders who too are women. The legal / constitutional enactment is the necessary condition, while the interplay among factors *inter alia*, caste, class, region, education, political party, prior experience in politics is the sufficient condition. These facilitate the process of empowerment of women and gender-based development.

This monograph is based on a study by Prof Manjula Bharathy of TISS, Prof N Sivanna and Dr Gayathridevi of ISEC. They took field studies in a cross-section of districts in Karnataka that are regionally spread in the developed and backward parts including men and women elected representatives of the Grama Panchayats. Using quantitative and qualitative techniques for analysis, the study concludes that despite several years of reservation in their favour, women in grassroots political institutions of planning and governance continue to depend on male relatives and officials for delegating roles and responsibilities. There is also reinforcement of hegemonic power structures and polarization of society along caste and religion. Thus, the devolution of power to women has largely remained symbolic, due to lack of facilitative support from familial and political hierarchy.

Even when women members gained self-confidence and courage to manage their leadership efficiently and effectively, their own perceptions regarding feminine roles, equality of status and opportunities, and attitude towards access to resources like credit and decision-making process were not in tune with expectations as responsible leaders and champions of cause

of women in their constituency. The study has highlighted that women have been traveling between genuine participation and proxy participation. Their contribution, true to their rights, has to come from their knowledge and further empowerment for enhancing their contribution to make a substantive difference.

The Institute places on record the contributions of Professors Manjula Bharathy, Sivanna and Gayathridevi, who richly deserve appreciation for bringing out this monograph. This an excellent addition to the literature on gender development through political empowerment and participation, and is useful to researchers, PhD students and policy makers.

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