CHAPTER – I    INTRODUCTION

• Global Scenario of Women
• Status of Indian Women
• Trends in Sex Ratio
• Maternal Mortality Rate
• Women’s Literacy
• Work Participation Rate of Women
• Women’s Political Participation
• Women and Violence
• Dalit Women in India
• Practice of Untouchability
• Atrocities against Dalit Women
• Efforts for Empowering Dalit Women
• Legal Measures of Women Rights
• Reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions
• Need for the Study
• Statement of the Problem
• Title of the Study
• Objectives of the Study
• Operational Definition of Terms
• Chapterization
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“When a woman moves forward, the family moves, the society moves and the nation moves”
- Swami Vivekananda

Women, who constitute nearly half of the world population, play a highly significant role in the society. No one can deny that women hold key position in the progress of a family, society, nation and world at large. Historically, in the early agrarian culture, women were almost on equal footing with men. Families were producing units and women received recognition by their substantial contribution. However, in the days when machines were introduced, women were relegated to the background and were exploited as they were paid less than men. But the industrial revolution made women to progress towards equality with men (Bryant, 2002). Since the past hundred years are so, women have gained a lot of ground in work force, education, politics and even more power in their own households (Leanne, 2009). Some of the names of powerful women who made their mark in history are Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher and Benazir Butto. But these are only a few names among the millions and millions of women in the world. The reality is that a large number of women are left behind to suffer a secondary status to men.

Global Scenario of Women

Worldwide the female Human Development Index value averages about 8% lower than the male Human Development Index value. The Human Development Index value in a composite statistic of life expectancy, education and income indices used to rank countries. The gap is small (3%) in countries of very high human development but about 17% in countries of low human development (UNDP, 2014). As far as health of the women is concerned, maternal mortality is unacceptably high. About 800 women die from pregnancy or
childbirth related complications around the world every day. In 2013, 289 000 women died
during and following pregnancy and childbirth. Almost all of these deaths occurred in low-
resource settings and most could have been prevented (World Health Organization, 2014).

The deficits in education are wide. Women form two thirds of the illiterate
population. While countries have made progress in girls’ education, the gender gap persists
even in primary school in the least developed countries (Women Environment and
Development Organization, 2006). On average 60% of women age is 25 years and older have
at least secondary education compared with 67 % of men. More women are in poverty than
men. The wage given to women is comparatively less than that of men. It is reported that
although women represent half of the world’s people, they make up 70% of the world’s poor
(ILO, 2014).

On average women occupied 21% of seats in national parliament (UNDP, 2014).
Obviously they wield much less political power than men. Also women lag behind men in
labour market participation (51% compared with 77%). Globally women’s participation in
the labour market remained steady hovering around 52%. The gap between participation rate
of women and men has narrowed slightly in the last 20 years. Over the years women have
entered various traditionally male dominated occupations (UNO, 2010).

According to UNO (2010), the violence against women is a universal phenomenon.
Women are subjected to different forms of violence – physical, sexual, psychological and
economic - with both within and outside their homes. Another important point to note is that
in many third world countries women live in a state of subjugation and misery than women in
developed countries.

**Status of Indian Women**

The status of women in India is considerably low. India is still a male dominated
country. Women are often considered inferior to men. Legal protection has only a limited
effect where patriarchy rules high. Though Indian women have occupied high positions like President, Prime Minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Leader of the opposition party, etc., women in India generally are exposed to numerous social evils. In terms of the Global Gender Gap, India ranks 113 out of 116 countries examined (Haussmann and Zahidi, 2011). In terms of Gender related Development Index (GDI), India occupied 99th place out of 130 countries considered. It is a matter of concern that India still ranks first among the 12 countries that account for two third of the under five and maternal mortality in the world (Chakraborty, 2012).

**Trends in Sex Ratio**

Sex ratio is the number of female per thousand males which is a significant indicator of the status of women. The trends of both overall sex ratio and child sex ratio are shown in Figure 1.1.

![Comparative Trends in Overall and Child Sex Ratios](image)

**Figure 1.1**

Source: Census 1951 - 2011

It is clear that the overall sex ratio was declined from 1951-1971. However, during the next ten years it rose slightly. Again over the next ten years there was a decrease. The latest
trend that is from 1991-2011 the overall sex ratio has been increasing steadily. This is a healthy trend.

As for child sex ratio is concerned figure 1.1 showed that there has been a steady declined since 1951. This is a factor which causes concern. The major reasons for the decline in child sex ratio are female foeticide and female infanticide. The two must be arrested so that one may be able to increase the status of women.

**Maternal Mortality Rate**

Health is an important factor that contributes to human wellbeing and economic growth. Poor health is considered as the major constraint to development. Health being the basic right of all individuals, everyone is entitled to have quality health care service, safe drinking water, sanitation and so on. Currently, women in India face a multitude of health problems which ultimately affect the aggregate economic output. Addressing the gender, class or ethnic disparities that exist in healthcare and improving the health outcomes can contribute to economic gain through the creation of quality human resource increased levels of savings and investment (Pathak, 2012).

**Figure 1.2**

![Trend in Maternal Mortality Rate (%)](image)

Source: Office of Registrar General of India, 2013
As per the figure 1.2 revealed that Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) has declined by 16 percent from 212 during 2007-09 to 178 during 2010-12. This trend clearly brings out that Maternal Mortality Rate has been declining steadily from 1997-2012. However, India is hopeful of reducing Maternal Mortality Rate by 2015.

Women’s Literacy

Education is the prime avenue for empowering women in their life and also is an important tool for controlling the social environment. This process of empowering entails much more than awareness of alternatives. According to Sridevi (2005), higher level of education leads to higher level of empowerment. Ahamad and Sultan (2004) also found a positive relation between education and women empowerment. By educating women, a country can reduce poverty, improve productivity, erase population pressure and offer its children a better future. The literacy rate of women in India and Tamil Nadu is depicted in table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Tamil Nadu</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>73.54</td>
<td>64.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>91.80</td>
<td>82.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 2011

Table 1.1 showed that in India both in urban as well as rural areas women were less literate than men. In Tamil Nadu also the same condition prevailed. Compared to the literacy level of women in India, the literacy level of women in state of Tamil Nadu was higher.

Work Participation Rate of Women

The work participation rate indicates to a great extent the economic empowerment of women in the society. The status of women is intimately connected with their economic
position, which in turn depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities. The participation of women in the workforce, the quality of work allotted to them and their contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are indicators of the extent of their being mainstreamed into the economy. In all these parameters, women in India fare worse than men and the challenge is to bridge the inequality (Government of India, 2011).

As per census 2011, the work participation rate for females is 25.51% against 53.26% males. Rural sector has a better female workforce participation rate of 30.02% compared with 53.03% for males. Whereas for urban sector, the participation rate of females trails at 15.44% against 53.76% for males. 41.1% of female main and marginal workers are agricultural labourers, 24.0% are cultivators, and 5.7% are households. While the reasons for this would need to be looked into in greater details and may partly be attributed to positive factors such as better retention in educational institutions, the decline in women’s workforce participation rate in India is a matter for concern and would have implications for their overall economic empowerment.

Women’s Political Participation

India is the first country where, since independence, women have the right to vote to elect representatives for the National Parliament as well as State Assemblies. Indian women have equal rights to contest any election subject to the fulfillment of other eligibility conditions. So far, 15 General Elections have been held for the Lok Sabha (Lower House). As per census 2011, in the current Lok Sabha (Lower House), there are 60 women members out of 544 (as on November 2011) and there are 26 women members out of 241 in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House). Overall the percentage of women parliamentarians stands at 10.96 per cent. There were 119,399 women representatives in Panchayat Raj Institutions in Tamilnadu as on 1st March, 2013. Among them 28,655 were of Scheduled Castes and the remaining 1,194 were of Scheduled Tribes (Government of India, 2013).
Table 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women in Parliament</th>
<th>Women Share in Parliament (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lok Sabha</td>
<td>Rajya Sabha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>52 of 544</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>45 of 544</td>
<td>28 of 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>47 of 544</td>
<td>25 of 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>59 of 545</td>
<td>21 of 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>60 of 544</td>
<td>26 of 241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>62 of 543</td>
<td>28 of 242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: India Country Report, 2013

Table 1.2 showed that women’s political participation was increasing. The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 that came into effect in April 1993 has brought about major reforms in local governance in the country. Although Panchayats have historically been an integral part of rural life in India, this Act combined with some other Acts have institutionalized the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) at the village, intermediate, and district levels as the three tiers of government. The aim has been to combine social justice with effective local governance, with an emphasis on reservation of seats for the deprived classes of population, including of the leadership positions. The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 has mandated one-third reservation of seats at all three tiers of Panchayat for women.

Since its inception, Panchayat Raj in India has seen women go from strength to strength in terms of their political participation. While many faced resistance initially to their presence in offices of responsibility, over time, acceptance of women within the Panchayat Raj framework has been increasing. In 2008, out of 26,45,883 representatives of Gram Panchayat, 9,75,057 (36.9%) were women. The share of women representatives at the Intermediate Panchayat was 37.1% (58191 out of 156794) and it was 37.2% (5810 out of
15613) at the District Panchayat. The three tiers of Panchayats taken together, the share of women representatives stood at 36.9% (Government of India, 2013).

**Women and Violence**

Indian society has been bound by culture and tradition since ancient times. The patriarchal system in the society and the gender stereotypes in the family have always showed a preference for the male child. Sons were regarded as a means of social security and women remained under male domination. Due to subordinate position, women have suffered years of discrimination, exploitation and subjugation and have become the victims of several evils like child marriage, sati, polygamy, purdah system, female infanticide, forced pregnancy, rape, etc. The main causes of violence are unequal power-relations, gender discrimination, patriarchy, economic dependence of women, dowry, low moral values, and negative portrayal of women’s image in media, lack of participation in decision-making, gender stereotypes and a negative mindset. This discrimination and violence against women had an effect on the sex ratio in India also. Among women, it is the Dalit women who suffer the most (Virendra and Shahare, 2014).

**Dalit Women in India**

Dalit women in India, along with their male counterparts, constitute a sizeable social group that suffers descent based discrimination and untouchability practices arising out of the caste system. Historically Dalit have been excluded from enjoyment of social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights due to customary restrictions derived from their ascribed low caste identity. They are one of the most marginalized Indian communities due to social exclusionary practices, lack of access to land ownership, lack of meaningful political participation and lack of free employment: over half of the Dalit workforce is landless agricultural labourers dependent on dominant castes for their livelihood. According to 2011
census of India, they are totally 201.4 million Dalits in India. Of them 103.5 million are male and 97.9 million are women (GOI, 2013).

**Practice of Untouchability**

In the Hindu caste system, Dalit women are described as untouchables or less than human and therefore face extreme discriminator on and violence by other caste Hindus. Historically, Dalit women were systematically segregated from the rest of the village and were denied access to education, housing and land. Public places such as temples, wells for drinking water, toilets and many other civic facilities were also out of bounds for them (Alexander, 2003). Even today untouchability is practiced in big way throughout the country. Like Dalit men, Dalit women suffer from inhuman practice of untouchability. Dalit women are prohibited or denied of certain acts and practices, access to common property resources, services and entry and participation in socio – cultural sphere at private and public places. Dalit women either have to wait for a long time to fetch water or are often beaten while fetching water from the public water sources. In a study on ‘untouchability’ conducted in 1589 villages at Gujarat, the NGO, Navsarjan Trust found that Dalit women were not allowed to fetch water from the tap in a non-Dalit area in 71% of these villages. 66% of the non-Dalit women refuse service to Dalit women area. Furthermore, milk collection centers refused to buy milk brought by these women. Also, Dalit women were discriminated in occupation, educational institutions, enjoying political rights, receiving government and donor supported programs. One of the many unnecessary hardships that women faced is that they are denied access to basic health services, particularly maternal health services (Navsarjan, 2013).

**Atrocities against Dalit Women**

Many Dalit women face atrocities from upper castes. Such practices are prevalent not only in the villages but also in towns. According to various studies, Dalits are equally
humiliated and victimized by the higher castes through the practice of untouchability, but it is the women who suffer most, Dalit girls who attend school are more vulnerable to eve-teasing, harassment and violence perpetrated by boys belonging to dominant castes. In cases where the school is at a distance from village, such incidences and insecurity increases. This deters girls from going to school, resulting in a high dropout rate among them. Other than working as exploited or bonded agricultural labourers, caste discrimination compels most uneducated and illiterate women into degrading work, such as manual scavenging and manually cleaning dry latrines (Zaidi, 2006). All these showed that Dalit women are powerless and there is an urgent need to empower them. Empowering them will enable them to have self confidence, develop them as individuals, fight for their rights and live as dignified citizens. If the present generation is empowered, segregation as untouchables will slowly disappear.

**Efforts for Empowering Dalit Women**

Empowerment is a multi faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women’s empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources – material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation. The Country Report of Government of India (2013) defines empowerment as moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. The empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. The Government of India has made empowerment of women as one of the principal objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) and also declared 2001 as the year of ‘Women’s Empowerment’ (Government of India, 1997).

The imperative of gender partnership in matters of development has been recognized. In order to give a boost to empowerment of women, appropriate institutional mechanisms and interventions have been consciously built into the development design.
Separate institutions for women and child department at the Central and State levels, creation of the National Commission for Women and also State Commission for Women in several states are some of the important developments for the betterment and prosperity of women. The launching of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Indira Mahila Yojana, Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, reserving of one-third of the number of seats in Panchayat and the local bodies are programmes launched with a view to improve and empower women socially, economically and in political frontiers.

**Legal Measures of Women Rights**

The Constitution of India has guaranteed equality before law, universal adult franchise and opportunities for men and women as fundamental rights. It addressed the issues of women’s development through special provisions for them in Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the State Policy. Article 14 provides equality before the law and Act 15 ensures non-discrimination on grounds of sex, specifically in the matter of gaining free access to public places. Article 16 provides equality of opportunity in public employment and Article 39 (a) provides equal right to adequate means of livelihood. Article 39 (e) and (f) ensures the state directing its public policy towards securing the health and strength of workers, men and women. Article 42 ensures humane conditions of work and maternity relief for women. Article 44 endeavors to establish a uniform civil code and Article 51 A (e) deals with fundamental duty of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

To safeguard the basic human rights of women, the Government has enacted a number of legislations, namely, the Special Marriage Act, 1954, the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1976, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956. Besides these laws, the Government has also passed the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act,
1956 which was amended in 1986, the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 and the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 to protect the dignity of women and prevent their sexual exploitation.

**Reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions**

In addition to these efforts, the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution has given opportunity to the women to participate in the decision making process at grass root level as forerunners of the development. Empowerment of Dalit women, of course, is a part of empowerment of Indian women. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has created space for women in political participation at the grass root level by providing one third (1/3) of the seats reserved for them all over the country. Dalit women have become part of 33 percent reservations in the Panchayat raj institutions. A large number of Dalit women got elected as leaders of local bodies of governance. As a result, on many occasions elected women have provided the leadership for organizing women and get their legitimate demands fulfilled like widow pensions, domestic gas connection, etc. There is a growing realization among the women that local elections are a means to bring positive change in their lives. Thus the process of politically empowering through reservation in the local bodies has helped in the wider mobilization. But whether it has been effective is to be empirically tested.

**Need for the Study**

In the context of various efforts by government in the form of Acts and programmes, it is very much essential to evaluate whether and to what extent, especially, after 73rd Amendment Act, the status of Dalit women and their position in rural areas have improved. It is equally important to find out how Dalit women react to these structural interventions when they assume the rational legal authority. It is necessary to find out answers to such questions as “Is there conflict between rational legal authority and traditional authority, if so, how do they resolve those situations in which they succumb to pressures? Is there a proxy
representation of Dalit women in Panchayat? If so, who substitutes them at decision making?”

There is widespread opinion that Panchayat Raj has not brought about effective participation of women in political decision making. Dalit women’s discrimination by upper caste people persists. Women are poorly represented at different levels of political life and decision-making deeds; there is widespread negligence of women’s priorities by politicians and bureaucrats. There is a feeling that women should only contest the reserved seats and not the general seats. Women face many obstacles while contesting elections such as sabotage, threats, boycott and pressure from family. Until there is effective participation of women in political life, it cannot be said that they have been empowered.

Empowerment of Dalit women needs to begin from knowing the current role of Panchayat in empowering Dalit women. Research has to be conducted to find out the various measures taken by the Panchayat to answer the questions whether Panchayat have created awareness among Dalit women about the opportunities available for them, about the Panchayat system and whether Panchayat have empowered them socially, economically, politically and attitudinally. Keeping the findings as the benchmark, future programmes may be chalked out. In addition, various dimensions of empowerment need to be analyzed in order to develop integrated strategies for the uplift of Dalit women.

Studies in this direction are very few in India and Tamil Nadu. No such study has been conducted in Dindigul district. According to Census, 2011, this district has considerable Dalit population (19.56%). Considering this large number Dalit men and women, an analytical study of how far Panchayats have empowered Dalit women is the need of the hour. In this context doing a study in this district was considered helpful to formulate policy and programmes for their empowerment. Hence the present study was taken up by the researcher in this district.
**Statement of the Problem**

Panchayat system came into effect from 1950. Empowering Dalit women by the Panchayat system develops leadership, democratization of administration and involvement of women in accelerating economic development (Laha, 2014). From the first Five Year Plan onwards Indian Government has allotted money for women empowerment, especially for Dalit women. The real power and rights for poor Dalits, especially Dalit women are still neglected. Dalit women are subjected to abuse by the upper caste males in the name of proving their caste hierarchy. In recent decades, both the Indian Government and Tamil Nadu State Government have implemented many programmes and policies for Dalit women empowerment through Panchayats at the grass root level. In this context the present study aimed to find out whether the realistic approach of local self governance, expectation, promotion of sustainability and empowerment of socially disadvantaged rural Dalit women through Panchayats can be readily attained. There were not many studies conducted to examine the precise role of PRIs in bringing changes among the Dalit women in Tamil Nadu aspects of Panchayat. It is necessary to find out the aspects of Panchayats that facilitate empowerment of Dalit women.

More specifically, the study examined whether selected sample of Dalit women were empowered socially, economically, politically and psychologically by the activities of their respective Panchayats. The study investigated the respondents' views on the programmes of Panchayats, their effectiveness in enabling them to get knowledge about Panchayat Raj itself, its duties towards Dalit women, opportunities for Dalit women to improve their condition and Panchayats’ role in making the welfare programmes of Government reach Dalit women. The study also looked into the relation between people of high castes and Dalit women. In
addition the study also explored the variables that foster empowerment of Dalit women. To
enrich data, case studies of selected empowered respondents were also collected.

**Title of the Study**

“PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND EMPOWERMENT OF
DALIT WOMEN IN DINDIGUL DISTRICT”

**Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the study are,

1. to prepare a profile of Dalit women in the study area
2. to describe the activities of Village Panchayat in empowering Dalit women
3. to study the political knowledge of Dalit women in the study area
4. to find out factors fostering for socio-economic, political and psychological empowerment of Dalit women in the Village Panchayat
5. to offer suggestions for effective functioning of Panchayat in empowering Dalit women.

**Operational Definition of Terms**

**Panchayat Raj Institutions**

Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) is a three-tier system in the state with elected bodies
at the Village, Taluk and District levels. The present study has focused only the Village
Panchayats which function at the grassroots level.

**Dalit Women**

The term ‘Dalit’ means oppressed groups. In the present study, women belonging to
Sakkiliyar, Parayar and Pallar castes that are mostly socially suppressed, culturally neglected
and economically exploited have been chosen. They were in the age group of 20 to 54 years
who were members of Self Help Groups (SHGs).
Empowerment

Empowerment is meant as a process of ‘becoming powerful’ due to which individuals, groups and communities are able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals. The various dimensions of the present study include socio, economic, political and psychological empowerment.

Chapterization

The first chapter explained the research problem, objectives and various concepts. The second chapter reviewed the studies conducted in different states of India and abroad on the concept on empowerment and Panchayat Raj Institutions separately. The third chapter on methodology gave a complete account of research design, sampling techniques, tools and techniques of data collection and mode of analysis. The fourth chapter dealt with the data analysis with the brief social survey of the study area. The profile of the respondents and the various factors empowering rural Dalit women were discussed. The subsections of this chapter attempted to give relation between the subscales and cumulative scale of empowerment. The concluding chapter gave a brief report of the salient findings, scope and social significance that the study holds for empowerment of rural Dalit women.