2.1 Introduction

The review of literature is an important task of research and gives deep insight and clear perspective of the overall field. The literature forms the foundation to study the relevant aspects and build all the future work. The present study concentrates on identifying various factors contributing to the empowerment of Dalit and Non-Dalit women Village Presidents elected from the elections held on 16th and 18th of October, 2001 for the Village Panchayats and also assessing their role and performance in the Panchayati Raj System in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu.


2.2 Panchayati Raj Systems in Tamil Nadu

Dharampal (1972) in his work on “The Madras Panchayat System: A General Assessment” presented an assessment of the performance of the Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu. The author conducted a sample survey of Panchayat leaders for evaluation. The major achievements, weaknesses and potential have been brought to light. The major problems have been discussed and projected for solution. He has developed a methodology to evaluate the performance of the Panchayati Raj institutions at different levels.

S. Saraswathi (1973), in her work “The Madras Panchayat System” focuses on the historical foundations of the establishment of the Panchayat System in the Tamil province. It brings to light the provisions of the Panchayat
Legislation of 1958. The author has extensively analyzed Panchayat Finance and Administration through some case studies. Rural Development schemes and their implementation have been thoroughly examined from the perspective of the involvement of the local communities. The author brings out the efficacy and efficiency of the Local Body system in delivering services to the people. The author clearly indicates the operative objective of the British, Central and State Governments. The varied perceptions and intentions of these institutions have been brought out. She gives a complete picture of the Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu prior to the establishment of the new system after the enactment of the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment to the Constitution of India.

C. Gnanaprakasam (1986), in his work on “Local Government in Tamil Nadu” covers both rural and urban local bodies in Tamil Nadu prior to the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment to the Constitution of India. The historical background of these institutions is traced and their actual functioning is examined. They are compared with those of other states. Local Body elections, reforms in Local Body elections, personnel administration in Panchayats and State control over Panchayats have been extensively analyzed.

Palanithurai,G (1993), in his work on “Needing Social Action for Effective Panchayati Raj”, in Kurukshetra, indicates the fact that, in the process of democratic decentralization of powers, the initiatives come from the center and not from the people. But, to ensure success to this dispensation, the initiatives have to come from the people. Social action, community participation, owning the institutions and taking responsibilities are the imperatives for the success of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In the process of devolution of powers, people have to come to the forefront pushing the government to the background. He has underlined the importance of conscientization of the people on the role of the people in governance at the grassroots.
A study conducted by Abraham (1993), in Kerala with the objective of finding out the socio-economic and political status of Panchayati Raj revealed that, in spite of the under-representation of SC/ST, about four per cent of SC/ST were Panchayat Presidents. It also revealed that an overwhelming majority of the Panchayat Presidents had entered politics when they had been students either in school or college.

G. Palanithurai (1994), in “Empowering People or Bureaucracy” in the *Southern Economist* has reviewed the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act of 1994. The author has critically evaluated the main provisions of the Panchayat Act in terms of the basic framework developed by the Central Government for devolution of powers through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India. He has indicated the major deviations of the Tamil Nadu Act from the spirit of the Constitution. The bureaucracy has been given the power of control over the Panchayati Raj institutions. People should have been given supervisory and control powers over the Panchayats. It indicts the overriding power of the District Collector. It makes a fervent plea for changing such provisions.

G. Palanithurai (1994), in his work “Empowering People for Prosperity; A Study in New Panchayati Raj System examines” the realistic scope for establishing a governing system at grassroots to deliver services and goods with the active participation of the people. It examines the reasons for the establishment of the New Panchayati Raj System. It further analyzes the difficulties involved in the process of establishing the first government at the grassroots. This book suggests a variety of means to overcome the problems and hurdles in the process of decentralization of power. It analyzes the people’s perception of grassroots democracy. It envisages a new economic scenario in the rural areas if decentralization is perceived properly. In the orbit of governance, it maintains that the establishment of institutions at the grassroots for governance creates a new scenario in Indian federalism. The likely relationship among the three tiers of governance has also been discussed.
The State Planning Commission Report (1997) on “Entrustment of Responsibilities to Panchayat Institutions” has analyzed the existing position of the Panchayat structure and suggested a new one in conformity with the legislation, indicating the possible problems that will emerge in the operational process.

R. Rukumani (1998), in her work on “Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu”, traces the history of Local Government in Tamil Nadu before and after Independence with the objective of identifying the course of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the light of the passage of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India. It touches upon the basic structure of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, powers and responsibilities conferred upon the Panchayats and the finances made available to the Panchayats in different periods. Performances have been evaluated. Finally this study focuses its attention on the State Conformity Act of 1994. An analysis has been made of the pattern of the Panchayats that emerged over a period of time and the problems associated with the emergence of the Panchayats and the strategies adopted to overcome the problems.

G.Palanithurai (1998), in his article “Planning for Village Development” (Tamil) in Thittam explains the importance of empowering people. The Panchayat brings power to the people. Now, Panchayats are under the clutches of the bureaucracy. This position has to be changed. Development activities are being carried out in a supply driven mode and this is to be changed. Unless the activities are changed to a demand driven mode, people cannot own the responsibility. To perform this task, planning has to be done at the grassroots where their needs and priorities will be finalized and their vision protected. Hence, the article indicates planning as an instrument to empower the people.
Teekathir (1999), in its Special Supplement for Local Bodies brings out the struggles of the Panchayati leaders in the grassroots institutions to realize the basic objectives of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India. Views Expert’s, Panchayat leaders’ interviews, excerpts from documents on devolution of powers and finance have been brought out for popular consumption. It has rich material for research. Raw data have been packed in this supplement.

G. Palanithurai (2000), in his work “New Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu”, (Tamil) presents the history of local governance, decentralization of powers, the role of centre and state governments in decentralization. He also explains how the Dalits use reservation effectively. The changes to be made in the Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act 1994 are mentioned in his work.

M. Aram, and G. Palanithurai (2000), in their work “Tamil Nadu”, in George Mathew (ed), Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India, analyses the state of the Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu. They deal with the historical background and the genesis of the Panchayat system before and after Independence and pre 73rd Amendment and post 73rd Amendment. They discuss in detail the structure and the functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions created through the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act of 1994. Contradictory provisions in conformity legislations have been analyzed and to some extent performance are also analyzed. It is a text portraying the status of the Panchayati Raj System in Tamil Nadu.

2.3 Panchayat Leadership

A.T. Kitur (1992), in his work entitled “Emerging Pattern of Leadership: A Study of PRIs in Dharward District”, explains the emergence of rural leadership on the basis of their socio-economic background. He concludes that young people are becoming a part of rural leadership by replacing experienced and aged people. They generally hail from the locally dominant caste people. Dalits have an opportunity to enter into the rural power structure through the reserved seats. At present, Panchayat leadership is constituted by the literate groups and graduates have also participated in the Mandal Panchayat and the Zilla Parishad. Landlords and moneyed people had the sole right in the Panchayat powers and only they contested the elections.

Pravakar Das (1994), in his work “Emerging Pattern of Leadership in Tribal India”, reveals that middle aged people with agrarian background and from lower and middle income group are emerging as leaders. The role responsibility of the leaders to address people’s needs and problems is quite realistic but they are lacking in ideas to provide solutions to the problems due to lack of dynamism. The emerging leaders are not powerful enough to assert their position and power at various levels of administration. Conflict between the officials and the leaders is seen at all levels. He concludes that Panchayati Raj Institutions should be restructured and revitalized in order to facilitate the emergence of effective leadership.

P.M. Verma (1994), in his work “Rural Leadership in a Welfare Society: Analysis of the Various aspects that are involved in the Role Performance of the Leaders”, explains the role of leaders in agricultural development, the educational programme and public health and family planning. In the context of the role of the leaders in the elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions, he presents reasons from personal benefits and maintaining prestige in the society to social idealism. Personal qualification has little influence on the emerging process of leaders. Group support is essential for command from either in-group or out-group and the numerical strength of a
caste plays a significant role in the determination of leadership at the local level. He concludes that policies should be framed to enrich the people’s participation and involvement in decision-making by replacing the influence of political wishes in the decision-making.

**Snehalata Panda (1996)**, in her study “Emerging Pattern of Leadership among Rural Women in Orissa”, tries to identify the emerging pattern of women’s leadership. She has undertaken the study following the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act 1991. She concludes that rural people have faith in their cultural milieu and social structure which influences the perception of the rural people while choosing their women representatives. Age, communication skills, freedom from family responsibilities and personal merit were the major contributing factors in the selection of women as representatives. The women leaders have the potential and capability to select the right alternatives from several ones due to their traits of leadership. Participatory skills have been developed with the help of guidance from their male colleagues, family members and the villagers.

**Jeyalakshmi (1997)**, conducted a study of empowerment of women in Panchayats with special reference to the experience of Andhra Pradesh. She concludes that reservation in Panchayats ensures entry for all sections and so may be visualized as the harbinger of equality and social justice. As it is widely acknowledged that a substantial gap exists between the implementing agency and the rural poor, the Panchayat has to play a continuous role in developmental activities and thus promote sustainable development through collective action and initiative, which pave the way for an honest political process promoting grass-root level leadership.

**G. Palanithurai (1997)**, in his article “Capacity Building Exercise for Elected Representatives in Tamil Nadu”, in the *Journal of Rural Development*, has underlined the need for building the capacity of the Local Body leaders as roles and responsibilities have been fixed for the leaders of the three tier Panchayati Raj System. Further, he has indicated the methodological nuances to be adopted to conduct the capacity building programme for Panchayat
leaders by keeping in mind the leaders’ level of understanding as they come from different socio-economic backgrounds. He has indicated the necessity for preparing a module and a manual for training, which should be State specific. More particularly the training institutions have to be identified and they are to be equipped.

**The Rajiv Gandhi Chair’s (1997), Manual for Capacity Building Exercises to the Local Body Leaders (Tamil),** is a module as well as a manual prepared by the Chair to cater to the needs of the training institutions to conduct capacity building exercises for the Local Body leaders at different levels. It explains the methodology to be adopted for conducting capacity building exercises and the content to be given to the leaders of various levels from Gram Panchayat Ward Members to District Panchayat Presidents.

### 2.4 Constitution of India Providing Equality of Status

**Rajalaxmi Rath (1995),** in her work entitled “Reservation and Social Transformation among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes”, analyses the policy of reservation. While the Constitution of India provides for equality of status to all citizens, it also recognizes the need for special provisions in favour of socially disadvantaged groups with the objective of bringing them to a level comparable to that of other communities. She examines the impact of the policy of compensatory discrimination and the various constitutional provisions aimed at giving preferential treatment to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, especially with regard to the provision of reservation of jobs in public services.

**Nandu Ram (1995),** in his work entitled “Beyond Ambedkar: Essays on Dalits in India”, suggests that it is not rational to be construed as negation or refutation of the ideas and philosophy of Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar for building a new society in India. Instead, it accepts the preposition ‘beyond’ purely in the temporal sense and attempts briefly to analyse some of his ideas.
and theories in the context of the present day society in India. Such an attempt has been felt necessary because a lot of changes have occurred since his death in every walk of life of people, including even Dalits in the country. Some of these changes have definitely followed the paths visualized by him. Therefore, he examines why some and not other types of changes have followed the paths suggested by him. More precisely, changes in the areas of education and social integration, social stratification and mobility, atrocities, protest movements and socio-political consciousness for social identity, etc. have been examined in the case of the most deprived communities like Scheduled Castes or Dalits whose social change and mobility are ‘sponsored’ through the Policy of Protective Discrimination or Reservation.

George Mathew (1995), in his article “Will Reservation Ensure Participation” has presented the experience of women in Karnataka. The study indicates that the women representatives of Zilla Parishads in Karnataka were of a young age group, had poor education, had agriculture as a major occupation and looked after the household works and relatives of a political leader. The women representatives were not involved in an active manner; a male from her family looked after all the works on behalf of the women, though the representation of women was more than the one-third reservation in Karnataka.

G. Palanithurai, etal. (1997), in their work “Major Issues in New Panchayati Raj System” present the defects in the Act enacted in Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly in 1994, globalization of economy and decentralization of powers, non-conventional sources for New Panchayati Raj System, resources for Gram Panchayat development, common property resources, empowerment of women, planning process from the grassroots level, resources for Panchayat Planning and linkage between the reaction of the participants to the presentations and major recommendations.
Sinha (1999), conducted a case study of women in Panchayats. He reveals that reservation of seats for the weaker sections of society has revolutionized the rural power structure. He adds that the women elected to such bodies have gained confidence and some of them have been performing extremely well.

G. Palanithurai (1999), in his work Perception of Grassroots Democracy and Political Performance deals with grassroots democracy. He argues that the perception of the stakeholders and that of the elites who are at the helm of affairs have to be conceived properly for proper implementation of the concept. This study examines perception of the elites comprising both leaders and functionaries of the administrative system who handle power.

MIDS (1999), has published “An Evaluation of Functions & Finances of Rural Local Bodies in Tamil Nadu”. This study is about the actual functional and financial devolution that has taken place after the elected Local Bodies came into being in October 1996. This study analyses the relationship between the responsibilities assigned to the rural local bodies and the finances made available to them. It also brings out some of the problems involved in the management of rural local bodies in terms of finance.

G. Palanithurai (2000), in his work “Grassroots Democracy in Indian Society” analyzes the present scenario of governance in India and its implications for the society from the perspective of people’s participation in the process of development. It is a collection of essays touching upon a wide variety of subjects like election, governance, people’s participation, development, devolution of powers, reconstruction of the political structure, planning exercise done by the people, food security and building the capacity of the people and their leaders at the grassroots. It focuses mainly on the positive aspects of the devolution of powers and people’s participation in the process of economic development and social justice.
2.5 Empowerment of Women in Village Panchayats

Mathew (1995), studied the “women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Karnataka”. The study revealed that the majority of the women elected members had no experience of active politics. Usually, a male member of the family had been instrumental in persuading the women to contest and in many cases, women continued to devote all their time to household chores as usual, because the men in their families were involved in discharging the political responsibilities on their behalf. However, it has been reported that, after two years, when the same Zilla Parishads were studied, changes were evident.

G.Palanithurai (1995), in his article “Role of Women in New Panchayati Raj System”, (Tamil) in Thittam indicates the possible roles to be taken up by women in the rural areas both individually and collectively in Panchayat activities by which women and Dalit issues can be effectively solved. An array of activities have been indicated which have no financial implications. The Panchayats can make use of such resources for administering development.

Gowda et al. (1996), have studied the developmental role of women members of Panchayati Raj institutions in Karnataka. They infer that women members of the Panchayati Raj institutions could play an effective developmental role if they are given adequate recognition and encouragement and that women are passive in their development role.

The Times of India (1997), Aiyer says that India is the first country in the world to adopt grass-root approach to the conscientisation and empowerment of women. India has begun at the lowest tier of governance and is working upwards. Despite their numerical strength, women occupy only a marginalised position in society because of several socio-economic constraints. This has inhibited effective participation of women in political processes and the institutional structure of democracy.
In a study conducted by the Avinashilingam University (1997) in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Institute of Urban Studies, Coimbatore, of experiences with 500 women elected to local bodies, it is reported that forty-five per cent of the leaders and 57 per cent of the members were aware of the availability of resources in the local bodies. Only a meagre percentage of leaders (10) and members (11) could utilise the resources for various activities. The problems expressed were male dominance, indifference to their views and their illiteracy and ignorance, lack of appreciation by family members and domestic chores.

A study was carried out by K.Ghosh (1997), on grass-root women leaders in West Bengal. He says that rural women participate in large numbers irrespective of caste, creed and religion and mostly women of younger age groups come to participate in Panchayati Raj institutions. But the educational status of women is comparatively lower than that of males.

Bohra (1997), conducted a study of women in decentralised democracy. He reports that most of the women representatives want to work for village development in general, but they didn’t have any clear idea about the solutions to the problems. Due to lack of education and knowledge, access to better opportunities is hard to come by. He asserts that special emphasis on leadership training for women may provide some solutions to this persisting problem.

P. Jeyapal and Dravidamani (1997), conducted a study of Panchayat Presidents. This study covered the socio-economic conditions, level of awareness of the New Panchayati Raj System and planning and execution of the Panchayat activities of the women Panchayat Presidents. They found that most of the women Panchayat Presidents do not have previous experience in politics, have low awareness of the Panchayati Raj system and are dependent upon their husbands or others for planning and executing the Panchayati Raj activities, which will not develop the women’s leadership quality.
V.B. Athreya and K.S. Rajeshwari, (1998), in their work,” Women Participation in Panchayati Raj: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu”, attempt to explore the socio-economic and political background of women Panchayat leaders, their problems and perspectives and the support they receive from various quarters in the process of contesting in the elections and managing the Panchayats. The study finds that political background and family support are important factors for women to enter the public arena.

Poornima and Vasulu (1999), conducted a study of women in Panchayati Raj. They found that Panchayati Raj institutions as grass-root democratic governance institutions are a necessary, but not sufficient condition in the transformation to a better social order and that, transformation facilitating women’s participation through reservation is the first and important step. Social transformation may sometimes be negative. Unintended consequences such as optimal utilisation of resources and weakening of other bodies of governance will automatically mean empowerment of women participation or engendering of the Panchayati Raj institutions.

G. Palanithurai (1999), in his article “Glittering Women Leadership” (Tamil) in Thittam studies the impact of the training programme conducted for women leaders of Gram Panchayats in five districts in Tamil Nadu. While evaluating the impact of the training of the women leaders it finds that they are conscious of their roles and responsibilities and that they are serious about the issues of women and the poor. More particularly there are certain skills they have acquired very fast while performing their roles in Panchayat administration. It indicates that there is a partiality for women in managing the institutions at the grassroots.

G. Palanithurai (2001), in his article “Women Leadership & Women Empowerment” in Thittam stresses the need for leadership training. Given the environmental backdrop of the women leaders in the Indian rural setting, the mindset of the leaders has to be changed. It requires a clear understanding of
the condition of women in Indian society and the role expectations of the women leaders. Specific programmes have to be evolved, modules have to be developed and thereby their leadership quality has to be developed. Empowerment of women can be made possible only by bringing the right kind of women leaders to the institutions at the grassroots.

G. Palanithurai (2001), in his article “The Genre of Women Leaders in Local Bodies: Experience from Tamil Nadu” in *The Indian Journal of Public Administration* explains the process of recruitment of women leaders to the local bodies and how they handle power in their institutions. It analyzes the problem of the women leaders while performing their roles and responsibilities. Different types of leaders with varying backgrounds and intentions have come to these positions. In the given environmental setting how they struggle to perform their functions has been analyzed in this work. It indicates the need of the hour for the women leaders to perform their roles efficiently. At the end of the five years’ tenure how the women leaders look at their space and how they design their public life have also been analyzed.

G.Palanithurai (2001), in his work “Empowerment of Women: Problems Faced By the Elected Women Representatives’ Experience from Tamil Nadu”, presents a report about the problems faced by the women Gram Panchayat leaders in managing Panchayats and public affairs. The problems have been taken from the reports of the training programme conducted for women leaders by the Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj Studies. It explains how the women leaders have been facing the problems on different fronts like family, society, party, bureaucracy, Panchayat council and Gram Sabha. The women leaders have indicated their needs. They strongly demand a support structure. It gives the details of the issues involved in Panchayat administration while dealing with women’s problems.

G.Palanithurai (2002), in his work “Empowerment of Women: Experience of the Elected Women Representatives in Grassroots Institutions” brings out the issues of the women leaders who are in power for the past seven
years in both urban and rural local bodies against the backdrop of the new dispensation. It questions the logic of reservation with the expectation that they are going to form a critical mass and examines whether and the critical function has been performed and if not, why. All these questions have been analyzed in this work.

**Palanithurai, G (2002),** in his article “Impediments to Empowerment of Women: Experiences of Elected Women Representatives in Panchayats in Tamil Nadu in *The Indian Journal of Political Science,* investigates the problems faced by the elected women representatives as they manage the local body institutions. He has classified the nature and intensity of the obstacles and hurdles in the process of governance and explained how these problems are being tackled by them and with whose support. The article has brought to light the ways and means by which the problems can be tackled, what the needs of the leaders and how they can be met by external agencies.”

**A. Celine Rani (2002),** in her work “Emerging Pattern of Rural Women Leadership in India” studies the process by which the women leaders are emerging to the political front to manage the Panchayat system. By evolving a framework suitable to this study, the process of emergence of the leaders has been analyzed. In this work it has been established that the socio-economic status is a significant factor in determining the emergence of rural women leaders. Different categories of leaders have been identified. This reflects the condition in Tamil Nadu.

**The Rajiv Gandhi Chair’s (2002),** “Manual for Leadership Training for Women” is a training manual exclusively prepared to give leadership training to women Panchayat leaders. It contains the information needed to conduct leadership training for women on the aspects of attitude, behaviour and performance. Very many exercises have been suggested for this training and women’s issues and the strategies to solve the problems of women have been presented in this manual.
2.6 Changing Scenario of Dalit

J.K. Pundir (1997), in his study “Changing Patterns of Scheduled Castes”, says that the Scheduled Castes have so far been the victims of social disabilities, poverty, suppression and injustice. In recent times several processes of change in their lives have been initiated and their own efforts have also enhanced these. It presents a holistic picture of the changing scenario of the Scheduled Castes in northern India. Theoretical conceptual frames for understanding the changing scenario are also examined and new ones are explored. He satisfies the queries concerning the multiple aspects of the changing patterns of the Scheduled Castes in India.

Ghanshyam Shah (2001), in his study “Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge”, finds that the Dalits, once known as “untouchables”, have from time immemorial been socially and economically oppressed, culturally subjugated and politically marginalized. However, in recent times, they have begun to assert themselves and have launched movements aimed at ushering in a new social order based on the principles of equality and liberty. Even though many Dalits have, as a consequence, reached positions of power and prominence, particularly in the political arena, the vast majorities of them continues to suffer discrimination, poverty and humiliation and are often the target of inhuman atrocities.

Vivek Kumar (2002), in his study entitled “Dalit Leadership in India”, discusses the conceptualization of Dalit leadership in India. It is a modest attempt to understand the same and many other related issues with Dalit leadership in India. The facts and figures about the origin, growth and development of Dalit leadership in Indian society are missing from the mainstream academia though Dalit leadership has a long history of struggle. An examination of the nature and dynamics, strategies adopted for mobilization and empowerment of the Dalits is also not found in different streams of discipline taught at the universities and colleges. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the aforesaid unexplored facts, issues, mysteries etc. about Dalit
leadership at this crucial juncture when Dalit assertion has become a socio-
political reality. He successfully answers most of these queries regarding Dalit
leadership in a very lucid manner.

**Vijendra Kumar (2002),** in his work “Rise of Dalit Power in India”,
reveals the role of Ambedkar in the movement for Dalit empowerment.
Ambedkar gave great strength to the movement for Dalit empowerment. Since
he was associated with the framing of the Constitution of India as Chairman of
the Drafting Committee, he was in favour of reservation for Dalits in the
legislative bodies and governmental services. This reservation benefit has
greatly intensified the movement for the rise of Dalit perspectives. He analyses
the role of various Dalit leaders and movements in the rise of Dalit power.

**P.C. Sikligar (2002),** in his study “Atrocities on Scheduled Castes and
Scheduled Tribes: Prevention and Implementation”, attempts to explore the
history of atrocities in the Indian scenario which is as old as the formulation of
the caste system in India. There has been a phenomenal increase in the number
and intensity of both social and physical form of atrocities imposed on the
Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in rural and urban areas in recent
years.

**Ramesh Chandra** and **Sangh Mitra (2003),** in their book “The
Ambedkar Era”, attempt to sketch a picture of a theme that has deep bearing on
the long and chequered career of the great Dalit leader, Babasaheb
B.R.Ambedkar. Ambedkar realized the social status of Dalits since his
childhood. In fact, he was a victim in many situations throughout his life.

**G. Palanithurai (2003),** in his research work “Dalit Leadership”, a
monograph prepared for PRIA, analyses the reasons for the exodus of Dalits
from Dravidian political parties, the influence of dominant caste groups over
Dalits and the problems faced by Dalit leaders while performing their
functions. It also focuses on the conditions and the performance of Dalit
leaders by presenting the cases of eight respondents. The author has concluded
that conflict is being witnessed in many places by Dalit leadership.
B. Goswami (2003), in his work entitled “Constitutional Safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes”, gives some suggestions for the parliament, the judiciary, the executive, the media, the society and finally the SCs/STs themselves, with the ultimate object of ensuring that the unity and integrity of the country is not disrupted in an overzealous attempt to ameliorate the lot of these downtrodden people. For several centuries, Shudras, now termed ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Scheduled Tribes’, have suffered immense humiliation at the hands of the remaining three varnas, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, and have been relegated to the lowest rung of the social ladder. The Constitution-makers realized this and bestowed certain extra benefits and facilities not available to the other three classes of the society. These were: reservation in government jobs and seats in legislatures, abolition of untouchability, prevention of atrocities, grant of land tenures and forest rights, admission to educational institutions, etc. The book has scanned these measures-legal, executive and judicial-with a view to examining how far the benefits and facilities intended to be conferred on SCs/STs have actually been made available to them.

Sukhdeo Thorat and Umakant (2004), in their edited work “Caste, Race and Discrimination: Discourses in International Context”, give details about the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR), held at Durban in South Africa in 2001, which led to an intense discussion on the issues of caste and race in India. The debate was catapulted to the centre stage by the demand of Dalit groups for inclusion of caste in the agenda of this conference and the different stands taken by the government and some sections of civil society. The discussion with different stands in the media, academia, NGO sector and civil society generated voluminous literature.

Sanjay Prakash Sharma (2004), in his study “Dalit Society and Upliftment”, analyses Dalit society and upliftment. The Dalits and their socio-economic conditions have been analysed in a manner which gives us a clear
picture of their earlier status and present status. The roles of Vinoba Bhave, B.R. Ambedkar and Gandhiji in this direction are also covered. It would be useful for social scientists, teachers, researchers and students in India and abroad.

S.N. Chaudhary (2004), in his work “Dalit and Tribal Leadership in Panchayats Examines the Participation of Dalits in M.P”, says that Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes constitute about 16 and 20 percent of the total population of Madhya Pradesh respectively. Because of social and physical segregation, the rate of their participation in the development process is very limited. Their presence in the political sphere, particularly in Panchayati Raj Institutions was notional before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Today, there are thousands of Dalits and Adivasis at different levels of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. She addresses various issues concerning Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in the state.

Vidyasagar (2005), in his “Concept of Humanism of Ambedkar”, deals with the concept of the humanism of Ambedkar in view of his thoughts based on rationalism, socialism, pragmatism, democracy and human rights. The ideas of Ambedkar reflect the spirit of humanism right from the beginning of his life-journey to the end of the last moments of his life. Whatever Dr. Ambedkar spoke, wrote and taught to the downtrodden, he stressed the need for a humanistic approach for the emancipation of the oppressed and the weaker sections of Indian society, especially the untouchables and the womenfolk.

V. Ragupathy (2006), in his article entitled “Empowering Dalits in Panchayats, Struggles Stages and Key Determinants: Case Studies from Tamil Nadu”, finds that in spite of reservation, SC people are not permitted to enjoy their rights to participate in governance at the grassroots. In a state like Tamil Nadu, elections are much influenced by caste considerations. The concept of social justice is marginalized by major political parties. The economic status of SC people in rural areas has not improved because of the failure of the state to implement acts related to land reforms and minimum wages. Denial of access
to temple and practice of untouchability are prevailing in some parts of Tamil Nadu because the civil rights laws have not been implemented effectively. In this context, the policy of reservation could not bring about the desired changes. There is a need for a powerful social movement to change the existing social climate in rural Tamil Nadu to bring about social justice. Civil society organizations and political parties must come forward to build a mass movement for this purpose.

Swapna H. Samel (2006), in her study “Rights of Dalits”, analyses the rights of Dalits. Comprising of 12 papers and a broad-based introduction, it presents an over all cognizance of the patterns and perspectives of the varied spheres of interaction that have been and are being affected in the long course of their journey through time and space. The issues discussed in these articles are multi-dimensional. Education, reservation policy and its implementation, position of women in tribal society, socio-legal status of Dalits are some of the interesting areas covered in this book. The article on Dalit women in the changing Indian scenario is an eye-opener to many women’s organizations. A study of the judicial intervention in the reservation policy and the genesis of Scheduled Castes and constitutional safeguards for them makes this book contemporary and sensitive. This is not a study of Dalits alone, but an attempt to present a social, economic and political history of a fascinating area in a time of rapid change and also a contribution to the regional history of India. It is a prime necessity to present an analytical discussion of the Dalit issue in the sphere of such studies in the hope of giving an effective addition of some refreshed material to the literature on Dalits.

R.M. Sarkar (2006), has undertaken a study titled “Dalits in India: Past and present”. It deals with the Dalit issue. It is not confined to a mere socio-political phenomenon, but is seen to deep into the historical context of the multi-caste social setting in India. There is no denying of the fact that the Dalits have been raising various thoughtful questions during the different times that are found to be reflected in the variegated behaviour-patterns and action-orientations of this oppressed group of humanity to having multifaceted ways
and means for the maintenance of life. Gradual awakening of the Dalits under
the leadership of towering personalities, no doubt, has exerted a strong protest
against the unjust thinking pattern nurtured by the advantaged caste groups.
The emergence of a newly developed perception of identity among the Dalits
has brought forward a challenging force against the age-long system of
exploitation at cultural, economic and political levels. The anthology,
comprised of 17 papers and a broad – based introduction has presented an
overall cognizance of the patterns and perspectives of the varied spheres of
interactions that have been and are being effected in the long course of their
journey through time and space. The application of historical, sociological and
anthropological methodologies in the elucidation of the multiplex dimensions
of the Dalit issue has, no doubt, added a novel angle of vision to this cohesive
compendium.

Narendra Kumar and Manoj Rai (2006), in their study entitled “Dalit
Leadership in Panchayats: A Comparative Study of Four States”, presents the
outcome of a study based on a field survey carried out in four states of India on
the emerging Dalit leadership in Panchayats after the 73rd Constitution
Amendment Act. Though situations in different states vary there are certain
common factors. While education, experience, family, community, economic
independence and personal initiatives have been found to be enabling factors
for the effectiveness of Dalit leadership, caste practices is the most important
inhibiting factor in all the states. But, like many other studies, this study has
also recognized the potential of Dalit leadership in Panchayats. These local
leaders have capacities to ring in irreversible positive changes in our social
system, which could not be achieved by democratically elected state and union
governments.

S.N. Chaudary (2007), in his study “Dalit Agenda and Grazing Land to
Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes”, makes a critical assessment of the
Dalit agenda or the Bhopal Declaration, undertaken by the Government of
Madhya Pradesh to empower Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
population by way of distributing grazing land to them. He has also attempted
to answer the questions: Was the agenda translated into action? What were the challenges? How were these challenges mitigated? How did this intervention affect the SC- ST population in terms of their socio-economic and psychological development? What is the sustainability of this intervention? These are some of the broad issues addressed in his work.

Joe Arun (2007), has undertaken a study “Constructing Dalit Identity”, which examines the process by which the Dalits of Tamil Nadu, South India, attempt to construct their identity by transforming the symbols of pollution into symbols of their culture and positive identity. It argues that conflict is a necessary condition for identity formation. For it remains as a resource that helps them become self-conscious of their low and polluted identity and guide them to imagine a new identity. To this end, instead of negating the symbols of polluted identity used by higher castes, the Dalits use the same symbols and myths to deconstruct their low identity and re-define themselves. Drawing on empirical data from a three-year fieldwork, this book explains that conflict, symbolization and identification are the three key phases in the construction of identity. This throws a new challenge to scholars and students of sociology, Anthropology and political science interested in studying social change, identity politics, social conflict, and Asian reality.

2.7 Empowerment of Dalit Women

Saraswati Raju Iyer (2004), in her article “Status of Dalit Women Need for Empowerment”, says that the lack of education is the main reason for the low status of Dalit women in society. She concludes that Dalit women have the least access to education and other opportunities for social and economic mobility. However the liberation of Dalit women does not only depend on liberation from the economic and political aspects, but also on liberation from the social and cultural aspects.
Sunita Dhaka and Rajvir S.Dhaka (2005), in their work titled “Behind the Veil: Dalit Women in Panchayati Raj”, talk about the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which reflect widespread international acknowledgement that empowerment of women and the achievement of gender equality are matters of human rights and social justice. Today gender disparity and empowerment have come to occupy the centre stage of the development debate. Since independence a number of legislative enactments have helped alleviate the status of women in India but still a lot remains to be achieved. The place and status of women in the decision making apparatus needs to be evaluated and empowerment strategies formulated.

Meena Anand (2005), in her study “Dalit Women: Fear and Discrimination”, investigates the history of Dalit alienation. Marginalisation and racial exclusion of Dalits is a burning issue today. Her work on Dalits goes back into the past and looks at the history of Dalit alienation. Issues like racial conflict, racism and justice, relevance of human rights to Dalits, caste and colour prejudices etc. find description in her work. Discrimination in different contexts finds its manifestations in physical segregation of communities, restrictions on resources like water and land, social prohibitions, restrictions on entry to religious places etc. She enlightens us on such things in a country where the Constitution guarantees equal rights and privileges to every citizen.

2.8 Other Panchayat Institutions

Mehta (1999), observed that people’s participation has been very low in Gram Sabha Meetings due to the large area of the Panchayat. Hence, he suggested that, in order to ensure effective people’s participation in Gram Sabha Meetings, meetings should be organized at village level and there may be designated as sub-Gram Sabha meetings. After holding sub-Gram Sabhas meetings, a meeting of all Sub-Gram Sabhas may be held at the Village level, which has the highest population in the Gram Panchayat. And if a Village Panchayat has only one Village having population where participation of the entire Village is not practicable, Sub-Gram Sabha meetings at ward level may be held.
G. Palanithurai (1999), in his article “Gram Sabha: A Civil Society at the Bottom” in R.C. Choudhury and S. P. Jain (eds.), *Strengthening Village Democracy*, explains the basic principles of Gram Sabha and its place in the Panchayati Raj System. He has analyzed the actual functioning of the Gram Sabha in Tamil Nadu. The gap between the intent and the reality has been explored as per the perception of the leaders and the people about the Gram Sabha and its implications. The major deviations have been indicated. Inferences have been drawn from a case analysis of eleven Gram Panchayats. Suggestions have been made to set right the malady in the functioning of the Gram Sabha.

Sinha (2000), states the important role of rural local bodies. He states that the top-down approach ignores the question of mobilising the vast masses for taking their destiny into their own hands. The remedy lies in transferring all such rural activities to the local people and their Panchayats, which can perform these tasks in a far more efficient and economical manner. Decentralization is the key to rural reconstruction and resurrection which ill unleash popular energy in an unprecedented manner, provided it is genuine and thoroughgoing. Keeping this in mind the year 1999-2000 has been declared as the year of the Gram Sabha. He adds that any deliberations in these bodies the degree of transparency and vigilance has definitely gone up with the involvement of these bodies in the development process.

2.9 Reasons for Selection of the Present Study

In the light of the above review of literature, it could be observed that though there are numerous research studies, books, articles and monographs on Dalits and politics, Dalits and reservation, political empowerment of Dalits, and their participation in rural development programmes, there are only a few research studies on the emergence of rural Dalit Leadership in Tamil Nadu. These studies too have been conducted from the perspective of the socio-
economic and political status of Dalits and Non-Dalit women leaders. But, there is no study about the empowerment of Dalit and Non-Dalit women elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Tamil Nadu. Women Dalit and Non-Dalit leadership has so far been made from the perspective of the performance of Dalit and Non-Dalit women elected Panchayat Leaders in the Village Panchayats. Besides the socio-economic and political background of rural Dalit women, there is a gap in the existing literature on the empowerment of Dalit women and Non-Dalit women leadership in the PRIs.

So, there is a gap in the existing literature on the emerging and empowerment of rural Dalit and Non-Dalit women leadership in the PRIs. Hence, to fill the gap, the present study is undertaken to study, “Empowerment of Dalit and Non-Dalit Elected women Panchayat presidents in the Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu”. A Comparative Study.
End Notes:


5. Abraham (1993), in Kerala with the objective of finding out the socio-economic and political status of Panchayati Raj


11. Teekathir (1999), Special Supplement for Local Bodies, Madurai: Theekathir Publication.


26. **Sinha (1999)**, conducted a case study of women in Panchayats.


30. **Mathew (1995)**, studied the women representatives in Panchayati Raj institutions in Karnataka.


32. **Gowda et al. (1996)**, Developmental role of women members of Panchayati Raj institutions in Karnataka.

33. In **The Times of India (1997)**, Aiyer says that India is the first country in the world to adopt grass-root approach to the conscientisation and empowerment of women.

34. **K. Ghosh (1997)**, Grass-root women leaders in West Bengal.

35. **Bohra (1997)**, A study of women in decentralized democracy.


38. **Poornima and Vasulu (1999)**, “conducted a study of women in Panchayati Raj.


42. **G.Palanithurai (2001)**, “Empowerment of Women: Problems Faced By the Elected Women Representatives’ Experience from Tamil Nadu”, Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj Studies, Gandhigram.


53. G. Palanithurai (2003), “Dalit Leadership, Research work is carried our by Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj to PRIA, New Delhi.


