

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

Women who are almost half of our total population and contribute monetary inputs towards national income, however, occupy a low position in the socio-economic index of India. Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differ with the variations in agro-production system. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the land-owning status of farm households. Their roles range from managers to landless labourers.

I

Women share abundant responsibilities and perform a wide spectrum of duties both in the home and outside, but their participation is accepted as normal. Involvement of women in agriculture is inversely related to socio-economic conditions of the family, development in the area and scale and type of operations.

Nearly all the Gram Pradhans and about 85% of the other women Gram Pradhans are illiterate with very poor understanding and knowledge of the Gram Panchayat manuals, their rights and responsibilities, poverty alleviation and employment generating schemes which are currently operational in the rural areas. They are even unaware of the major sources of revenue of the Gram Panchayats.

Almost all the women Gram Pradhans and nearly 30% of those hailing from other backward classes are dummy Gram Pradhans in the sense that either they avoid participating in the meetings of the Gram Sabha altogether or simply sit through the meetings of the Gram Panchayat without any active participation in the deliberations whatsoever.

Only those women Gram Pradhan who belong to the general category and a very small percentage from the backward classes actively participate in

the meetings of the Gram Sabha and are involved in the decision-making process.

Most of the women Pradhan who were sympathetic towards and conscious of the problems, plights and issues faced by the village women community were, nonetheless, pathetically indifferent towards raising these issues at the meetings of the Gram Panchayat.

Political participation of women in the local rural bodies has hardly made any noticeable dent in terms of raising their social and economic status, improving the literacy ratio, providing health, maternity and sanitation benefits to women and ameliorating violence, oppression, the menace of dowry, rape, discrimination, etc.

A significantly high degree of positive correlation of 0.89 was observed between education and awareness of the issues related to women in both the blocks. Almost all of the women Gram Pradhans were of the view that lack of education, male dominance, degraded social status, family workload, immobility and ignorance of rules and regulations, etc., are the serious impediments to their performance.

Almost all the women Gram Pradhans agreed that granting reservation and thus paving the way for political participation in the rural local bodies is a praiseworthy step towards women empowerment, but about 80% held the view that employment and asset generation for women will prove to be a better and a more effective delivery vehicle for empowerment.

II

The adoption of legislative approach to women empowerment through reservation of seats in Panchayati Raj institutions at a time when the government was also showing a keen commitment to implementing various employment and poverty eradication schemes at the grassroots

level as well as increasing the role of local self-governments for implementing the plans, is definitely a desirable and welcome move, and should ideally prove to be effective. But the conclusions arrived at on the basis of the empirical survey do not hint at such a success story materializing, at least not yet.

It would only be fair to conclude that the provision of reservation of seats in PRIs, although laudable, has merely succeeded inducting a few women in the political process and raising their status temporarily without evincing any desirable signs of their active participation in decision-making in the interests of women. Thus, for all practical purposes, they are analogous to a puppet swaying at the behest of its master who holds all the strings.

Most of the women Gram Pradhans reluctantly conceded that they were more in the place to serve their mentors than to serve the interests of the women community. Thus more or less, they work as dummy surrogates in the guise of women Gram Pradhans. They admit that even if they so desire, they could do little as the whole proceedings of the PRIs had largely been hijacked by the rigidly dominant male class.

There is unanimity about the fact that their performance has primarily been hindered because of illiteracy, lack of mobility, and poverty coupled with little or no access to productive assets, family responsibilities, corrupt\indifferent and uncooperative government officials, male militancy and traditionally orthodox and biased social institutions.

And despite recognizing the fact that a lot should be done for promoting girls education, for providing vocational training to women, for improving health, maternity and sanitation facilities, for organising and uniting them to fight against social evils like dowry, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, etc., they still find themselves unable to take up the gauntlet, for

there is an intricate web of adverse factors which effectively infringe their desire and ability to do so.

Undoubtedly the political process of empowerment provides collective strength to women. Individually a woman feels weak, shy and vulnerable, but when they do get a platform we see them shedding that mantle readily and forming a class to fight for their rights and amelioration of women-related problems and issues. Nobel laureate Mohammad Yunus, has rightly said: “Empowerment leads to political power and political power leads to decision-making.”

Despite the fact that women’s effective participation in the PRI institutions leaves much to be desired, and also recognizing that women representatives are mostly either subservient to the militantly dominant male class or at best dummy surrogates planted to serve the vested interests of their masters, to conclude that women’s reservation in the PRI (and the subsequent enhanced political participation of women) has not made a mark in terms of improving the grim scenario faced by women in general and the poor and low caste women in particular, would be an exercise in fallacy.

More so if we take into account the short period of time that has elapsed since reservation for women in PRI’s was initiated, and particularly when reservation for women at the State and Union levels is still elusive. The need of the hour is to nurture and protect the process of transition and not make attempts to hasten it, for we must realise that the orthodox mind-set of the people (more so in rural areas), the rigid social institutions with their traditional male bias, the inhibitions of the society, the political and administrative institutions and the stereotyped and pathetically vulnerable woman, cannot be washed away by a mere wave of the Constitutional wand. It is perhaps here that NGOs can step in as a major player. Although the NGOs are, without a vestige of doubt, actively involved in the empowerment exercise, they ought to assume a more

dominant role given the crucial role they have to play. They need to equip women with capacity and the confidence, and empower and motivate them to enter the political domain, to facilitate horizontal and vertical interaction by women elected at different levels of governance to enable the sharing of experiences and building solidarity and networking. And last but by no means the least, these women must be imparted political education and training so that they realise the power of their vote and the need to seek and be accountable, and gender-stream the political agenda (an essential recommendation of the Baseline report on women and political participation in India).

III

Their time of association with the SHGs has had a significant impact on the benefits the respondents derived from them. Greater the time of association, greater is the benefits accrued to them. Joining the SHGs has helped in a significant reduction of poverty, have made women members feel more independent, and have increased their standard of living. Women have found it easier to repay the principal amount along with the interest, and furthermore, women members were also satisfied with the interest rates charged on the loans taken from SHGs. Though there was a significant difference in the perception towards the effect of SHGs across the time of association, it was clear that greater the time of association with SHGs, greater were the benefits derived.

All the respondents agreed that there was an increase in their monthly savings after joining the SHGs, and greater the time of association, greater was the monthly savings and increase in the living standard. All the members accepted that they had benefited economically after joining the SHGs. And these benefits also increased as the time of association increased.

Though there was a difference in the perception regarding the social benefits derived from the membership of SHGs, most of them did agree that the time of association with SHGs increased their sense of social security and created social awareness among the women members.

Women also politically benefited differently across the time of association, so it can be concluded that women taking an interest in the SHG programmes and coming forward are becoming self-dependent and self-employed, which has ensured their well-being and growth; they have also learned to take decisions.

Managerial Implications of SHGs are like blessing for the rural women, and for their effective running the women take care to pay the instalments and interests on time to the banks and other financial institutions. Give only secured loan to any SHG members because if they give loans without taking security, then there is the chance of failure of payment which creates difficulties. Loans should be processed immediately with low rate of interest. Maximum amount of loan at one time should be fixed. Anyone wanting to take loan should give prior notice at the group meeting with genuine purpose except in case of an emergency. SHG groups should promote business activities which can ensure increased living standard of women, so that they can feel self-dependent. SHG group should give equal chance to all woman to take part in activities of the group, so that their leadership qualities can be recognized and enhance skills for income generation.

IV

Women empowerment is not something which can be handed over to women. This is a process which involves sincerity, earnestness and capability on the part of both men and women. It is a challenging task in India's villages, as even today, if a woman is to travel to her parents' house or go somewhere, she must be accompanied by some male

members of the family. She cannot take an independent decision. She feels even subordinate to her son.

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of the economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated structure. Broadly there may be two ways of bringing about gender equality and women empowerment – (a) through inducting women in the mainstream of development and assuring their access to productive assets, and (b) through legislation for ensuring them equal social and political status and assuring their participation in political decision-making; thus providing them a platform for venting their grievances, integrating their issues into the mainstream of the decision-making process and fighting for the cause of the female community in general and the poor and oppressed women in the society in particular. However, in both the strategies, providing education is the crucial link which holds the key.

The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed with income and property, so that they may stand on their own feet and build up their identity in the society. Development warrants the eradication of the feeling of dominance and dependence of whosoever is associated with inferior economic status.

While women's participation in the development process provides them employment opportunity and the opportunity to get out of the clutches of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, etc., economic independence imbibes confidence and the strength to stand up and think about their future.

Employment-generating schemes in rural areas providing preferential treatment to poor women workers may prove to be a good move in this direction, but it needs a definite preconceived development strategy and pattern. Growth itself does not guarantee gender equality and women empowerment. The present mode of production based on the market system has no inbuilt system for minimising gender disparity; rather it thrives on opportunities created by gender relations for power and profit.

The superseding significance of group in a patriarchal sense guarantees that women infrequently have an autonomous say in group issues. Female infanticide keeps on being normal. Insights demonstrate that there is still a high inclination for a male child in states like UP, MP, Punjab and so forth. The male to female proportion is high in these states. Abusive behaviour at home is additionally across the board and is likewise connected with dowry. Leaving a pitiful number of urban and sub-urban women, Indian women are as yet sobbing for social equity. An audit of government's different projects for strengthening of women, for example, Swashakti, Swayamsidha, Streeshakti, Balika samrudhi yojana and another two thousand programmes uncover that little has been done or accomplished through these projects. The inconsistency in the belief system and routine of the strengthening arrangement of women in India constitutes its proceeded with social, financial and social backwardness. Women make up 52% of our nation's population. Henceforth there can be no advancement unless their needs and interests are completely met. Strengthening would not hold any significance unless they are made solid, ready and mindful of their equivalent status in the general public. Strategies ought to be confined to bring them into the standard of society. It is vital to educate the women. The need of great importance is to enhance female proficiency as training holds the way to improvement. Strengthening would turn out to be more pertinent if women are taught, better educated and can take reasonable choices. It is likewise important to sharpen the other sex towards women.

It is critical to introduce changes in societal states of mind and recognitions with respect to the part of women in various circles of life. Changes must be made in customary sexual orientation particular execution of assignments. A female should be physically sound so she can take difficulties of correspondence. In any case, it is tragically ailing in a larger part of women particularly in the rural areas. They have unequal access to fundamental wellbeing assets and need sufficient advising. The outcome is an expanding danger of undesirable and early pregnancies, HIV contamination and other sexually transmitted infections. The best test is to perceive the hindrances that hinder their entitlement to great wellbeing.

To be valuable to the family, group and the general public, women must be given social insurance offices. The majority of the female work in rural part either as specialists, in family unit ranches or as wagedworkers. However it is accurately job in agribusiness that has had a tendency to wind up more unpredictable and unreliable lately and women cultivators have in this manner been adversely influenced. The administration's arrangements for reducing destitution have neglected to deliver any attractive results, as female don't get proper wages for their work.

There is likewise huge measure of unpaid or non-advertised work inside the family. The expansion in sex divergence in wages in the urban ranges is likewise very set apart as it results from the occupation of women in various and lower paying exercises. They are abused at different levels. They ought to be given legitimate wages and work at standard with men so that their status can be lifted in the public eye. Lately there have been unequivocal moves to build women's political cooperation. The Women's reservation strategy bill is however an exceptionally miserable story as it is more than once being abandoned in parliament. In the Panchayati Raj framework, notwithstanding, females have been given representation as an indication of political strengthening.

There are numerous chosen women agents at the village assembly level. However, their energy is confined, as it the men who wield all the power. Their choices are regularly over-ruled by the administration apparatus. It is significant to prepare and give genuine energy to these female pioneers with the goal that they can impetus change in their towns in regards to women. This demonstrates the procedure of sexual orientation equity and ladies' strengthening still has far to go and may even have turned out to be more troublesome in the late years. The fundamental explanation behind the disagreement is that, focused on plans have a tendency to have just restricted effect when the essential push of improvement is not achieving a normal lady, making her life more delicate and powerless.

To roll out a positive improvement fundamental base ought to be given in each town and city. In the first place, giving safe drinking water supply and better sanitation not just specifically enhanced the lives and wellbeing of females additionally diminishes their workload regarding provisioning and guaranteeing such offices. An entrance to reasonable cooking fuel diminishes the need to travel long separations looking for fuel wood. Enhanced transport interfacing towns with each other and with towns can straightforwardly enhance living conditions and additionally unpaid work time spent in transporting family unit things. It can likewise prompt access to a more extensive scope of merchandise and administrations in addition to a superior access to wellbeing offices. Use on sustenance sponsorship and better procurements for open appropriation benefits straightforwardly influences the lives of women and young girls as far as satisfactory nourishment.

The examples of asset preparation by government likewise effect crafty affect women that are normally not perceived. At the point when expenses are backward and fall excessively on things of mass utilization, at the end of the day these tend to influence females more. This is not just in light of the fact that the utilization of such things might be diminished additionally on the grounds that the provisioning of such things is every

now and again thought to be the obligation of the females of the family unit. Additionally credit approaches diminish the stream of credit to little scale ventures subsequently decreasing the livelihood open doors for women. There is a need females benevolent financial arrangements that can upgrade their social and monetary position and make them independent. There is most likely about the way that advancement of women has dependably been the focal center of arranging since Independence. Strengthening is a noteworthy stride in this course yet it must be found in a social connection. A reasonable vision is expected to expel the obstructions to the way of women's liberation both from the legislature and females themselves. Endeavours ought to be coordinated towards all round improvement of every last area of Indian women by giving them their due offer.

The empowerment of women can be further strengthened by adopting and initiating the number of steps.

Low Status: Need of Up-gradation: Most of the women in a family feel inferior to male members in the family. From ancient times, women have been acting as workers and do not take part in decision-making. This attitude needs to change to make women as part and parcel of the family by carving out an important place for her.

Low Morale: Need of Creating Positive Attitude: At present, Women possess low morale, which is a depressing situation as she does not have a sense of belonging. We must develop a positive attitude in her by enlightening her about her creative potential for contributing to the overall development of the self, the family and the society.

Dependence upon Men since Childhood: Need for Independence from Early Stages: In Indian villages, girls remain dependent on their father, brother or cousin and this very feeling continues into their married life. We must give capacity-building training to girls in schools to be

independent. It does not mean breaking the linkages of the family, rather it leads to strengthening the bond on an equal platform.

Change of Attitude of Men towards Capability of Women: Men have built an impression through observation that women are inferior and they cannot face emerging situations. This attitude has to be changed through positive examples from our country and abroad. Though the attitude is changing, it is slow and needs to be accelerated.

Women Elected Representative of PRIs to give way to their Men Fold:

Need for taking Independent Decision: Women representatives in PRIs must be trained in the art and science of decision-making so that they are not influenced by extraneous factors. They should discuss with other women and take their opinion. They must develop leadership qualities. The 74th and 73rd Constitutional Amendments on Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalika with 33 per cent reservation for women have created political space for women. But in most cases they exercise “proxy” power on behalf of men. In reality, women have never been able to get more than 10 per cent seats in Parliament or other bodies of decision-making. Even after more than half-a-century of freedom we have neither been able to provide them something as basic as security. Even in the country’s capital city of Delhi, the number of toilets and shelter for women is inadequate.

Lack of Interest and Enthusiasm: Need of Enthusiasm: Women lack interest in PRI on account of the lukewarm attitude to PRIs by the State and Union Governments. To make life worthwhile and fruitful, they must generate enthusiasm within themselves. Enthusiasm can be generated when they discover for themselves a goal and attach themselves to the platform with a spirit of dedication and reverence. Once they have surrendered themselves to it, the idea itself will provide them inspiration and strength. Then nothing can hinder the progress of women’s march towards that goal and ideal. The ideal should be inspiring, it should arouse

the spring of activity in us. Thus, the discovering of the ideal is the secret of generating in ourselves dynamism and vitality in its fullness.

No Forum to Exchange Ideas: Need for All Women Forum: Elected representatives of three tiers should meet once in three months. At present elected representative rarely meet on one platform to form opinion on different activities being carried out at various levels. There is a need to have a quarterly meeting of all the elected representatives to exchange viewpoints. In this way, they would be more participative while deliberating on important issues.

Women do not struggle for Employment: Need to Acquire Empowerment: The emphasis now is on empowerment. Power is not a commodity to be transacted, power cannot be given away as alms. Power has to be acquired; once acquired it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved. Women have to empower themselves. It is a multi-dimensional process which should enable individuals or group and individuals to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision-making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives or have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives, and freedom from shackles imposed on them by customs, beliefs and practices. Discrimination against women from womb to tomb is well known, age-long traditions and worn-out customs are the handicaps, and women have to struggle on their way up.

Mere Legislations do not Keep Women: Need for Action: Every new legislation has only worsened the position of women. And now the right to property granted by law in a recent judgement by the Supreme Court poses a new threat to their life. These developments only reinforce the belief that laws alone do not lead to social transformation unless followed by resolute action and societal awareness of the wrong from time immemorial. In short, the struggle for justice – social, economic and

political -- remains to be fought and won. In this scenario, all talk of women empowerment is nothing more than an empty jargon. The situation demands a revolution of consciousness in the minds of women -- in the ways they think about themselves. Women must realise that gender deprivation is inconsistent with their basic human rights. They must realise that they have constitutional rights to quality health care, economic security, access to education, employment opportunities, pay equity and political power.

V

There is a need to strengthen the technical competence of Gram Panchayat at the Gram Panchayat level by involving professional agencies and competent NGOs to guide Panchayat members to improve the design of works which are to be implemented. At the moment, Gram Panchayats are deficient in technical competence, therefore, a lot of effort is required to increase the technical competence at the Gram Panchayat level. The suggestions are to develop programmes to train Panchayat leaders in gender-integrative participatory approaches and local planning. Develop programmes for rural women to build leadership skills for managing agriculture, community-based development activities. Develop economic and political literacy programmes for rural women to utilize development inputs effectively. Support agriculture extension in-service training programmes and other relevant agricultural-related curricular activities to support gender-sensitive extension agents. Put in place appropriate institutional mechanisms for information exchange and cooperation between the agencies that focus on women's affair and agriculture-related technical activities. Support women-managed rural production and marketing ventures in horticulture, floriculture and post-harvest processing in commodities. Provide technology training and input support to women to take advantage of emerging high-value agri-business sector.

The recognition of the role women play in agriculture and rural society is fundamental to agricultural and rural development. More importantly, recognizing and supporting this role is crucial for the development of women and the fulfilment of their economic potential.

To a large extent, women's situation has worsened. Underlying this assumption is a lack of recognition that, within the household, women have distinct rights and obligations. Their situation is determined by their multiple responsibilities for the care and well-being of their families and community, household tasks, and farm and non-farm income-generating activities. What is required is more than an adjustment in their situation; there needs to be a transformation in development approaches, a transformation that fully includes women. However, mainstreaming women's issues in development strategies continues to be hindered by an overall lack of capacity and commitment within the development agencies and the national government. Unfortunately, to say the least.

VI

The country became food self-sufficient after the initiation of the Green Revolution in the late 1960s, and it was praised as a laudable achievement by the world community. As a result, the per capita dietary energy supply increased significantly. Here I would like to emphasise that the country is still home to a fifth of the world's under-nourished population; the problem of hunger persists on account of population pressure; infant mortality rates are high and the situation is far from satisfactory. Despite the decline of poverty at the national level, the poverty level is disturbingly high in some States such as Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. There has been increasing concentration also of the poor in some States and among some vulnerable groups.

The major areas of concern for the agriculture sector are: (a) Infrastructure, (b) Land and Water management, (c) Agricultural research

and extension services, (d) Agricultural inputs and credit, (e) Effective marketing and price policies, (f) Diversification, and (g) Developing institutions to address these concerns.

Micronutrient deficiencies among women and children are observed to be very high: as high as 50% for women and 80% for children, especially among the rural population. Major social protection initiatives have to be taken to improve access to food. The MNREGA has been specially designed to improve rural employment and the purchasing power of the rural poor. Local involvement of Panchayat and other community groups is absolutely essential and the selection of eligible Anganwadi workers from the local rural works programmes are now widely recognized as important instruments in the strategy for poverty alleviation and hunger through employment generation. They enhance the purchasing capacity and this is expected to increase the access to food.

There is also a need to strengthen the technical competence at the Gram Panchayat level by involving professional agencies and competent NGOs to train and guide Panchayat members to improve the design of works that are identified for implantation.

The programme needs local involvement and control to maintain and sustain services of good quality. It is, therefore, essential to involve Panchayats and other community groups in this programme. Each district must ensure that the Gram Sabha selects only those eligible as Anganwadi workers; it would also be desirable to appoint local people who would be accountable and regular to achieve the major goals such as ensuring social protection to the most vulnerable people living in rural India by providing them employment opportunities. Strengthening decentralized participatory planning through the convergence of various anti-poverty, livelihood initiatives and PRIs.

VII

Women participation in agriculture is seldom accorded the importance it deserves. Especially with their ever-growing numbers on the farm leading to feminization of agriculture, the cardinal issue calls for urgent attention by the planners and policy makers alike.

Women's role as agricultural workers, especially their work on family farms is not being reported correctly, thus denying them access to extension and credit that they truly deserve in the context of increasing male migration out of agriculture. Statisticians and ground staff need to be sensitized to the changing nature of agriculture, so that their mind set of thinking of farmers as males only is changed. The gender bias in function of institutions for information, extension, credit, inputs and marketing should be corrected by gender-sensitizing both men and women.

Government should recognise that women and men may have different priorities, problems and needs. In order that farm women get a fair deal at the hands of change agents, one of the remedial measures that needs to be undertaken is to induct a sizeable number of well trained women personnel in training and extension programmes of agricultural development agencies at all levels and more so at the grass –root level.

Technology transfer to women should be prioritised in all aspects of farming and farm management. Grassroots women farmers must be trained in various fields, including dry land farming technologies, animal husbandry, forestry, sustainable natural resource management, enterprise development, financial management and leadership development. They should be provided training in pre and post harvest technologies, storage, preservation, packaging, processing and marketing.

Existing formal institutions must take the initiative to recognise women's role and needs in various fields of agricultural activities. For this they must ensure participation of women farmers in designing programmes for

technical training and research. The methodologies, time duration, location and other factors of programme design must be appropriate to the needs of women. Women's access to agricultural technology should be improved through designing women friendly agriculture technology.

The outreach of the formal credit system has to expand to reach the really poor and needy women. There is an urgent need for a paradigm shift from micro-finance to livelihood finance, comprising a comprehensive package of support services including financial services through SHGs, NGOs, KVKs and commodity cooperative and empowering them through capacity building and knowledge centres.

Women's cooperative and other forms of group effort should be promoted for the dissemination of agricultural technology and other inputs, as well as for marketing of produce. Wherever possible a group approach for investment and production among small scale women farmers, be it on purchased or leased land should be promoted. Women farmers are typically unable to access inputs; information and market produce on an individual basis. A group approach would empower them.

Although the plan budget of the Ministry of Agriculture has been increased several fold in the last decade, there is a multiplicity of schemes, particularly the ones which target the agriculture sector (both the central schemes such as RKVY, NFSM, NHM, MMA, among others as well as the state schemes) with overlapping objectives, and without there being any apparent benefit from having so many schemes – instead, there are costs, as the schemes are being implemented by different departments in many cases and there has been little convergence.

Overall, the implementation of these schemes has led to a large transfer of resources to the rural economy, but does not appear to have demonstrated widespread impact on sustainable basis-in terms of a sustained increase in agricultural productivity and a major transformation

of the sector. Although on paper the schemes insist on one-third of the beneficiaries being women, in actual practice the male farmer (chosen on the basis of patronage and other extraneous considerations) brings papers signed by his wife and pockets the subsidy amount.

Most problems that women face in agriculture would get sorted out if their rights over land are recognised in the revenue records. Endowing women with land would empower them economically as well as strengthen their ability to challenge social and political gender inequities.

It is now well recognized that the poor rural women are best empowered if they function as a group rather than as individuals.

Women's participation levels in local governance, community members' views on this participation and changes in practices of unescorted mobility outside the house, reduction in practice of veil, sense of self-expressed in perception of their enhanced status, confidence and aspiration levels indicate the empowering impact seen against the dimensions of empowerment including in their relative lack of adherence to gender norms of socially constructed expectations of women's behaviour.

Women have entered panchayats across class, castes and tribes and have shown emerging leadership and achievements despite the challenges and obstacles faced by them. They continue to have substantial number of new entrants at every five yearly general panchayat election due to rotation of reservation in panchayats and their constituencies. They will also continue to include women from earlier excluded section. This underscores the need to address the challenge of capacity building to meet the expectations of empowered leadership for caring, good governance. The direction for future strategy will have to address this need. As exploration brings out, it means to enhance the capacity not merely to enter panchayats and carry out panchayat functions but, more importantly, to manage politics, building alliance and coalitions and

mobilisation on issues to counter patriarchal, caste-based and feudal resistance.

The rural women not only need to have knowledge regarding their powers and responsibilities but also need to be encouraged to perform their role independently. The elected women leaders in the PRIs should also be imparted knowledge about various rural development programmes of Central and the State governments.

The gains made in the socio-economic and political fronts of women's lives have been hard earned and are not to be frittered away due to neglect. These are to be further nurtured to be able to boom. These efforts need to be maintained and strengthened in the coming period, aiming at placing the women more at the centre of project activities. As regards, policy-makers and development administrators cannot ignore the potential of SHG movement in bringing about the significant mainstreaming of Feminisation.

There is a need to strengthen the technical capability of Gram Panchayat by involving professional agencies, competent NGOs and SHGs to guide Panchayat members and improve the design of works which are to be implemented. (a) Develop programmes to train panchayat leaders in gender-integrative participatory approaches and local planning. (b) Develop programmes for rural women to build leadership skills for managing agriculture community based development activities. (c) Develop economic and political literacy programmes for rural women to utilize development inputs effectively. (d) Support agriculture extension in-service training programmes and other relevant agricultural curricular activities to support gender-sensitive extension agents. (e) Support women-managed rural production and marketing ventures in horticulture and post harvest processing in commodities. (f) Provide technology training and input support to women to take advantage of emerging high-value agri-business sector.

The unemployed rural youth and women must come forward with determined efforts to join the mission and become self-reliant, instead of remaining unemployed and migrating to urban areas for indefinite time in expectation of salaried jobs. They would certainly become the leader in generating employment in the rural areas. There is ample scope for them to become the true representative of masses in the future. Therefore, be enterprising the industrious to achieve something tangible with your own knowledge, skill and efforts.

