

# **From Role Plays to Role Models**

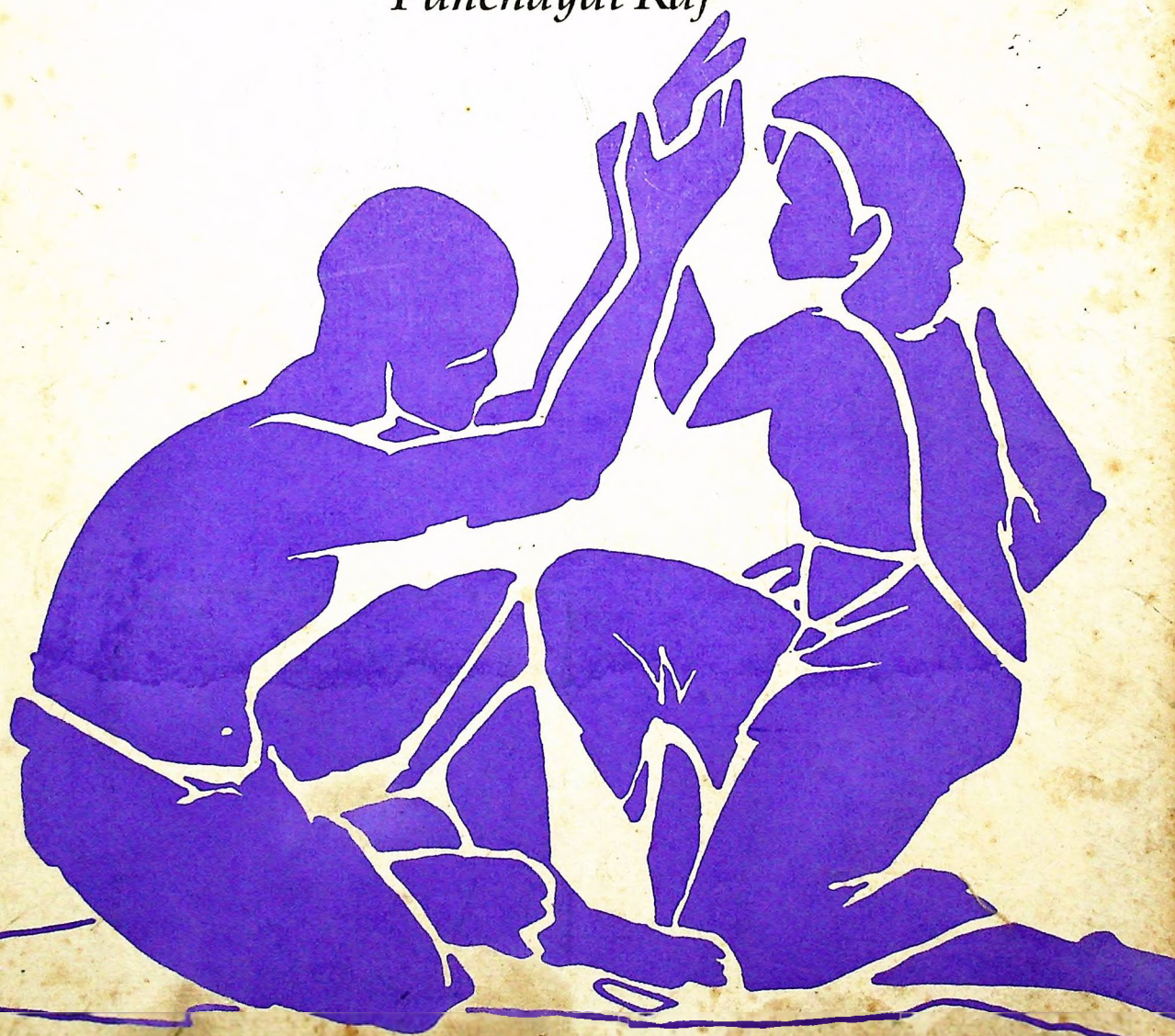
*A Resource Book*

*for*

*Women Representatives*

*of the*

*Panchayat Raj*



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## FOREWORD

### STRENGTHENING WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES : A NEED FOR NEWER APPROACHES

In the past decade or so, training organisations and individual trainers have, with sustained efforts, risen unequivocally in their support for grassroot movements. On the basis of the insights drawn from their training experience as well as of people's experiences of social change in their specific cultural contexts, these organisations and individuals have evolved modules and approaches to train people toward social action.

Now, just as our training strategies are being validated especially by women activists who acknowledge the need for such support, a new dimension of social change is clamouring for attention, demanding that new approaches be evolved. The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution has given a new shape to Panchayati Raj and training institutions and trainers are being required to take cognizance of these new spaces for women. Although there is an agreement among most people involved in Panchayati Raj about the need for training of women representatives, we are faced with the Herculean task of having to be pro-active: leave no stone unturned in demonstrating our support for these women who will go ahead and architect a new, more representative understanding of people's governance.

Our efforts need essentially to be located in newer approaches. Readymade formulae are conspicuous by their absence. But even as we are still learning, we still do have some pegs to hold on to.

For ISST, the success stories of women representatives in the erstwhile Panchayati Raj Institutions have been powerful in their inspirational value. We have attempted to identify through these women's experiences, some issues of concern, some questions, some imperatives for action. We hope they are useful not just as training material but also for the grit and determination that they share.

### ABOUT THE RESOURCE BOOK

This Resource Book records the true experiences of women members of the Karnataka Panchayats (1987-1991). Each episode is first summarised and is followed by a role-play based on it. The language and style have been deliberately kept simple. Trainers could enact the role plays and initiate discussions around issues emerging from the role plays. The episodes can also be modified into skits, mimes, stories, songs or any other desired form.

Some pointers for training have been provided with every episode. These are only suggestions and can supplement the role play session based on the episode, during a training programme. It has been our earnest attempt to present these "success stories" in a manner that any interested reader can appreciate not merely the "success" element as much as the "struggle" element. We sincerely feel that the experiences of women in these stories are not isolated, random occurrences, but are representative of the lives of many more women in many more places.

## INTRODUCTION

### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Through these case studies, we attempt to articulate some of our concerns and also initiate a dialogue on the "how" and "whether" of dealing with many issues. These we hope, will enable the brainstorming for a common understanding on approaches to and the content of training women representatives in Panchayati Raj.

The thoughts expressed in this section are not generalisations from the case studies but statements of our understanding that women's experiences are rooted in a complex reality that is indisputably one in which there is a skewed distribution of power and of resources. Therefore, the issues and concerns derived from the episodes are meant to be construed as an attempt to capture the hues and shades of an unequal society characterised by patriarchal, feudal, casteist institutions and structures and as an attempt also to locate the success stories in an ideological context.

#### Confidence Building

Episode 1 clearly demonstrates how women's entry into political circles is bound to be resisted especially in the form of empty threats. The ideal reaction to such threats would be to meet them squarely and not get cowed down. Also, women may be used as pawns by power brokers. The need here is for women to look at their own spaces in the political process with much less skepticism and their own capabilities with much more confidence.

### Access to knowledge and information

The attitude of the politically powerful, 'educated' upper class/caste male bureaucrats and politicians is a reflection of patriarchy and its mechanisms to ensure that women are excluded from the creation of knowledge and are denied access to information. For women, and particularly for women in political life, access to and use of information is vital to the performance of their role as is manifested in Episodes 2 and 3. Women members in the Panchayats need to perceive access to information as their fundamental right.

#### Representing the voices of the marginalised

Women representatives will have to strategise to break the nexus between the hitherto all powerful contractor, bureaucrat and political leader who have distorted decision-making processes at the village level. Episode 3 reflects how the voices of the marginalised have been feeble in a social context that has repressed them.

Panchayats in the emerging context will provide spaces for the marginalised, especially the poor women who are among the most victimised. These spaces need to be used to stake claim over the resources that reach the village in the names of the poor and the marginalised.

#### Challenging oppressive social structures

Episode 4 challenges the oppression and exploitation inherent in casteist, feudal, patriarchal social structures. Women representatives need to emerge as a powerful lobby to bring into the agenda of

Panchayats, issues critical to the everyday lives of women, such as water, forests etc.

### **Informed decision-making**

The provision of amenities, facilities and development itself is linked inseparably with the introduction of technology and people who control technological know-how.

For village communities to benefit from optimal utilization of the Panchayat's resources, decisions must be based on an evaluation of the relative merits of several options; otherwise women representatives in particular, will find themselves helplessly dependent on people in control of technological know-how.

### **New work-culture**

Patriarchal societies undermine women's health needs. Women's protests against drunkenness, alcoholism and smoking are therefore likely to be dismissed as trivial. Episode 6 and 7 highlight how it is imperative to relate such a protest to the larger question of work-culture (episode 5 also questions red-tape and absence of accountability) as well as to the stance that Gram Sabhas and Panchayats need to take vis-à-vis the role of alcohol in power politics.

### **Creating an agenda to promote women's interests**

Women in Panchayats carry a responsibility to tap on its potential of serving as a system of social justice. There can be no development without justice and it is the justice

dimension of the Panchayat's function that will determine to a great extent its credibility as a people's institution. Interestingly, the judicial function of the Panchayati Raj Institutions has been left very much to the will of the individual State Governments to determine. While a few states such as Himachal Pradesh have incorporated the Nyaya Panchayats in their Acts, there is no mention of this function in the other State Acts. Episode 7 is but one example of the increasing vulnerability of not only women village level functionaries but also of poor women in villages.

Episode 8 and 9 also exhort women representatives to build connections with one another irrespective of their social background or differences to promote an agenda that protects and promotes the interests of women. Women in power need to question the locus-standi of men or officials who encroach on women's personal lives. Episode 8 in fact is not merely an issue of abuse of power but is inextricably entrenched in the issue of subtler forms of violence against women.

### **Participation in management of resources**

Women representatives need to use the authority vested in them in the management of the Panchayat's resources. As depicted in Episode 9, an item such as celebration of International Women's Day on the agenda of women, may seem superfluous to those whose attitudes mirror patriarchal values. Episode 10 reiterates the need for women's representatives to use their authority to ensure accountability.

*We have articulated these concerns not as theoretical constructs built hastily around a "small" episode in the life of "some woman" in "some distant village", but as an attempt at presenting larger issues related to women's struggles towards equality that lie hidden within the stories.*



## ARE WOMEN POLITICAL PAWNS?



A bitter dispute to contest for the post of Upa-Pradhan arose among the rival contestants, both men, in a certain Mandal Panchayat. No solution emerged for quite some time. With the last date approaching for the election, the rival groups decided to ask a woman to contest. They were sure that they could get her to resign anytime they wanted. The woman consented to contest and also got elected. After a few weeks, the men decided that it was time for her to resign. She had served her purpose.

But they were in for a surprise. When they approached her, she refused to oblige them! She had been elected member and she had every right to continue in that position, she said. She resisted all their threats and blandishments. Finally, the men realised that she was not just a convenient pawn they could push around. We are delighted to inform our readers that our courageous woman member completed her term successfully.

Elections are nearing. Groups of men are busy discussing and deciding the relative merits of the candidates. A bitter quarrel starts between two powerful men vying for the post of Upa-Pradhan.

The men come up with a plan.

**Man 1 :** Why are we arguing so much? Let us ask Shantam-

**Man 2 :**

ma to contest right now. We can always get rid of her later.

Yes, yes, I feel this is the best solution... But will she agree to contest?

**Man 1 :**

Where is the problem? We will pressurize her. It

should not be too difficult to convince this woman.

Shantamma is persuaded to contest and gets elected.

One day soon after, Shantamma is seated in the Panchayat office when a group of men and women come to meet her.

**Woman 1:** Amma, our children are not going to school.

**Shantamma:** Yes I do know: my children also keep running around the whole day

**Woman 1:** The problem is that the teacher is so irregular: she is not from our village.

**Woman 2:** (angrily) But that is no reason to be irregular. She is paid to do this job. (addresses Shantamma) Amma, why don't you come with us and talk to the teacher. After all, you are a Panchayat member.

Shantamma talks to the teacher and persuades her to come regularly. This experience emboldens Shantamma and gives her the confidence to tackle problems. Gradually, she wins the trust of the villagers.

However, after a couple of months, Shantamma gets an unpleasant surprise. It is the early hour of the morning: she is in the midst of her daily chores.

**Visitor 1:** Namaskara. How are you? You seem to be very busy.

**Shantamma:** Yes, this is the way it is for women. I will come to the office. Why did you take the trouble of coming here?

**Visitor 2:** No, no Madam. There is no problem. We are all friends. So we thought we could discuss personal matters at home.

**Shantamma:** Personal matter? Is there any personal matter for us to discuss?

**Visitor 1:** You see, it is something very simple. (Pause) We made you a Panchayat member, that is true, isn't it? You really never wanted to take on the responsibility. After all, why should you? Maybe you can resign now.

**Shantamma:** Resign? Why should I? I am happy, the people are happy, so why resign? (looks from one face to the other, bewildered...)

**Visitor 2:** After all you have to take care of your house, your husband, children. We know it isn't easy for you.

**Shantamma:** (confidently) But I don't want to resign. I think I can do a lot of useful work and I have been doing useful work in the last two months.

**Visitor 1:** Hey, look here, if you act tough, we know how to get rid of you. Don't try to be too smart.

**Shantamma:** (in a self-assured manner, calmly) I want to make this clear to you. I have been elected to follow the people's dictates and not

those of ruffians like you. I refuse to even talk to you.

**Visitor2:** Amma, you better change your mind. otherwise you will have to face the consequences.

**Shantamma:** (determined) I am ready for any challenge. This is my final decision. Listen. I have been elected by the people for a cause and I have

a responsibility towards them. I have decided to complete the term. None of your threats will make any difference. Please leave and learn to respect others.

**Visitor :** OK. we shall see.

Shantamma stands firm, convinced that she is right. Eventually, her opponents stop harassing her and she completes her term successfully.

### POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

**a. A discussion to address and debunk the myth "Politics is the forte of men alone"**

Trainers can explore with the group the attributes that are important for political participation and highlight that such attributes are also intrinsic to women.

Eg:

1. Women take different decisions every day
2. Women have excellent skills in human-relations
3. Women are practical and resourceful
- b. **An exercise to focus on women's strengths, their managerial skills and their acumen for political participation.**

Eg:

1. What are the things women do during the day and what managerial skills do they use in such tasks.

2. How do women plan for various occasions such as festivals, marriages etc?

3. How can what is normally understood as a "weakness" in women be reinterpreted as a strength? Say, for instance, the ability women have to empathise.

4. A role-play to highlight various qualities of a leader, such as ability to prioritise, to be impartial, to be assertive etc.

**c. Exercises on assertiveness, building a positive self-image exploring means to counter threats.**

Trainers can use a 'mirror-game'. One woman talks to another who is the mirror. Every statement the woman makes, the 'mirror' reflects back in a more assertive manner. Women can take turns in being the "mirror".

Other games on self image related to posture, body language, voice modulation will be useful.

Ask participants to list or talk about what women do successfully. Highlight how women usually overlook the achievements in their everyday lives.



It will be helpful to explore participants' views about 'dealing with threats'. The trainers can enact the role-play till the point where the visitor threatens Shantamma and then stop and ask the participants to visualise how Shantamma would have countered the threat and to enact it, one by

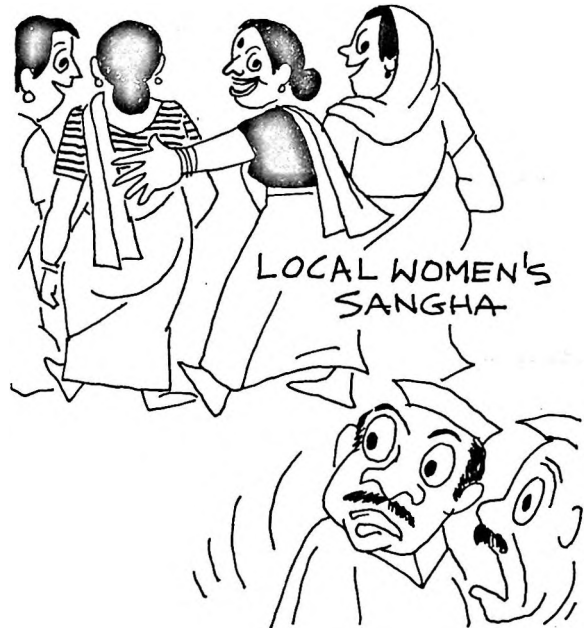
one. A variety of responses will emerge and the trainer can assess the relative merits of each approach to counter threats along with the group.

Subsequent to this, a small input on the concept of "fear", its social and psychological roots can be given.

#### **A NOTE FOR TRAINERS**

In dealing with sensitive issues such as strengths, perceptions, self-image etc., it is imperative that trainers play their own role with sensitivity. It would be catastrophic if trainers did not work with the premise that women are as capable as men. Trainers need to be firm believers in the principle of equity. Only then can we communicate to women who are diffident and unsure about their inner resources that skills in managing, decision-making, assertive communication like all skills, can be acquired.

## WOMEN'S SANGHA TO THE RESCUE



In a particular Mandal Panchayat, one seat reserved for women was vacant. The dominant political party of that mandal while looking for suitable women candidates, chanced upon an illiterate, timid and reticent Scheduled Caste woman, Madamma. The party workers decided to persuade her to contest the elections as they felt they could mould her the way they wanted to and hence, she would not pose any threat to them. She did contest but only after the party workers gave her an assurance that she could depend on them for advice about her role and responsibilities when in doubt. On assuming office, every time she approached them for help and guidance, they mocked at her. After several such disheartening encounters at the party office, Madamma realised that she had to explore different avenues for support. She then turned to a local women's collective for support and with their help she was able to build up her confidence. Eventually, she became a successful member of the Mandal Panchayat.

With the Mandal Panchayat elections nearing, political activity in the village is at its peak. Elections are to be held for one post reserved for a woman. The workers of the leading political party decide that a Scheduled Caste woman will be their candidate as she appears submissive.

**Worker:**

Madamma, listen to us. Why don't you contest for this seat? This is a great opportunity for you to enter into politics. You will become well known in your area.

**Madamma:** (diffidently) No, no... please leave me out of politics. I cannot understand what it is all about. I do not know what the duties of a Panchayat member are.

**Worker:** Do not worry about things like that. We are all here to help you. All you need to do is to contest. We will take care of the rest.

**Madamma:** If you agree to guide me, I shall contest. I am keen to work for the poor.

**Worker:** That's good... here's your nomination form...

Madamma contests and emerges victorious.

The first Panchayat meeting is scheduled for the following week. Madamma goes to meet the party worker in his office, to clarify her doubts.

**Worker:** Come in.. come in. Madamma.... I am happy to see you. Tell me, what brings you here?

**Madamma:** Swamy, I have come to seek some clarification from you. Could you provide information regarding government schemes available for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes?

**Worker:** Why do you want to bother about such things? We will take care of everything.

**Madamma:** But ... so many poor people are coming and asking me. What should I do?

**Worker:** Oh that... Why are you so worried? Just ask them to come next week, next month... where is the hurry?

The worker dismisses her concern and sends her away. Madamma leaves the office, feeling bitter.

On her way home Madamma meets Savitri, a member of the local women's sangha. Madamma narrates her tale of woe.

**Savitri:** Maybe you should come for our meetings. Many women have found the meetings helpful. Some officials will also be present in the next meeting. You can talk to them.

**Madamma:** I will certainly come.

Madamma finds the sangha meeting an enriching experience and slowly gets more and more involved in its activities. She soon finds that she is able to be more articulate and play a meaningful role in the Panchayat also.

### POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

a. **Information relating to Panchayati Raj, which can be shared through songs, picture booklets. The concept of "Mahiti melas" may be introduced.**

b. **A group discussion on**

(i) the socio- historical context in which a certain segment of society has been denied access to information and knowledge.

- (ii) an inquiry into who has benefitted from a division of society on the basis of caste/class/gender.

Here, trainers can explore cultural and religious beliefs that participants have internalised. Trace these beliefs back to religious ideology and the religious prescriptions in the various religious texts that discriminate against women. Make another backward linkage by highlighting that religious beliefs that perpetrate the lower status of certain castes, classes and women are "man-made".

**c. An exploration of the participants' views on**

- (i) the role of women's collectives/sanghas in empowering or supporting women members in the Panchayat.
- (ii) the role of literacy in the new political scenario.

Trainers can ask illiterate participants to name the middle-men/women who they approach in order to understand the written word. Emphasise the need to do away with such middle men/women.

**A NOTE FOR TRAINEEW**

Trainers will need to read about the history of religion to deal with such analyses. Also sensitivity is a pre-condition while treading on issues such religion.

# **DON'T WOMEN HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW?**



Gowramma had become a Panchayat member for the first time. She was moved by the plight of the poor Scheduled Caste people in her village. She had heard about some government programmes to help the poor and wished to get more details about them.

Whenever she attempted to get this information from the Panchayat members and from the BDO's office, she was ignored, snubbed or shouted down.

Eventually she met a woman member, the Upadhyaksha of the Zilla Parishad who was on a visit to the village. The aggrieved Gowramma poured out her troubles to this sympathetic Upadhyaksha who promised to intervene.

Suddenly Gowramma found that the officials were far more co-operative and this went a long way in helping her perform her role effectively.

A Panchayat meeting is in progress

**Gowramma:** I understand there are a number of government schemes but nothing reaches the Harijans.

**M R :** You have just entered the Panchayat and you talk so much.

**Gowramma:** Please Sir, just think of the poor people. They work as coolies on daily wages. Shouldn't we do our bit to help them? After all, the schemes are meant for them.

**M R :** You leave it to us. We have more experience.

Not satisfied she decides to meet the BDO. But this experience is even worse. The official is very rude.

**Gowramma:** In that case, I will have to approach higher officers.

**Officer:** (arrogantly) Go anywhere. Go to your DC, Vidhan Soudha or even Delhi. I am not bothered.

Some time later, the Panchayat office is getting ready for the visit of the Upadhyaksha of the Zilla Parishad who is a woman. The Upadhyaksha arrives.

**Upadh :** (looks at Gowramma) Aren't you a new member? What is your name?

**Gowramma:** (hesitantly) I am Gowramma.

**Upadh :** How do you find your new role?

**Gowramma:** (pauses) What can I say?

**Upadh :** (encouragingly) Do tell me. I am here to help you with your problems.

Gowramma tells the Upadhyaksha about the uncooperative attitude of the male members of the Mandal and the BDO.

**Upadh :** (addresses the BDO) What is this that I am hearing?

**BDO:** (sheepishly) No madam, even if we tell them, what will these women understand?

**Upadh :** (firmly) Don't underestimate women. She is a member of the Panchayat and you have a duty to cooperate with all Panchayat members.

From that day onwards, Gowramma is able to perform her role more effectively.

## POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

- a. **Inputs on the federal structure of the Indian polity, the three tiers of Panchayati Raj as well as on finances and resources of panchayats.**
- b. **A discussion on the theme -**

**"Knowledge is Power".**

Emphasise that knowledge can be acquired easily; by interacting with others, by cultivating a desire to ask questions and a willingness to be open to new experiences and learning.





## WATER POLITICS



Scheduled Caste women in a particular village faced the all-too-common problem of water shortage until a woman member of the Panchayat took interest in their welfare. A separate drinking water pipe was provided to the colony and the women who had been walking several miles to fetch water until then, were overjoyed. A few days later however, the taps went dry. They posed the problem to the woman representative. An inspection team was sent by the Zilla Parishad. However on that particular day, plenty of water was available at the tap, making the women look very foolish. Suspecting foul play, the woman member along with some village women, decided to investigate. She found out that some rich farmers had drilled holes in the pipe and had diverted the water to their fields. Whenever they heard that there was an inspection, they would block the holes and make it difficult to catch them red-handed.

The woman representative therefore suggested that the women take their problem to the authorities in the Zilla Parishad. They did so and the Zilla Parishad sent a team which took the culprits to task.

Some poor Scheduled Caste women go to the Panchayat office.

**Woman1:** (to the woman representative) Amma, the water has stopped again. It

seems as if it is only the upper caste people who are blessed with everything.

**Woman2:** This is our fate. Why is it so?

**W R :** No, don't feel so. We will all do something about the water problem.

The following day she visits the spot and opens the tap. To everyone's surprise, water flows out. They wonder why it is that only when the Panchayat representative opens the tap, there is water.

**Woman1:** Something is wrong somewhere.

**Woman2:** Let us find out.

The woman representative also suspects some foul play. Together they start walking along the pipe line. Suddenly, they notice water gushing out of a hole in the pipe.

**Woman1:** Look, the problem lies here. These rich farmers have drilled holes and are diverting water to their fields.

**Woman2:** How awful! How unfair!

**W R :** This should not be ignored. We need to take stern action against these people. Why don't you all go to the Zilla office and ask them to take action? I will also put in a word.

Sometime later, a team from the Zilla Parishad makes a surprise check and confronts the culprits.

**ZP mem:** This is not expected of you. You have stooped to such low levels.

**Farmer:** But it is not like that ...

**ZP mem:** I don't want any justification for your selfishness. But I warn you. Never repeat this. In future, if any complaint comes to me, I will not spare you.

Thus, through collective action and the key role played by the woman representative, the women were able to solve their water problem.

## POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

- a. **A discussion on "What are the issues located in women's everyday lives?"**

**Begin with the questions**

1. "What is an issue?", "Can women identify issues in their everyday lives as issues?"

2. Elaborate on the concept of "right to resources".

- b. **Inputs on "Practical and strategic gender needs?"**

Practical gender needs are those that arise from concerns such as food, fuel, fodder etc. The measures taken to satisfy

these needs do not challenge established structures. They do not question the gender division of labour.

Strategic gender needs arise out of the recognition that women's long-term interests lie in challenging social structures that disadvantage them. Examples of strategic gender needs include redefinition of the gender division of labour, removing institutional forms of discrimination.

Connected to these concepts are the ones of position and condition. Providing water facilities may change women's condition but will it change their position?

Whether from a well, or a tap, it is women who get water. Unless there is a change in gender division of labour, women's lower status remains unaffected.

...I know what to do..

## TAKING THE JOB SERIOUSLY



The women members, although new to the job, took it seriously. This attitude certainly forced a change in the working style of officials attached to the Panchayat. In this episode, water and sanitation facilities of a particular area were on the agenda for the Panchayat meeting. The Junior Engineer, responsible for preparing the blueprints and the plan of action, failed to turn up at the meeting. This was so, although he had been informed in advance. Meeting him later, the woman representative reprimanded him strongly and insisted that he come to the Panchayat office with all the required documents. A somewhat chastened Junior Engineer realised that he could not take things lightly and proceeded to complete his job within the allotted time.

The meeting commences. Everyone is waiting for the engineer. Several hours later...

**MR :** What is the last point on the agenda?

**WR 1 :** The Engineer was supposed to bring the blue-prints for water and drainage lines. But he has not turned up yet.

**WR 2 :** It is okay. Let us go ahead with the agenda.

**WR 1 :** This is ridiculous. He is aware of the meeting and yet he has not turned up. How irresponsible.

After the meeting, the woman member meets the Junior Engineer.

**W R1 :** Sir, this is negligence on your part.

**JE :** But these things take time. Preparing a blue-print is not so easy.

**W R2 :** What is so difficult about the blue-print? All it involves is identifying where the pipes will be laid and then estimating the time, material and cost involved. Don't try to fool me with big words.

**JE :** Madam, I have been here for many years and I know how serious everybody is.

**W R1 :** (sternly) But things are somewhat different now. I don't want this to happen again. If you fail in your responsibility, we will have to take serious action.

**JE:** (sulking) Alright, what do you want me to do?

**W R2:** In the next meeting, either be present or at least see to it that the blue-print of the sanctioned water plan is presented. I don't want any excuses.

### **POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION**

The role play can be supplemented by

- a. **A discussion to explore ways in which transfer of technical know-how to village communities can happen and on the need to be more self-reliant.**
- b. **Sharing case studies of communities which have used traditional/low cost technologies in the area of irrigation, sanitation, public health, farming etc**

- c. **Inputs on academic/research institutions which can help in transfer of technology to village communities.**

Eg: Application of Science and Technology to Rural Areas (ASTRA) is an organisation located in the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore which has considerable experience in the adaptation of technology to rural areas. There are such organisations in different parts of the country.

## WOMEN BRING IN DECORUM



An official was in the habit of coming to meetings in a drunken state. This was a big nuisance, especially to the women present and they began to protest. They requested him several times to improve his ways but to no avail. Finally the Upadyaksha of the Zilla Parishad, a woman member, complained to the Chief Secretary of the Zilla Parishad. The District Health Medical Officer was summoned to conduct a medical test, which proved positive. Strong disciplinary action was taken against the erring official. Women members also protested strongly against excessive smoking in Panchayat meetings and a resolution was passed to ban smoking in Panchayat meetings. Thus the presence of women members brought decency and decorum to the Panchayat meetings.

A Panchayat meeting is in full swing. The official comes in very drunk and unsteady. The women are irritated and worried.

**WR 1 :** Just look at this man. How can we sit in the room with a person like this?

**WR 2 :** He cannot even walk properly or stand on his own legs.

**WR 3 :** And he is going to carry out Panchayat duties!

**WR 1 :** What shall we do? We must think of a possible solution.

The women members discuss the issue with the lady Upadhyaksha of the Zilla Parishad.

**Upadh :** Let me talk to him and request him to change his ways. Let us see if it works.

Before the next meeting, she summons the errant official

**Upadh :** There have been complaints that you are drunk even during the meetings. Many of the members, especially women don't like it at all.

**Official:** How does it bother them as long as I am doing my work properly?

**Upadh :** (sternly) But that is not the point. Such conduct is not in keeping with the behaviour expected of officials and Panchayat members. What kind of example are we setting? How can you expect people to respect you if you come drunk to meetings?

The request falls on deaf ears. He comes back to the next meeting in a drunken state and gets into a brawl with other members.

**W Rs :** (loudly) Mr. Adhyaksha, either you ask him to go out or we will stay out.

**Adh :** Please calm down. We do need to take this up with the Chief Secretary. I promise you something will be done.

**W R 1:** We also need to do something about excessive smoking during meetings. I get a severe headache after every meeting. And we have appealed enough number of times.

**M R :** What a fuss you women make!

**W Rs :** (in one voice) We should pass a resolution to ban smoking and drinking during meetings. This is no fuss. It is a real problem. Aren't men also affected by smoking?

The President takes action and a resolution is passed.

### POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

a. **Sharing stories about the anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh.**

b. **Exploring women representatives' vision of an alternate work culture. The exercise can be an essay, role play or a mime.**

1. Ask participants to critique the existing work-ethos in the bureaucracy or within the Panchayat. Can they identify that corruption, redtape, etc. are problems that can be addressed?

2. Trainers can enact the roleplay till the point where women demand that something be done about smoking in meetings. Ask participants how something can be done? Do they know resolutions to regulate members' behaviour may be passed?

c. **Ask women how it would be if there were no controls on their mobility, no fear of physical molestation, rape; no dependence on anybody. Can they visualise such a society?**



## WHY SHOULD WOMEN PUT UP WITH VIOLENCE?



The Anganwadi workers in a particular village were being summoned by officials at odd times of the day. The women were obviously inconvenienced by this procedure. The other problem facing them was that they were being teased and pestered by the men of the village. One day, when an Anganwadi ayah was returning home after a meeting held late in the evening, a gang of thugs molested her.

Later, some women from the village sangha heard about this crime and they were extremely agitated. Along with a woman representative, they decided to take up the matter with a woman member of the Zilla Parishad.

The woman member of the Zilla Parishad reassured them and promised that she would do her best to get the culprits to book. She also took immediate action and got a notice issued to the effect that no woman worker could be summoned after 3.00 p.m for any reason whatsoever.

Although the fact that the culprits could not be traced is a sad commentary on our society, the presence of a woman representative in the Zilla Parishad at least ensured the personal safety of the Anganwadi workers after this incident.

At 9 a.m. Savithri usually leaves for the Anganwadi centre. She is usually back by 6 p.m, but today for some strange reason

she has not returned. It is past 8 p.m and everyone at home is worried. She finally arrives, in tears, looking shattered.

**Mother:** (looks worried) What is the matter? What happened?

**Savithri:** (totally shattered) What I used to always fear... The meeting got over at 6 p.m and I started to walk back ... Some horrible men followed me, dragged me to the Fields and molested me. I struggled, I screamed ... but there was no one to help me... What should I do now? I am ruined forever ...

Mother and two women from the neighbourhood listen to her horrified.

**Mother:** (sobbing) Why has such a terrible thing happened? I do my Puja everyday. My poor daughter was only trying to earn a living and help the family. Now the girl has lost her good name forever. Who will marry her? All is lost. Shantamma, Gowramma, (looking at neighbours) for pity's sake do not tell anybody about this.

**Gowramma:** Akka, it is not Savitri's fault. Don't you think by keeping quiet we are letting this sort

of crime happen again? (looks at Savitri) First, let us call the lady doctor here.

**Shantamma:** Tomorrow during the meeting we will talk to our sangha leader. Our Panchayat member Siddhamma will also be there. Something needs to be done. We won't keep quiet till the dirty fellows are caught.

At the sangha meeting Siddhamma proposes that they bring this incident to the notice of the lady Upadhyaksha of the Zilla Parishad and immediately file a police complaint.

Siddhamma meets the Upadhyaksha

**Upadh:** I am glad you have filed a police complaint but we should see that such incidents are not repeated. There is one thing I can do immediately. I will request the Zilla Parishad to issue an order that women workers should not be called out on duty after 3.00 in the afternoon. Siddhamma, we will also do our best to bring the culprits to book.

**Pointers for Training Intervention are included in Episode 8**

## TREATING WOMEN WITH RESPECT



A hard working ayah in an anganwadi was not well one day. She managed to come to work but could not clean the premises. The officer-in-charge got annoyed and started shouting at her. When the ayah protested that she was not well, he asked her rudely how she had the time and the energy to dress up and even put on her **bindi** when she claimed she did not have the strength to clean the anganwadi. The ayah was very upset and related the episode to the women representative. The latter was sympathetic and reprimanded the official and warned him against hurting the sentiments of women workers.

The anganwadi premises in a particular village are kept scrupulously clean. The person responsible for its cleanliness is an old ayah. One day when the officer finds the place dirty, he loses his temper with the ayah.

**Officer:** Why didn't you clean the place today?

**Woman:** Sir, I am not keeping well. I have some problem at home. That is why I was late

and could not clean the steps or decorate them with **rangoli**. I promise you this shall not be repeated in future.

**Officer:**

Is that so? You are not feeling well? Eh? You did not have time to clean the place but you had time to put "bindi" on your forehead. How did you remember that?

The ayah is very hurt and sits outside the anganwadi building weeping. The woman representative of the Panchayat is passing by.

**WR :** Laxmanma. How are you?  
(sees her weeping) Why?  
Why are you crying?

(Laxmanma relates her story)

Laxmanma: Amma, doesn't he know how important the **bindi** is to a married woman.

**WR :** Don't be upset Laxmanma. The Officer has been very insensitive. Don't worry. I will speak to him and make him promise that he will not offend you again.

### POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

- a. An exercise on sharing personal experiences of gender discrimination and an analysis of the underlying social values, patriarchal ideology.
- b. Discussion/Inputs on patriarchal control over women's mobility, body and sexuality
- c. An exercise to weave together from individual life experiences of participants, a collective experience of gender inequity and male dominance. Participants can also explore their own dream of an equal society and present it as a song, poem or mime.

### NOTE FOR TRAINERS

These exercises may pose some difficulties if participants get subsumed into their problems. As trainers, there is a need to move beyond self-pity and encourage women to look for constructive options.



## A LEGITIMATE PLACE FOR WOMEN'S CONCERNS



The women representatives and many women in a village had plans to celebrate International Women's Day in their village. They had planned to organise a camp and call in guest speakers to discuss gender-related issues.

The person they had to convince to get funds sanctioned, was the Chief Accounts Officer at the Zilla Parishad. While a separate provision did exist to sponsor such events in the village, the Chief Accounts Officer was not convinced that the money should be spent to celebrate the International Women's Day. He felt it was not important enough to warrant the expenditure. The women members of the Finance Committee then had to intervene. They impressed on him the relevance of celebrating the International Women's Day. They emphasised that it was an expression of solidarity among women folk, not just in the village or state but all over the world. They were not spending money on merry-making but the programme was intended to sensitise local people about gender-related problems in society. The CAO finally accepted their arguments although reluctantly and sanctioned the money needed for the celebration.

There is a heated discussion between the women members of the Finance Committee and the Chief Accounts Officer at the Zilla Parishad.

CAO:

We can't sanction money for such programmes. You women want to get together and sing and dance; some women will come and give speeches... how can we

- spend so much on something like this?
- W R 1:** But do you know what the international Women's Day is? All over the world, on this day, attention is focussed on women's problems and how they affect society.
- W R 2:** It is not just singing and dancing. The women coming to this programme will express difficult issues concerning their lives through song, dance and drama. It is not some cheap entertainment. It concerns their day-to-day lives.
- CAO:** But why should the Zilla Parishad pay for all this?
- W R 1:** But women's problems are social problems that concern every one of us, particularly the Zilla Parishad.
- W R 2:** And we are sure that there is a provision for organising such programmes. Why are we hesitating then? Maybe there is no precedent but we can assure you that the programme will be very useful.
- CAO:** OK. Ok, I will sanction the money. But I am not very happy. You women have started making too many demands!

### POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

**a. Inputs on Understanding finance/resource management in Panchayats.**

Trainers can explore women's understanding of budgets in the idioms that they are familiar with. For instance, explore how women preserve food for the rainy season. Basic accounting principles may be shared.

**b. A simulation exercise to explore women's negotiating and bargaining skills.**

The "closed-fist" exercise will be helpful. One participant closes his/her fist. The other is instructed to open it. The objective of this process is to examine different ways in which different participants open the fist: whether they use force, whether they persuade, whether they bargain. The trainer's role is to highlight the merits of negotiation and persuasion.



## TACKLING CORRUPTION



A mandal panchayat sanctioned the construction of a road in a particular village. The job was given to a contractor whose estimate included three truckloads of **jelli** stones for the job. The proposed road happened to be near the house of a woman member of the Panchayat. She kept an eye on the work as she passed that way everyday. She soon realised that the contractor was trying to finish the job with two truckloads of **jelli** stones instead of the three that he had mentioned in the estimate. She brought this to the notice of the Panchayat and made sure an inspection team was sent to survey the work. The errant contractor was caught and reprimanded by the Panchayat. He was forced to make good the loss of material and complete the job to the satisfaction of the Panchayat.

The pathetic condition of the village road is bothering the woman representative who brings it up at the Panchayat meeting.

The meeting has started. The lady member raises her hand.

**Pradhan:** So Madam, what is your problem this time?

**W R :** Sir, I have mentioned it in the detailed note given to you. The village is inacces-

sible because of the bad road. Kindly grant permission to begin construction of the road.

**Pradhan:**

Amma, all roads are like that. There are more important matters.

**W R :**

Our village becomes completely inaccessible because of the bad road. It is a priority issue. Please

understand this and don't postpone the approval.

With great difficulty she manages to convince the President. The Panchayat approves the construction. The task is assigned to a contractor who gets a sanction for material including three truck loads of jelli.

The construction work begins.

Contractor to Supervisor

**Contr:** So has all the material come?

**Super:** The second truck of jelli has also come. All the material we need is here.

**Contr:** There should be no delay. Finish the job quickly.

Later the women representatives stops by to look at the work.

Addresses Supervisor:

**W Rep:** I see that the work is progressing well. I saw another truck bringing jelli in the morning. When are you expecting the third truck?

**Super:** The work will be over with two; we don't need more jelli.

The women representative checks the estimate and finds that the estimate includes three-truck loads of jelli. She informs the President about the misappropriation and the Panchayat members come to the site.

**W R :** (looks at the contractor) Here he comes. Pradhan, ask him in front of his men how much material he sent to the site?

**Pradh:** (to supervisor) Tell us the truth. How many trucks of jelli came?

The contractor is caught red-handed.

**Pradh:** You had better make good the loss. Don't cheat the public.

## POINTERS FOR TRAINING INTERVENTION

The role play can be supplemented by

- a. **Inputs on the concepts of authority, accountability and responsibility.**
- b. **Exercises to enable women to use authority commensurate with the responsibility of being a people's representative.**

Trainers can explain how elected women representatives derive their authority from the people who they represent and therefore how accountability to the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat is a primary responsibility.

## AFTERWORD

### TRAINING WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES - SOME CHALLENGES

The essence of Panchayati Raj is derived from a philosophy of equality and self-determination. The following questions relate to such a philosophy. There are some issues that -

1. How can women in Panchayats network horizontally with other Panchayats and also with women co-members to counter dis-empowering forces working against them?
- 2) Will the presence of more women in politics be akin to "old wine in new bottle" or will women infuse democratic institutions with newer and more decentralised notions of power? How can a shift from the existing "power over" (others) paradigm to the "power within" (oneself) paradigm be facilitated?
- 3) In the context of the global information revolution, how can training expand women's world view? What is the role of literacy and numeracy in the changing political scenario?
- 4) How can women representatives (Panchayats) forge links with social and political movements?
- 5) To what extent does the semantic range of the concept "self-governing" include the Gram Sabha?
- 6) To deal with a system tarnished by corruption, red-tapism, nepotism, lack of accountability etc., What new standards can women set?

## TO READERS

We would be happy to receive comments from readers and users of this resource book. Trainers who have used it are welcome to send their feedback to us.

It would be enriching to know the ways in which the role plays have been employed in different learning situations. Do send us a note on the ways in which you have adapted the material. The insights that emerge from the training programmes you are part of, will be valuable contributions to the pointers for training that we have suggested after every episode. They will also throw light on newer issues and perspectives about women in Panchayati Raj.

Please write to us if you want more information about the **UMA** Resource Centre.

## ABOUT US

UMA is a resource centre for women in Panchayati Raj, a project of the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) located in Bangalore, Karnataka. ISST as an institution has made contributions in the area of research and documentation on issues relating to gender, poverty and Panchayati Raj.

UMA aspires to strengthen the solidarity and enhance the capabilities of women in politics by fulfilling the long-felt need for information exchange and networking among individuals and organisations working in Panchayati Raj. UMA also publishes a newsletter related to issues in Panchayati Raj.

A major component of the UMA project is the design and implementation of a training programme for the women representatives elected to the Gram Panchayat in selected areas of four districts of Karnataka.

### List of Abbreviations

BDO	Block Development Officer	MR	Male Representative
CAO	Chief Accounts Officer	Super	Supervisor
Contr	Contractor	Upadh	Upadhyaksha
DC	District Commissioner	WR	Woman Representative
JE	Junior Engineer	ZP Mem	Zilla Parishad Member



# **UTSAHI MAHILA ABHYUDAYA**

**UMA is a Resource Centre  
for Women in Panchayat Raj**

**AT**

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