Interview

Patriarchy and Women - A Focus on Development and Progress in Southern India

Prof. Paul Ade Silva Interviews Prof. Yazali Josephine on
Women Empowerment Progress in India

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Women Addressing Men

PAS: Can you introduce yourself by taking us through your upbringing, your education and work?

YJ: I was born in Guntur Dt of Andhra Pradesh to well-educated parents, my mother was a school principal and my father was a tobacco exporter. I have studied in Christian Missionary school and college in Guntur, but I grew up as an atheist. My mother was religious and my father was an atheist. Although, my father was not very much encouraging of female liberty he encouraged me to become a medical doctor and do some social work for the poor. In

contrast, my mother had liberal values and had always encouraged girl's education and women empowerment.

My father passed away, few days before I could start college. My mother with the help of my brother educated me. However, due to financial struggle I could not pursue medicine. I have an elder brother who studied up to Bachelors of Commerce degree and an elder sister who studied up to school level and was married off to a bureaucrat before my father's death.

My mother encouraged me to go for higher studies. My sister helped me to make my career in Delhi. The men at home were of conservative ideas about women and never approved of higher education for women, and for women to work. They only believed in marriage for women and for women to look after the family. After getting a job I continued my education by refusing to marry and went to Italy and France, for further studies.

Then I joined Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi, India) for MPhil/PhD higher studies Programme in Economics and later got a job in an academic organisation under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (India).

Later, I got married to an upper caste North Indian Hindu man of my choice. In spite of my marriage, my progress was with great struggles academically and professionally in an atmosphere of male domination. Every step in my professional development was an acid test for success. I worked with several international agencies and travelled to almost 20 countries on academic consultation / conferences etc. When I retired, I started my own Academy and consultancy.

PAS: Growing up in such a diverse surrounding, you like your father being atheist and you said your mother was religious and that you went to a Christian school. How did that form you in response to your strongly male dominated society?

YJ: My grandparents were also educated and my maternal grandfather was a school's inspector, who worked with an English mission. He imbedded in his children, the values and the importance of women's empowerment based on individual freedom and education for women.

My mother inherited those values. She used to say to us that "the journey of a girl child starts from the parental home as a slave of social norms or a social prisoner" and that we have to break it. First is family discrimination, next is at married life, third is in workplaces and the fourth is old age. I was told to never live their dreams. It is education which can bring us out from such prison walls.

She used to believe that one of the major hindrances in the growth and advancement of women is gender inequality i.e. treating women unequally from the early stages of their lives.

My mother's view is that discrimination starts from not giving girls equal education. A male child is always encouraged by his family to go to school, while the female child is told to learn household work. Educating girls will benefit not just themselves but also their communities and help them to be less isolated at home or in exclusion from financial, political, and economic decisions. With an education, women are able to live their dreams by pursuing their own goals and values and girls can make choices in life from the position of self-confidence and improve their health, economic and social life.

PAS: I thought the Indian government passed legislation in 1993 to improve the empowerment of women. Can you talk about the effect of the 1993 Laws and how successful were they in changing the lives of women and girls with respect to equality of opportunities?

YJ: You're right, the government of India passed a piece of progressive legislation in 1993 to enable the presence of a 'critical mass' of women in the decentralized decision making process. The enabling measures can be characterized as the facilitator of 'rights based approach' to women's empowerment. When India was under colonial rule it was only the restricted male members who could vote and contest elections while women were totally absent from the political scene.

For instance, the Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1920 categorically stipulated that no person could become an elected member who was a female and that the election was to be held in each village by the adult male residents at a meeting presided over by the assistant or deputy collector. Even after independence the Indian Constitution did not mention or specifically provide reservation for women's' representation in the parliament or state assemblies. Although the 73rd and the 74th Amendments Acts of 1992 sought to reverse the aforesaid Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1920, by examining women's socio-economic situation the issue whether women have really been 'empowered' is still a work in progress. The case of Dalit community women in Panchayat raj (local governance system) could help test out the assumptions inherent in the goals and objectives of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992. (See excerpts from a long article - Chief Editor.) PUCL Bulletin, March 2003 Panchayati Raj institutions and human rights by George Mathew
https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/women/active-participation-of-rural-women-in-panchayat-raj-system/5589

PAS: Before we talk more about the measures of success of these specific laws, I would like us to go back to what you were saying about your own upbringing. How easy was it for you growing up as a girl and later as a woman in India?

YJ: It was not easy for me to reach the position of a professor as men at home and surrounding areas did not support women's empowerment. They believe it is not safe for society if Indian women were to move freely like western women, India therefore remains a strongly male dominated society.

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PAS: From which university did you retire as a professor?

YJ: National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) New Delhi India. Now the name has been modified to National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA New Delhi)

PAS: Tell me more about your current work, what is the focus of your consultancy and are there any projects that you and your organisation have carried out successfully that you want to share with us?

YJ: I have started my own academy called Peoples Development Academy**.** Our academy consists of 5 units dealing with Research, Training, Consultancy, Volunteering, Teaching, Production and Dissemination. Our research Studies are conducted through study reports, small videos, and storytelling clips. We work on contract/assignment basis. Our staff members are highly qualified and experienced. We have a free-standing independent unit in each area. Each unit is headed by an honourable director who is highly qualified, dedicated, and is an experienced professional to supervise and guide the other team members.

In collaboration with edumilestones.com (Pvt Ltd) we give consultancy and counselling for study abroad programmes.
https://peoplesdevelopmentacademy.com
https://peoples.edumilestones.com

So far, I have worked in three international consultancies

1. DFID on Tribal Education Innovations 2016-2017
2. European Union funded Consultancy on Evaluation of Foreign funded Education Programmes in India (Rashtriya Madhyamika Shiksha Abhiyan) RMSA) 2017-2018
3. IP Global (India) as a consultant with IP Global for Study visit of Ethiopian Education Administrators. 2019

I have been self-funding my participation in some International Conferences and I have published two research based articles in two edited books:

a. Digital Empowerment for Gender Neutralisation in the Edited Book "Women among Marginalised Communities of India: Issues and Challenges" (2020) Gyan Publishing House

b. Equity driven financial Reforms of education in Northeast India Comprehending Equity: Contextualising India's North-East (2021) Published by Taylor and Francis Group

I volunteer in several activities with International Association with Volunteers Effort (IAVE), it is a United Nations affiliated Volunteers Association.

I freelance on women related issues like female feticide in India, violence against women, girls' education and tribal related Issues etc. with no national or foreign funding but self-generated money and my savings.

PAS: In the Book Review: Anupama Roy, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* by Charu Gupta, which extract is quoted below, the Dalit women were said to have now occupied the centre of Indian democracy and modernity. How much empowerment and economic liberalisation have the Dalit women actually achieved today and how much work is needed?

> *Rao's incredible text too relies on moments, events and individuals in the history of Maharashtra between the 1880s and the 1990s, intricately weaving history and anthropology to highlight how we can 'rethink India's political modernity from the perspective of the Dalits' (p.xii). Temptingly, The Caste Question challenges the association of subalterns, here specifically Dalits, with non-modernity, tradition, 'pasts' and community. Instead, it places them squarely within the paradigm of India's democracy and secular modernity, with anti-caste radicals constantly negotiating with the state, and in the process, transforming conceptions of nation, citizenship and political rights* (p.11). (The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 50, 1 2013)

YJ: Dalit women constituted about 16.60 percent of India's female population in 2011. Dalits are the lowest in the caste hierarchy in India, and in the Indian society they have historically suffered caste-based social exclusion from economic, civil, cultural, and political rights. Dalit women's problems encompass not only gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination associated with religion, caste, and untouchability, which in turn results in the denial of their social, economic, cultural, and political rights. They become vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation due to their gender and caste and they also become victims of abhorrent social and religious practices such as *devadasi/jogini* (temple prostitution), resulting in sexual exploitation in the name of religion. The discrimination is clearly reflected in the differential achievements in human development indicators for this group. In all the indicators of human development, Dalit women score worse than Dalit men and non- Dalit women. Thus, the problems of Dalit women are distinct and unique in many ways, and they suffer from the 'triple burden' of gender bias, caste discrimination, and economic deprivation.

The Indian Constitution has listed 1,108 castes in its first schedule, and hence, these deprived castes are known as Scheduled Castes. The Indian Constitution carries certain safeguards in Article 341 for the Scheduled Caste for ensuring their fundamental rights as Indian citizens, and the Directive Principles of State Policy authorize the state to protect this socially marginalized group from any further discrimination in modern Indian society based on their caste identity. Subsequently, laws have been passed that aim to remove discriminatory practices against the Scheduled Castes and also to ensure their social and economic empowerment. Anti-discriminatory measures for the Dalits include the enactment of the

Untouchability Offence Act, 1955 (renamed as the Protection of Civil Rights Act [PCR] in 1976), and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA), 1989, which aims to prevent crimes and atrocities stemming from discrimination and hatred toward Dalit (Nidhi Sabarwal: study Global justice: Theory practice rhetoric (8/1) 2015)

Political empowerment facilitated through decentralization process in India enables participation of all segments of society including women and the marginalized in local governance. Decentralisation process in India is backed up by affirmative action that provides constitutional rights for every section of the society to represent the people. This constitutional reservation for women and the marginalised has opened the doors to revolutionary changes of a political, social and cultural nature by empowering more than one million women and large number of Dalits through free and fair elections at village, block and district levels in rural India. Reservations for women appear on prima-facie to be working well however we cannot apply the same results to all states in India.

The economic and political social empowerment of Dalit women varies from state to state, region to region and from rural to urban enclaves. Maharashtra is a progressive state in social movement of women. This does not mean that its progress can be applied to the whole of India. Dalit Women in BIMARU (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) States still suffer from discrimination, violence, suppression and poverty. Women from regions like Northeast India (Sikkim, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh) enjoy much privilege than the BIMARU states. The stark differences between the BIMARU and Northeast India may be due to the fact that most of the North East states are Matrilineal and Matriarchal (the main difference between matrilineal and matriarchal is that matrilineal denotes kinship with mothers' or female line while matriarchal denotes a form of social organization in which women are the head. We can describe the matrilineality and matriarchy as two women-centric concepts. However, matrilineality is not the same as matriarchy. There is a distinct difference between matrilineality and matriarchy (https://pediaa.com/).

Southern Indian states (Keral, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and d Telangan) vary with each other. For example, Keral Dalit women lead the other states. In some states (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamilnadu) they have not been mute victims resigned to their plight; they have relentlessly been struggling against caste-based social oppression, exploitative material relations, they have been opposing atrocities of complex and contextual forms of hierarchies.

As of now, we don't have any documented authentic data on how much Dalit woman have progressed, so I cannot give any authentic statement. My arguments are based on several research studies, newspaper clippings etc.

Finally the problem of Dalit women is distinct and unique in many ways all of which cannot be removed merely by applying the aforementioned schemes and laws for they will not yield proper fruits, as political will, commitment, and International pressures are required. It is also important to address the issue in conventional feminist movements as till today they have not addressed the caste-based gender violence. To me personally it appears, there is still a long way to go.

PAS: On the issue of credible data measuring the effects of the schemes and laws relating to the empowerment of women in India that we have localised on the Dalit women, SIMON CHAUCHARD of Dartmouth College writing in the American Political Science Review of May 2014 provides the result of his research into how the dominant groups' attitudes and perspectives can be altered through descriptive representation of groups such as the Dalit women. CHAUCHARD concludes in the affirmative. I would like your own response to Simon Chauchard's research – extracts are quoted below;

> *Can descriptive representation for a stigmatized group change the beliefs and intentions of members of dominant groups?*
>
> *To address this question, I focus on quotas (reservations) that allow members of the scheduled castes to access key executive positions in India's village institutions. To measure the psychological effect of reservations, I combine a natural experiment with an innovative MP3- player-based self-administered survey that measures various beliefs and behavioral intentions.*
>
> *Results*
> *provide credible causal evidence that reservations affect the psychology of members of dominant castes. Even though villagers living in reserved villages continue to think poorly of members of the scheduled castes (stereotypes do not improve), reservation affects two other types of beliefs: perceived social norms of interactions and perceived legal norms of interactions. These changes in beliefs in turn appear to have far-reaching consequences for inter caste relations, as villagers' discriminatory intentions also decrease under reservation.* (Chauchard, S. American Political Science Review, May 2014 pp.1-20 doi:10.1017/S0003055414000033)

YJ: One of the most striking aspects of the modern *Panchayati Raj* defined by the amendment is the systematic reservation of political positions (*pradhans*, sarpanchs, and ward members) for villagers from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SC/ST) or *Dalits*. In spite of strong initial opposition from traditionally dominant caste groups, these reservations have now been implemented during several electoral cycles in most Indian states and have guaranteed the election of tens of thousands of SC/ST candidates that would not have been otherwise elected.

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About 250 million *Dalits* are numbered in India. There has been a meagre improvement in the socio-economic condition of Dalits in the past 50 years which is not enough when compared to non-Dalits. Of course, much more needs to be done. There is an urgent need to have a national sample survey on the *Dalits*. Every fourth Indian is a *Dalit*. There is no proper survey to give the correct number of *Dalit* women in India. They are generally scattered in villages and they are not a homogeneous group. About 75% of Dalits live below poverty line. Economic backwardness of the *Dalits* is mostly due to injustice done to them by the high castes and also due to exploitation. From the time immemorial they worked like slaves, sold as commodities resulting in their social discrimination, economic deprivation, and educational backwardness. To assess the position of *Dalit* women in India, the following indicators will help in the assessment.

Till some years ago, many Dalit women were ill-treated and educationally backward in spite of the facilities for free education. The reasons for the high rate of illiteracy among Dalit women are many. The following are the main reasons:

Puja Mondal: Active Participation of Rural Women in Panchayat Raj System Conducting Meeting

Table 1: The reasons for the high rate of illiteracy among Dalit women

Resistance from the family to send girls to schools.	Lack of physical facilities like accommodation, school, transport and medical facilities.	Girls were forced to do domestic chores which prevent them from attending school.
Fear of insecurity in villages.	The girls were forced to take care of the siblings when the parents are away at work.	Working to earn for the family prevent the girls from attending school.
Working with parents to earn their livelihood in beedi factories or other unorganized sector made them illiterate.	Because of the sick and unemployed parents girls were forced to work.	Many were forced to get married at young age, which stop schooling.
Social restriction is that the girls should stop education after marriage.	In some areas there are complaints from Dalit women teachers of misbehaviours, blackmail and exploitation by the male staff of other high caste people.	Distance of schools from home.
Irrelevant content of the education system.	Fear of alienation of girls from their environment as a result of education are some of the other factors for low literacy level among SC girls. Even if the education improved the marriage prospects of the girls, the minus point is the increase in dowry. Therefore many parents wish to withdraw the girls from schools.	

Jayshree Mangubhai Aloysius Irudayam sj Emma Sydenham (2009) Dalit Women's Right to Political Participation in Rural Panchayati Raj A study of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads.

PAS: Give me a closer look at the problems underlying gender discrimination of women, especially the *Dalit* women in India. I would like to be able to glean any statistics that your organisation may have. Let's have your insights into this matter.

YJ: Female infanticide is more prevalent among the uneducated *Dalit* families. Educational development among *Dalit* women is very marginal because girls are not sent to school because of their responsibilities at home.

Therefore the gender discrimination starts at the very early stage in the life of a *Dalit* girl. Normally girl children are retained at home to look after their siblings. Another thing is the compulsory marriage of the girls at very early age after which their education is halted, that is for those who are even managing to attend school. Generally in the male-dominated society, polygamy is allowed and more so in many *Dalit* families. Because of this the position of the

women deteriorates. Joint family system, polygamy, property structure, early marriage, and permanent widowhood were hurdles for the development of all women in the early period. But in the twentieth century, after the Mahatma Gandhi's movement to educate women, changes slowly began to occur in the position of women. But here, rural women were more blessed than urban women because divorce and remarriage were allowed for them. Mainly Sudras (i.e. low caste people) allowed divorce and remarriage for their women.

The occupation of many scheduled castes women can be divided thus:

Table 2: OCCUPATION, UNTOUCHABILITY AND ILLTREATMENT

Agriculture labourer	Marginal Cultivators	Fisherwomen
Traditional artisans	Leather Workers	Weavers
Scavengers and sweepers	Midwifery	
Non-access to temples, places of worship	Non-access to hotels and eating-places	Not available – barber services for SC/ST Tamil Nadu
Not allowed in gram Sabha sittings – Tamil Nadu	Discrimination in educational institution, public health services	Not allowed to participate in social ceremonies – Tamil Nadu
General untouchability – Tamil Nadu	Enforcement of removal of carcasses – Tamil Nadu	Not access to public cremation / burial ground / public pathways/roads
Not allowed in residential premises of high caste	Access to Dharmsalas – denied	

Untouchability is acute in villages. There is a gradual change in rural areas because they have become aware of their rights and the spread of education has led to improvement in economic conditions and welfare measures.

PAS: What are some of the impacts of reservation on women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI)?

YJ: After getting elected to village local bodies, women representatives have been doing constructive work for the community. Though the growth is slow in the beginning, they are picking up. Here it would be useful to cite a few examples of those women who have done exemplary work for their community after getting elected.

[1]Reservation has played a significant role as four-fifths of all the representatives got elected from reserved seats. Many Studies which were guided by an Academic Advisory Committee helped to analyse various issues related to Elected Women Representatives vis-à-vis their male counterparts. It also investigated their socio-economic characteristics, tracked their

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[1] (EWRs)

political careers over the past three rounds of elections and specifically examined the quality of their post-election participation in terms of performance of their roles.

The women whom PRI has brought into politics are now governing, in the formal sense of the word. They are the government for their area, be it one village, or a larger area such as 100 villages or a district. Women's political empowerment in the last few years through the constitutional amendments has exploded several myths, like the belief that they are passive and disinterested in political institutions; or, only the well-to-do, upper strata women will come through reservation; or, only the kin of powerful politicians will enter *panchayats* through political connectivity to keep the seats for them; and lastly and most importantly, women are only proxy - 'name-sake' - members and they do not participate in the *panchayats*. Without discounting the existence in *panchayats* of some women who do fit into the patriarchal oriented framework, one can say that these myths have now been buried. Today the buzzword is that 'women can do it' because women are doing it.

It is widely recognized that decentralization of power to the local bodies and women's proactive participation on a large scale in the management of the local affairs in the villages has enhanced their status and rights.

In many states in India there is a greater awareness about gender equality and women's rights through the work of women's organizations and especially where human rights initiatives have taken it as a challenge to protect the interests of women in society. Now there are nearly 600 district panchayats, about 6,000 block *panchayats*, at the intermediate level and 2,50,000 gram *panchayats* in rural India where 72.2 percent of India's population lives. Urban India, with 27.8 percent of India's population, has 96 city corporations, 1700 town municipalities and 1,900 Nagar *panchayats.*

The data reveals that, quota or women in PRIs has provided the much-needed opportunity for women to actively participate in the decision-making processes of their locality through the political right that was conferred on them through the Central Act.

Dalit In this new era of *Panchayati raj*, there are now more than one million women representatives elected to the three tiers of *panchayats* who give more meaning to democratic representation as they become spokespersons of their local community.

Overall, the elected women representatives are functioning within an enabling environment at the level of the village community and the household. Quality of participation assessed across various dimensions turned out to be reasonably good. A significantly large proportion of female *Pradhans* reported executing the important role of being a local *Panchayati Raj* functionary. The responsibilities that accompany a high position in the Panchayat are

reflected in their spending the greater part of their time in *Panchayat* related works. [2] "An important objective of the entire process of empowering women through *Panchayati Raj* was to broaden the focus of development to include issues that directly concerned women."
(PAB press release Govt of India Saturday, 8 August 2009)

PAS: What are some of the initiatives that empowered women are taking?

YJ: The initiatives taken by elected representatives at the community level involve providing an enabling environment for ordinary citizens, especially women, both within and outside the household.

Due to encouragement by the elected representatives, the attendance of women in *Gram Sabhas* (village councils) has increased; the frequency of their raising issues also went up.

The attention drawn by women towards issues of 'women and children' and 'sanitation', safe drinking water increased. Women are also involved in issues for providing civic amenities like streetlights, drinking water etc. during their current term.

There was an increase in the proportion of girls getting enrolled in primary schools. {Only} female *Pradhans* reported making special efforts to encourage girls to go to schools.

Among the social issues, the discouragement of child marriage emerged as one which attracted the highest rate of intervention. The problems of gambling and alcoholism were reportedly addressed by representatives and incidents of domestic violence had been reduced.

The awareness of people regarding the various development and poverty-reduction schemes was an indication of the efforts taken by the elected representatives in disseminating information.

> *In 2007-08, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj commissioned a Study on Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Gram Panchayats. The Study was guided by an Academic Advisory Committee and was based on a nationwide survey carried out by AC Neilson ORG-MARG, New Delhi. Prof. Niraja Gopal Jayal of Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi supervised the writing up of the principal conclusions. The Study Report was released on 24th April 2008 at the National Convention of Presidents of Zila Parishads and Intermediate Panchayats. This Study helped analyse various issues related to Elected Women Representatives vis-à-vis their male counterparts. It also investigated their socio-economic characteristics, tracked their political careers over the past*

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[2] PAB press release Govt of India Saturday,8 August 2009

three rounds of elections and specifically examined the quality of their post-election participation in terms of performance of their roles.

(2007-08, the Ministry of *Panchayati Raj* commissioned Study)

PAS: To conclude the interview, can you provide a summary of the historical antecedents to present-day situation in respect of the institutions that have been developed to deal with female empowerment in India?

YJ: Let us concisely examine the local administrative institutions such as *Panchayati* or *Panchaayati Raj* which is a system of governance in which *gram panchayats* are the basic units of administration. It has three levels: village, block, and district.

The term *panchayat raj* is relatively new, having originated during the British administration. *Raj* literally means governance or government**.** Mahatma Gandhi advocated *Panchayati Raj*, a decentralized form of government where each village is responsible for its own affairs, as the foundation of India's political system.

The village *panchayat* is the main institution of running the administration of local affairs of the village. The *Panchayats* performed their functions efficiently even in small villages.

After 1880 the British rule in India made efforts to revive the local self-government system. It was only in the cities that special attention was paid towards local self-government. Eighty percent of Indians live in the village and unless the condition of villages improves, the country cannot make any progress. Mahatma Gandhi stressed the need for establishing *panchayats* and giving more powers to them.

PAS: Please explain its composition.

YJ: The *Gram Panchayat* consists of one or a group of villages. The size of the membership of the *Gram Panchayat* varies from State to State. The membership of a *Panchayat* is fixed on the basis of the population of a village. There is a provision for the reservation of seats for scheduled Casts (*Dalits*) in the *Panchayat*. A specified number of seats are reserved for women in all the states. Every adult who is a resident of the village has got the right to vote in the *Panchayat* election. Any voter who is 25 years of age can contest the election and become a member of the village *Panchayat*. The *Gram Panchayat* is divided into various wards and one representative is directly elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise.

PAS: What is the nature of its tenure?

YJ: The tenure of the *Panchayat* in all the States is not uniform. Usually the members of a *Panchayat* are elected for a five-year term.

There is the head of the *Panchayat* who is called the *Sarapanch*. Other members of the *Panchayat* are called the *Panches*. In some states, the *Sarapanch* is elected by the *Panches.* All the decision of the *Panchayat* is taken by an ordinary majority. The *Sarapanch* also has the right to exercise a vote. Besides the *Sarapanch* there is also one *Naib-Sarapanch* who is elected by and from the members of the *Panchayat*. The *Sarapanch* or the *Naib Sarapanch* may be impeached by the vote of no-confidence motion and also may be suspended for corruption or miss-management. Each *Grampanchayat* has a Secretary and a *Gram Seva*k.

PAS: Do they have regular meetings?

YJ: The *Panchayat* must hold its meeting once in a month and the *Sarapanch* presides over the meeting.

PAS: What are some of the administrative functions?

YJ: It maintains peace and order in the village.
It helps the police in the prevention of crimes and in the arrest of criminals.
It can oppose the sale of wine in its jurisdiction by passing a resolution of two-thirds majority.
It keeps a watch on the work of the government official in the village.

The *Panchayat* can lodge a complaint to the District Collector against the *Patwari*, *Lambardar* & *Chowkidar* if they do not perform their duties properly.

PAS: Are there any other functions we should know before rounding up the interview?

YJ: Other functions include making sanitary arrangement in the village, arranging for clean drinking water and of pouring medicine in the wells, tanks etc.
It arranges for street and road lights.
It opens libraries & reading rooms in the village.
It gets trees planted and looks after them.
It promotes of animal husbandry in agriculture.

The *Panchayat* helps with the development of cottage industry so that unemployed villagers get employment. It also helps people economically in case of floods, famine and drought and works arranging fairs, exhibition, wrestling matches and kabaddi matches as recreation for the people. Construction and the maintenance of roads and bridges in the village are also part of its remit including some judicial functions.

PAS: Thank you Professor Yazalin Josephine for doing the interview and for taking us deeper into the issues that still plague women in India. I would like to acknowledge as you have also pointed out that the Indian government has been making strides tackling some of the issues in terms of women's education and employment.

The problems of inequality and lack of empowerment of women and people classified as minorities are global in nature. Too often, women, black/brown people, people with disability are marginalised in society and their voices often silenced because of the patriarchal nature of most governments which has been a leftover-result, a sort of dominant control mechanism that has been handed down or justified by most orthodoxy religions where their god is a male father archetype.

Even when they have a female god or goddess, she has always been a created being made by the father-god. Dominant regions and cultures of the world are self-captives and promoters of femicide and discrimination. Equality is a right of every single child, male or female. It is time to say "enough" to tokenism of efforts towards solving the so-called minority peoples' issues, for in truth, they are more of the majority than the ruling cabal which is usually in minority.

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