

* 'Parties can help improve women's role in governance'

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JAN. 17. Political parties are crucial for "engendering" or enhancing women's participation in governance, according to experts at a seminar on Wednesday.

They were attending a one-day multi-party consultation on "Facilitating women's participation in governance", organised by the Gender Studies Unit (GSU) of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) here.

The GSU Fellow, Dr. N. Shantha Menon, said that she, along with the GSU Research Associate, Ms. Asha Ramesh, and Ms. Piush Antony, had "documented the gram panchayat elections held last year as part of an on-going project (begun in 1998) on decentralised governance".

The GSU team surveyed the districts of Mysore, Koppal and Udipi "to develop indicators of governance" in the panchayat raj institutions. The study revealed that there was a decline in the number of seats for women as the

levels of governance went higher.

"While there were 48 per cent women members at the GP (gram panchayat) level, it became 42 per cent at the ZP (Zilla Panchayat)," Dr. Menon said. She believed that Karnataka, which was one of the first States to implement the Panchayat Raj Act, should pioneer women's reservation as well. "Why not introduce women's reservation in the State Assembly," she wondered.

A new political order had to be created in this regard, she felt.

Dr. Menon's views were echoed by the former Chief Secretary, Mr. T.P. Issar. He, however, believed that obstacles in the way of women's governance would be removed in time. Besides, he felt that a woman's comparative political inexperience (with regard to that of men) was an asset. "Political experience makes people cynical, parochial and less honest," he said.

Assessment: Mr. Issar called for a relative assessment of all-women and all-men panchayats. "I'm

sure women will prove better because they have an intrinsic advantage that flows from a disadvantage," he said.

Mr. Issar said that men's efficiency was a myth. He cited the recent examples of the City Mayor, Ms. Prema Cariappa, and the Chief Secretary, Ms. Teresa Bhat-tacharya, to prove that women were as capable as men, if not better than them, in administration.

Ms. Asha Ramesh presented the salient features of the GSU study. In the last session, the presidents of the women's wing of parties, such as Ms. Rani Satish (Congress-I), Ms. Vimala (CPM), Ms. B.T. Lalitha Naik (JD-S), Ms. Vimala Gowda (BJP), Ms. Vijayalakshmi Ram Bhat (JD-U) and Ms. Sumithra (CPI), gave their views on women's participation in governance.

Mr. Suresh Kumar (BJP), Mr. S.R. Basavaraj Bommai (JD-S), Mr. Hasnaba (Congress-I) and representatives of the JD(U), CPI and CPM participated.