

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The institution of Panchayat in rural India has been functioning since ancient times. The system of Panchayats however, lost its autonomy under British regime. The British Court of justice offered tough competition to the traditional role played by the caste Panchayats, thereby, contributing to their ineffectiveness and decay. These courts of justice under the British altered the traditional way of functioning of these village panchayats so as to make it suitable for the changes made in land settlement and revenue system.

The village Panchayats withstood ups and downs till the British seized India in the 19th Century. During the British regime, they carried on to function informally and preserved the Indian society from collapsing. In the initial stages of the British regime, it was the logical proceedings and inevitability which was largely responsible for the curtailing up of an arrangement of local administration. The requirement for democratic decentralization approached from the educated elite who required allocation in the exercise of patronage and power. It was restricted to grassroots bodies and municipalities and was based on the belief that local needs should be fulfilled by local taxation. This rule was integrated by Lord Mayo into the decentralization scheme, devised by the government in 1870 that made a condition for local finances to be used locally by the municipal and rural boards to meet up their local requirements.

Lord Ripon's reforms comprised of a magnum opus in the account of local self government in our country; they tried to put it for the very first time on an accepted elective basis. The nominated District Committees which prevailed had not been proved as favorable things. The resolution suggested that the sub-division or the tehsil should usually be placed under the authority of a local board. And above the local board, there should be Provincial governments which may create District Boards, with authority of co-ordination and control. But, neither the Provincial governments nor the Central government loyally carried out the plan of Lord Ripon. Later, the Royal Commission

which was set up on Decentralization advised that the rural boards should be placed below the District Officers, who do not pay attention to the elected representatives.

The Montague-Chelmsford Report which was on Indian Constitutional reforms regarding local bodies should be free from external control. The Government of India Act, 1919 left the local-self governmental institutions under the control of Indian Ministers who exercise power over all Transferred Subjects. The Government of India Act 1935, promised to give autonomy to provinces. So the popularly elected governments in provinces enacted legislations to democratize institutions of local-government.

The partial revival of power and autonomy of Panchayats in India could be seen only after it got independence in 1947. The nationalists like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were among those few who fought for the revival of grassroots democracy. Gandhi ardently believed that “for freedom to be meaningful, real power must rest with the rural communities. India's independence, he maintained, must begin at the bottom.” It was due to their endeavor that a special provision was incorporated in the constitution of India initially in the form of Directive Principles of the State Policy and it was mentioned “that the state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government”.

The Government of India started off the Community Development Programme in the year 1952 for the betterment of the poor. But unfortunately the programme failed to achieve the desired results. To review the situation the government appointed a team under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta. The Committee suggested the setting up of a three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj system for the country. The proposals of the Committee were acknowledged by the Central and the State governments. Thereby, in accordance with the suggestions of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, the state government of Rajasthan, for the first time instituted the Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1959.

But soon after the implementation of the programmes, numerous problems arose in different parts of the country. Some states did not display any enthusiasm either in enhancing or the extension of these local bodies. The elections were not conducted

regularly in many states and by the year 1970, the local self government was subdued under the stagnation and inactivity. In order to invigorate the rural local self government, the Janata Government selected a Committee under the Chairmanship of Ashok Mehta in the year 1977. The Committee proposed the introduction of a two-tier system of Panchayati Raj in the country. But, with the fall of the Janata party Government, the recommendations of the report were not implemented by Congress Government.

Later in the year 1985, a twelve member committee was also appointed under the Chairmanship of Dr. G.V.K. Rao for assessing the administrative measures for rural development and abolition of poverty. The Committee emphasized the requirement for regular elections to the Panchayats. In June 1986, another Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of L.M. Singhvi. It recommended that the village Panchayats must be reorganized to make it viable for Panchayats. The P.K. Thungon Committee constituted in 1988 felt that the PRIs must be constitutionally reorganized.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 was a milestone in the history of rural self-government. It introduced a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj throughout the country. It proposed that direct elections must be conducted at the village level for the Gram Panchayats and the indirect elections at the District and Block levels. It assigned list of 29 activities and responsibilities to the PRIs. It also prescribed reservations for SCs, STs and women.

The institution of Panchayati Raj became the linking element between Gram Sabha and Lok Sabha. On October 2, 1959 Nehru inaugurated India's first Panchayati Raj in Nagaur district of Rajasthan and therefore, Rajasthan became the first state to implement this institution according to the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommendations, followed by Andhra Pradesh. Nehru declared it as "the most revolutionary and historical step in the context of new India". Democracy at the top would not be a success unless it was built from below". The Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan is a statutory institutional structure based on two enactments of the Rajasthan legislative Assembly, viz. (1) the Rajasthan Panchayat Act, 1953, and (2) the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad Act, 1959.

The success of any institution and especially of Panchayati Raj depends on the freedom, power and autonomy granted in the field of decision making and financial issues. But in Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act itself, there are several provisions which limit this autonomy. Some of them being like Section 92-107, which states that on specific grounds, the state government have the power and authority to dissolve Panchayats. The introduction of new programmes is also done with the prior approval of the government. The understanding and solving of village level problems require micro level planning which suits the particular village and therefore there should be financial autonomy for carrying out the responsibilities.

The turning point in the historical evolution of the panchayati raj in India since British time by the enactment of 73rd amendment act 1992 giving constitutional status to village panchayats. It is an advocacy more for the empowerment of the people in general and the marginalized section viz., SC, ST, and women, of the rural population. By devolution of power through the process of democratic decentralization which delegate powers to the local at the village level with the implementation of the Act, it rather draws the rural masses to the mainstream within the domain of power structure.

Introducing the democratic decentralization in the state of Rajasthan, which been comparatively backward in education, economic development and consequently in socio-political consciousness brings hopes for the upliftment of the unreached population within the state. The state is composed of a large number of former princely states. Rajasthan was the first state in India to launch Panchayati Raj Institutions on 2nd of October 1959. The introduction of three tier structure was a welcome step towards rural development in the state. The structural pattern of Panchayats is also discussed in the above chapter which talks about Gram Panchayat being a constitutional body constituted for a term of five years. Today the excluded and marginalized communities are also participating in the development process. The increasing number of women participants has given positive hopes of penetration of democracy at local levels and despite their weak educational, social, political and economic status, today they are ready to take the responsibilities and carry them with efficacy. Today, although few instances but, there are changes in power relations of our society. The two elected women Sarpanches

selected for the study differs in terms of their caste, education, and economic backgrounds, still both manages to bring their respective villages to development. The local self-governance or grassroots democracy can never succeed without community participation. Therefore, the kind of leadership along with the participation from the entire village community plays an important role in bringing about real democratic decentralization.

To reach the unreached as well as to harness the potential of the people for their own development, the focus has been shifted to the villages. The Indian villages are one of the important institutions of our society. Gandhi has been rightly known as the ideologue of the village. After Gandhi, Nehru was perhaps the most important and influential leader of the Indian nationalist movement. Apart from being an important ideologue of the Indian National Congress, he also became the first prime minister of independent India. He was the catalyst of the approach India chose for its development after it achieved independence from colonial rule. Though Nehru worked under the leadership of Gandhi and gave him a good deal of respect, his ideas on the nature of India's past and his vision of its future were different from those of Gandhi. These differences were also reflected in his views on the Indian village. Unlike Gandhi, Nehru perhaps never identified himself with the village and referred in technology driven development for the developing countries like India. However, to really realise the true values and spirit of democracy by the people, the focus has been shifted to the local level for a participatory democracy.

This has resulted into emergence of leaders at the grassroots level and change the leadership pattern in rural India and it being the source of empowerment not only for the masses but also the marginalized and deprived sections of our society including women. The implementation of the constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 has empowered women and the marginalized sections like SC, ST population through reservations in the local elected bodies. So women who are customarily discriminated and denied involvement in political and public spheres, have initiated participation in such forums because of the reservations and quotas specially enacted for their welfare. The responsible leadership plays a crucial role in determining the successful implementation of various schemes and programmes at the grassroots. The community participation in

Panchayati Raj Institutions also to a considerable extent depends upon the kind of leadership administered. Not only women citizens but also other disadvantaged communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes have been gradually involved in the process and the results of democratic decentralization can be realized and the change in the power structure at the third tier of local governance.

Further, it can be very well asserted that the political stature of women is determined by the freedom and access she gets in decision making process. In the case of India, empowering women through legislation really empowered them. However, due to the social structural setup constructed in the premises of patriarchy ideology poses staunch challenges. Beside, there is always social, institutional constraint in the form of caste, illiteracy, gender, etc., which will be much more difficult for women leaders. The representation of women in public or political sphere will be effective with participation of women is improved, which needs efforts from both the male and female citizens of our country.

This study has attempted to understand local self-government through the study of Panchayati Raj Institutions as it evolved since British Raj to present day, along with the main focus on the importance, role and participation of women in PRIs. The study dealt with broader view of empowerment of women, which receives little or no attention in most studies restricting themselves to mere presence in PRIs and stresses on the role women played in and the resultant change occurred in their knowledge, skills and attitudes. The study has been conducted at micro level by taking two villages (Soda and Nosera) from different Gram Panchayats from Rajasthan. The main focus of this study was to measure the people's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. In this study, participation has been discussed in various ways, such as looking at the participation in the voting process, reasons for voting particular candidate, reasons for non-participation and attendance in gram Sabha meetings. Besides this, the study also seeks to look into the governance pattern and differences in the governance of two female sarpanches having entirely different social and cultural capital. The Sarpanch from Soda village belongs to dominant caste and is highly educated whereas the other Sarpanch from Nosera village is a dalit and illiterate.

The organisation and conduct of periodical and fair elections in Panchayati Raj Institutions provides scope for choosing and changing unresponsive leader. These elections are the essence of real democracy. From the present study, it can be observed that the electoral participation in the form of voting in elections is 90 percent and 97 percent from Soda and Nosera villages, there was high percentage of respondents who attended gram Sabha meetings and those who did not attend these meetings cited the lack of time or interest as the main reasons for non-participation in such meetings. The factors which influenced the voting pattern ranged from the caste and kinship ties to influential and resourceful personality to family pressure. Voting is a democratic right which one should exercise according to one's own judgement. But in the Panchayat election, it is found that most of the voters have not exercised their voting right independently. Their voting rights are largely governed by primordial ties viz., caste, kinship loyalties, and money and muscle power of the rich and influential people, family pressure and resourceful personality of the candidate. Women voting behavior is often influenced by family members. It is also found that no time and lack of interest were among the prime reasons for non-participation in the Gram Sabha meetings. Gram Sabha is a manifestation of direct and participatory democracy. It provides an opportunity to all people to participate in developmental process.

It is quite evident from the field that women seldom participate in the electoral procedure or in the interaction of the Panchayats. This research shows that women previously had very little knowledge about the electoral procedure and they have no knowledge about their rights, prerogatives and their own situation in the society. But, this situation is changing with the coming of new female Sarpanches. During the research a very interesting point was observed from the respondents that is, their responses show that by political involvement and participation they only identify with as casting their votes. They have very little knowledge about provisions like the minimum age of voting, the age limit of a candidate to contest in the elections, the provision of fundamental rights, the period of elections, the reservation of seats for women in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Assemblies and Parliament etc. Their interaction with the gram panchayat is very less and they never put forth their demands before the Gram Panchayat about the privileges and facilities meant for them. This is only because of their lack of

awareness and low levels of education. So, in the light of the above analysis, it is quite evident that numerous reasons are there for their indifferent approach towards political partaking. The reasons like poverty, illiteracy, conventional pattern of society, and narrow thinking of the family members and to some extent, the neglected and irresponsible approach of the Gram Panchayat. The women, as a result, in these villages were not only socially, but also politically, culturally, economically and educationally weaker but on the other hand, the changing trend was visible as compared to earlier times. Today, the women from these villages have at least little knowledge about the value of voting and choosing their representatives as they can now see the difference of having a female Sarpanch.

The leadership of women has to come forward from the grassroots level to gain self-confidence and to claim authority at higher positions. Therefore, this study has analyzed if the formal changes brought about by the 73rd Amendment Act by assuring a minimum status to women but without altering the structures and institutions effectively resolves their marginality. Can women's numerical existence bring about changes in institutions and structures and make them open to women's needs and concerns. There are aspects of authority and power, hierarchy and control which will bring about the alteration in gender and power relations.

There are hopes that the path of empowerment and emancipation of women in local governance would facilitate them to re-analyze their lives, to distinguish the structures of power and of their own suppression and subservience and initiate accomplishment to confront the existing ideology as well as institutions and structures. They would change from situations of silence to gaining opinion. We may see their evolution from uneducated, unhesitating citizens to inquisitive individuals, who value their own understanding and learn to demand gendered divisions of labor. They may transform from having limited mobility and permission to move about only if escorted by men, to gaining greater independence and mobility attending meetings, going to public offices without male escort and, most importantly, from politically passive persons to active agents in the political process.

The discrimination based on caste and gender has always existed in our Indian society. The power relation between upper caste and lower caste and between male and female members of our society is not of equals. There has always been dominance of one over another. The initial reasons for discrimination between men and women started long back but the origin of it cannot be traced and therefore, even in today's time women irrespective of caste, class and religion, stand as powerless members of our society. The denial of financial and educational independence along with basic decision making powers have subordinated and oppressed them further.

According to the observations of M.L. Sharma, there is general perception among people belonging to lower socio-economic strata that only the contestants belonging to upper socio-economic status would win elections. But on the contrary, Iqbal Narain's study points to the fact that few people from the lower strata have started participating in politics through Panchayati Raj and these lower castes who could somehow succeed economically and had numerical strength have thrown away the ritually high caste people from the power positions. "Jats in Shekhawati and Marwar region have been particularly effective in this respect. Other peasant castes like Gujjars, Kumhars and Meena are also coming up to follow the precedent set by Jats. There were also cases in which lower castes have challenged supremacy of the higher castes." As is the case in present study, where one of the elected Sarpanch belongs to reserved category but she won election from an unreserved seat.

The earlier preference for higher ritual status for choosing leadership has given way to orientation towards development and growth. The development of Panchayati Raj Institutions also contributed towards raising political awareness and making rural population conscious of their rights and duties. This enactment gave rural population power to choose their local leader and also opportunity to rural women to voice and share power positions through one third reservations at each level. Therefore, slowly but steadily social transformation for women at grassroots started with the coming of 73rd Amendment Act 1992.

The issue of women empowerment and emancipation is not one-dimensional. It involves social, cultural, economic and political empowerment at the same time. Thus, the entry of

women members in grassroots politics is a development in positive direction which needs tremendous will power and efforts to be successful. The inclusive and participatory politics through democratic decentralization ensures the political empowerment of rural women but the real implementation remains a setback even today.

The new century threw an obvious challenge which was to bring back the people in the process of democratic governance specially feminization of the political space. Making the institutions more representative and inclusive is the key task of this century. The democracy can be saved from the vices of intimidation and authoritarianism only after bringing the people back specially women in role play. Hunger, war and violence are the major challenges of this time and have an overwhelming effect on mankind specially women.

There are efforts being made at the national as well as international levels to increase the participation of women in politics which will beget changes and add new dimensions to the global as well as local politics. Women have started coming on forefront questioning their absence from the political forums and dominance of men in the same.

It is fateful that marginalization of women in political space has been vivid enough for the political elites to ignore. The continuous absence of women from the process of decision making has been the problem all the democracies in the world; be it the largest or the smallest; oldest or the strongest. The situation of women in these democracies can be highlighted through few examples. In UK, the oldest democracy, the right to vote was given to women in 1918 and today their representation is only 17.12 percent. The right to vote to women was given in 1920 in USA and today they represent only 13.6 percent. The story of the largest democracy of India is full of disgust with women reaching only 8.8 percent even after more than sixty years of independence.

There are different factors which check the participation of women in South Asian politics; religion being the foremost. The patriarchal norms combined with socio cultural beliefs; lack of economic independence makes the women more dependent on men for their needs which in turn work against them and in favor of men entering politics. To add

to their grievances the biological factors of low health indices and increased maternal mortality inhibit their entry into larger political space.

South Asian countries have been a witness to violence in the election process and this political build up functions to work against the entry of women into politics. Violence is not only confined to physical violence but also targeting the character of the women which weakens them and leads them to withdraw their candidature. Women are short of experience and expertise to contest elections in these countries which can be traced to the lack of education and uneven access to power structures. The political parties also set a bias when they allocate the seats to men and conveniently ignore women participation.

The choices available to the women in the political space, economic and social well-being can be reduced to the recognition of their efforts in the society, their equality within the family and the freedom to hold on to their choices in life. Women in the countries where equal status has been given to them enjoy more political and economic space and get assistance for recognizing their participation in country's decision making process. When women are short of such support and motivation, it acts as a hindrance for them to enter the political process of the country. It is a two way relationship between power and politics irrespective of the nature of politics. It does not matter whether the politics is of governmental kind made of political parties or economic kind consisting of bureaucracies or interpersonal in its structure.

The various dimensions of power and its concept including authority establish a relation between the powerful and the powerless. This clearly lends out that only a small fraction of people who have inherited power can rule. As far as women are concerned there is development of ideological skeleton which legitimizes power. Today we are witnessing a "political inheritance syndrome" which means that a widow or daughter in law of a political leader is seen as a powerful candidate to enter politics. The son of a politician is also a politician, meaning that there is concentration of power in the hands of few. These examples show the feudalistic mindset which still rules the politics of South Asia.

The participation of women in politics is an extension of the democratic space given to them in the family, society and political outline of the country. The obstacles encountered

by women in the family, society and politics sends out a strong message of enlarging of democracy at these levels too. Women can enjoy more power at the national level provided these structures are more democratic in nature.

Other factors of gender insensitivity in the party politics and electoral system, gender stereotyping contributes considerably to the invisibility of women in politics. The obvious disinterest in the women's movement, the slow-moving political culture and the regressive socio cultural barriers add to the problem. The precipitation of level of confidence of women acts as another factor as it is seen that there are specific professions which provide potential leaders to the nation.

As already mentioned there are various factors which are responsible for the lack of women participation in national politics. These are no different when we talk about women in Indian context. The socio cultural norms, lack of economic status, low level of literacy, assault on character, high maternal mortality, gender insensitivity of political parties, religious norms and lack of encouragement from women already in politics play a deciding factor in entry of women in political space. The absence of a political quota, political inheritance syndrome and power to vote to field a prospective candidate are some other factors which work against entry of women in politics. Although political participation is being seen as an important means to address the concerns of women by women yet their representation is not adequate enough to fulfill these concerns. As a matter of fact legal rights in South Asia do not automatically translate into citizenship rights.

Patriarchy has always portrayed women as being weak to men in physical, intellectual as well as social dimensions. Resultantly women face many constraints on social front due to overabundant expectations and suppositions. There are numerous social indicators to specify how disadvantaged girls are as compared to boys and their contribution as well as presence in the society does not hold any value. The upbringing of a child in the society is different and is largely dependent on the gender of the child which affects their right to basic education and gives shape to inequalities in future. The place of women in these boundaries becomes invisible and nonexistent.

These inequalities leave men in the society in an insensitive condition and they cannot understand the role of women in decision making process. Women also believe the same or are made to believe the same and it restricts their role playing to family care and necessary labor at home. Their involvement is not considered important in the family processes as well as in deciding what is best for community.

There are women who break these shackles and want to be involved in the political space but only expression of desire is not sufficient to enter the decision making and governance. There are certain psychological barriers which women should confront before entering this space. In India women who seek power are labeled as prostitutes and this creates a stigma in the minds of the women as well as their families leading to situation where it is hard to overcome this stigma. The male members of the family have to be convinced if the female wants to participate in the politics at local or national level. Most of the time the women lack support of their own family, the extended family as well as the neighbors who have a pre conceived notion of what is right and wrong for them.

Not only the psychological restrains but the physical barriers in Indian society also hold back women from entering politics. Kamal Nath and Milly Chatterjee carried out a study and found that Indian women who participate in politics have to cope with multiple roles which end up conflicting with each other. The expectations with the women in family wants to them domestic role; with those in politics requires them to play a civic role. This new role playing in the civil environment often clashes with the role which society has inferred upon them. Addition of the political responsibilities to the existing family and financial responsibilities add an extra burden and makes entering politics less attractive and less practical.

Indian society gives preference to a son's education and many women are not able to educate themselves satisfactorily to perform political functions. This functions against the entry of women in politics. The political awareness holds no importance if their education is not enough to get them respect at the local level and certainly a great blockage at the national level.

A good election campaign particularly at the state level and the national level politics can be very financially demanding. This is a challenge for women for two evident reasons. First, the political parties invest their money on male candidates than female candidates as former have more chances of being elected. As put by Nadezha Shevoda, it is an “old boys club” which holds no respect for the potential of women to enter political arena. Thus more resources will be put on male candidates than female candidates. Secondly, if the women think of independently running their campaigns, they need to manage their own finances. If the women belong to a political family it is easier for them to manage economics. But if the money belongs to non-political background it becomes a herculean task for her to fund her campaign.

The call for reservation of 33 percent for women in local governing Panchayats was a result of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993. This has resulted in women entering the political space more and more which can be numerically enumerated to 1.3 billion. This will help them create policies which will affect them and their community. It has been studied by Malene Lindenmayer that reservation was responsible for the women at local level to participate in politics; 97 percent of the women contesting for Panchayats were first time participants and they fought due to security given by reservations. Around 14,000 women were included in the development council in Karnataka; 22000 in Orissa and women in Kerala and Rajasthan won more seats than reserved after the implementation of 73rd and 74th Amendments.

The research done by Stephanie Tawa Lama Rewal on the Calcutta Municipal Corporation(CMC) and quota implemented for women showed encouraging results in that not only it increased the women representation but also increased the number of women in the non-reserved seats after the implementation of quota. Thus reservations acted as stimulating factor for women participation.

There have been doubts on the effects of reservations when there have been reports that some women act as substitutes for their ousted husbands, uncles or brothers. But these studies also demonstrate the positive effects of reservation for women in India at the local level and even if there were few female proxies there were new female leader being born. The growth of women at the local level politics will certainly pave a path for other

women in the society to join leadership at local as well as national level. The Indian women movement during the 11th Lok Sabha elections demanded that the more women may be represented at State and National Legislative Assemblies. As a result two major political parties BJP and Congress promised to give reservation to women and made it highlights of their election manifesto. In September 1996, 81st constitutional amendment regarding Women Reservation Bill was introduced by United Front Government.

The Women Reservation Bill defines the role of women as a political equivalent in need of political representation which can only be achieved through reservation which guarantees a separate quota. The bill proposed to reserve one third of the seats in the house of people and state assembly for women. It also stipulated the amendment of Article 330 and 332 of the Indian Constitution which called for a sub reservation for women in schedule castes and schedule tribes and rotation of the seats that were to be reserved. But these promises by parties were never saw the light of the day and the Women Reservation Bill is still waiting for another debate in the Parliament. It always takes a set back on its introduction reducing it to all party meetings or sending it back for revision in select committees.

Had the issue of bill been black and white it would have been much easier to solve. The opponents of this bill in both the genders see it as a demeaning step to existence of women. Some women groups, who opposed the reservation, later went on to realize that it was a last resort to provide women a fair contact with politics. Constitutional provisions do no good to women when it is a matter of their entry into politics. Fairness before law does not guarantee fairness at societal level. An optimistic approach is required to facilitate and mitigate the opportunity to equal access and equal opportunities. It is ironical for the parties talking of women reservation and then opposing it within and outside the house when the procedural movement starts.

Women are subjected to various challenges in all spheres of life be it in their socio cultural or political arena. They can excel in all the fields provided they are provided adequate resources and support to carve a niche for their own selves. Women should be a part of everything not because they are better but because their life experiences shape them in different ways which can act as another dimension in the way the things are

conceived on political ends. It is important to consider these views to make the functioning at societal as well as political level more equitable. Women in India are trying to abolish the factors which limit their participation in politics by adopting a three pronged strategy. Firstly it calls for establishing unity for women at regional, national and international levels. Secondly, training should begin at the grass root level to achieve larger aims. Finally, it calls for a partnership with judiciary and media to alter the mindsets which have been hindering the progress of women in public sphere as full citizens.

The message which Mahatma Gandhi gave aptly suits the Indian woman which says “Woman is a companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of man and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he...By sheer force a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not have.” Women should create large social coalitions to push themselves into the world of politics and establish inclusive culture for revitalization of democracy. The quest for gender justice globally can help to maximize the participation of women in decision making and helping them to establish their existence with full strength.

The amplification of democratic decentralization can be successful only when a holistic approach to development is taken into account. A revolution which encompasses issues of gender justice, social and political equality, self-sustenance of villages, basic education for all and sustainable development is needed to make any country a real democracy. The role of leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions is of extreme importance, as one of the objectives of giving constitutional status to this institution of local self-governance was to develop proper leadership suitable for the developmental needs of the rural masses and bring about social change. The growth and penetration of democracy at local level depends a lot on the quality of leadership offered.

Therefore, eventually we can say that the Panchayati Raj Institutions grants the probability to rural masses to feel the real democracy at the grassroots and experience local self-governance. It also bestows the chance for local leaders coming from different socio-economic backgrounds both males and females to be a part of this inclusive and

participative democratic process. It is in the real sense, “governance of the people, by the people and for the people.” The bottom-up approach plays a significant role in our democracy. The political and social equality has been targeted simultaneously through this institution of Panchayati Raj.

Need of the hour

The advocacy for local democracy stands has been established due to interconnections among the social equality and democratic process. The idea established during 73rd and 74th amendment regarding the representation of the local institutions in the electoral process lead all the state governments to introduce certain legislative measures for the same. These measures consist of obligatory elections at regular intervals, reserving the seats in village Panchayats and municipal bodies for women and SCs and STs and decentralization of power to local bodies. The amendments which came into force in 1993 lead to a plethora of interesting activities being done in different parts of the country and saw involvement of not only the state government but also political parties, NGOs , women groups and various activists.

The practice of equality in India can be only realized if there if greater level of democracy is achieved at the local level. Local Government, quintessentially, refers to the government at the grassroots level for ‘promoting and encouraging the well-being of the masses’. It provides a sound foundation for the organization of healthy democratic society in India. Its development and advancement has been fostered and encouraged by the State to enable the population to participate in the administrative and other areas of community life. Local democracy is a means of establishing access to the disadvantaged and a step towards achieving participatory democracy. It can enhance the efforts towards social equity by transforming the relation between employer and employee, man and woman, high caste and low caste. The equitable management of local public services can act as a base for establishing participatory democracy. The services of schools and health centers, drinking water facilities and fair price shops depend a great deal on the sensitivity of the authorities to popular demands.

There are various studies whose positive findings can be enumerated regarding the acceptance of participatory democracy by the authorities. Firstly, there is enough substantiation of the vigorous commitment of Indian citizens with new promises of local democracy. The elections at the level of Panchayats keep the interest of the public intact. It is evident that women turn out in elections has increased making it a case of larger political education and awareness. When it comes to politics at the level of villages people are becoming more structured in their approach and are questioning the political legacy and corruption. This process of learning is making them move in the direction of participatory with understanding of its ideology and processes.

The main concern for the Indian socio political system after liberalization and globalization has set in, is the involvement of the common man in the decision making process. The 1980s-90s have seen success of various movements like Bargadar movement and other movements of land reform in West Bengal, anti-arrack campaign in Andhra Pradesh, Right to Information movement in Rajasthan, schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh and gradual reach of local democracy in India. These illustrations indicate that India is not repulsive to the change and practice of democracy and the success of participatory democracy is much more than its failures. There have certainly been certain drawbacks in accomplishment of the goal of participatory democracy. These include lack of social equality in local democracy, incomplete involvement of people in local governance, lack of powers in certain spheres and misuse of public resources provided for development under the Panchayati Raj and latent form of Gram Sabhas. Despite the above mentioned there are numerous other reasons for celebration and not leaving hope for a better future.