

Women in Decentralized Governance in India

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Abstract: Women constitute half of the population of the world. Women are politically marginalized world over. There are various social, economical, cultural factors which work as constraints in women's participation in political domain. There is a need to make special provisions to include women in the democratic governance at different levels. India has taken the initiative to make a special provision for the reservation for women at the local self-government institutions. What was the journey of women in achieving today's status is the subject of this paper. The paper talks about women's role in freedom struggle, reservation under Panchayati Raj system through 73rd Amendment Act and capacity building programmes and other initiatives by the government. The paper also discusses the impact of this amendment act on the status of women in local level politics, their role in governance and the consequent socio-economic, political empowerment.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj system, women, governance, reservation.

I. Introduction

History looks different when the contributions of women are included.

-National Women's History Project

"Women spend two-third of their work time in unpaid activities, men only a quarter. Women predominate in caring professions and domestic service. Families, nations and corporations have been free-riding on caring labour provided mostly by women, unpaid or underpaid."¹ The Report on Human Development in 1999 recommended that if governance has to promote human development, it has to go beyond being people-centred. Report recognised that women occupying half of the South Asian population are allocated with much of the responsibilities and burden for care. This recognition of the differentiation in nature of work among women and men defines status of women in society. Women held various important and prestigious positions around the globe yet it did not convert it into positive outcome for the status of women.

In 1993, Government of India passed a series of Constitutional reforms. To democratise and empower local governmental and political bodies, it came with the name of 'The Panchayats' and 'The Municipalities' for rural and urban area development respectively. Panchayat is not a new concept to India. The institution of Panchayati Raj is as old as Indian civilization itself. The history of legalized Panchayat Raj is not very old. Following the constitutional changes, decentralization has become an inevitable part of the governance to strengthen the Local Bodies. As Local Self Government is government at door step of citizens with the personnel for economic growth and social justice as the core aim.

The provision of contesting election on not less than one third reserved seats gave women a mandatory entry in local level politics along with the local people, with the assumption that women will have a say in decision making process at the local level government as they would be elected representatives. It has been over six decades of independent India and twenty years of Constitution (73rd and 74th Amendment) Act i.e. two decades of law in action, and it is long enough period of time to look back at the law to review its efficiency and effectiveness in enhancing women's status by increasing women's political participation in governance.

II. Women's participation in Freedom Struggle

The process of democratisation of decentralising the governance, India witnessed a long period of struggle to decolonise herself from foreign rule. Women in India came out in large numbers and played very important role during freedom struggle. Presence of women in public sphere witnessed change in women's status in the society.

"We record our homage and deep admiration for the womanhood of India who in the hour of peril of the motherland forsook shelter of their homes and with unflinching courage and endurance stood shoulder to shoulder with their men folk, in the frontline of India's National Army to share with them the sacrifices and triumphs of the struggle."

- From a Resolution passed on Jan 26, 1931²

During freedom struggle, with establishment of organisations, political parties, religious organisations, women status started being visualised in a positive atmosphere. During 19th Century, these organizations focused on issues related to suffering and deteriorating socio-economic condition of women prevailing in the social system. In these movements, men and women both were involved against least interested British Government to meet the challenges with respect to socio economic status of women. During this period, women came out of four walls, raised their voice against discrimination both in private and public spheres. Thus, the

women's movement was the expression of the instinctive desire of women to rise to full liberty of soul, to the fullest development as human being³.

Male thinkers, activists and reformers were the one who took initiatives during this period. Later on, female reformers became active and they took it to the core. Reformers like Rajaram Mohan Rai, Ishwarchand Vidya Sagar, Jyotiba Phule, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Ambedkar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, D K Karve, Keshab Chandra Sen, Debendraanath Tagore, Syed Ahmed Khan and many others took the issues like widow remarriage, child marriage, sati pratha, women's education and their rights as a human being in the society. Later on, Mother Teresa, Annie Besant, Pandita Rama Bai, Sarojini Naidu and other big names attached themselves with some organisations, political parties and some of them took the path of active politics. There were examples of female college students and many others taking part in revolutionary actions like attacking British officers, active participation in revolutionary groups by freedom fighters. This direct involvement of women in Freedom Movement witnessed increased enrolment of women in literacy and awareness in political education during early period of independence. It can be seen in the data of 1941 and 1951. The gap between male female literacy declined from 20.5% to 17% between 1941 and 1951⁴.

Besides the fact that women are far behind in active participation in public domain, there are many such big names mentioned in the history which read them as a great freedom fighters and count those names among one of the most courageous leaders who were behind the country's freedom. Yet they are less in number, but fat in terms of stories and heavy in terms of courage. Their participation in the struggle began as early as 1817 when Bhima Bai Holkar fought against the British Col. Malcolm and defeated him in Guerilla warfare.⁵ Rani Lakshmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, during 1857 mutiny left such a powerful impact on minds of people. Kasturba Gandhi, Kamla Nehru, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit (in 1937 elected to provincial legislature of United Province and was the first woman to become president of United Nation General Assembly), Sarojini Naidu (first Indian woman president of Indian National Congress), Aruna Asaf Ali (Bharat Ratna), Madam Bhikaji Cama (called as Mother India's first cultural representative of USA), Kalpana Dutta (prominent revolutionary influenced by Surya Sen), Sucheta Kriplani (Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh 1963-67), Raj Kumari Amrita Kaur, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay, Annie Besant (1st woman president of Indian National Congress), The history of Indian freedom struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contribution of these great personalities.⁶

III .Gandhi's vision of Panchayat and women's participation

In the course of the freedom movement it became clear that after independence India's nationhood would evolve within a democratic political and institutional setting. Some leaders believed that it should be a representative democracy much in the mould of western countries. But Mahatma Gandhi's development discourse hinged on a village based participatory democracy embedded in his vision of the Panchayati Raj. Gandhi felt that real development of India can take place only through its political system of Gram Swaraj in which the State Government would only exercise such powers which are not within the scope and competence of the lower tiers of participatory governance institutions.

Women's participation in political domain has been a part of discussion for long time. Women have also biological, reproductive and cultural constraints and their own disinterest in public issues curtail their eligibility criteria for participation in politics. Society has framed it in such a way that these biological, social and cultural shortcomings come with the question of women's participation in political domain. To understand the obstacles to women's participation, we must first comprehend the historical debate surrounding PRIs.

"I would boycott that legislature which will not have a proper share of women members"

-Gandhi

With Gandhi, for the first time, a distinct approach to the role of women in society began to make itself felt... Thus, the leadership realised that women's activities in the public domain "within politically acceptable limits", could expand.⁷ It is said that Gandhi was the person who made women realise their hidden potential and vulcanized/mobilised their dormant strength that was need of the hour to get free the country from the foreign hands. During this time women started to take initiatives as they gave up purdah, started participating in public activities, meetings. Deccan Herald dated January 3, 2015 reads that Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy Chairperson Janki M. Brahmavan says that Mahatma Gandhi motivated women to take part in freedom movement. Even Gandhi's spouse Kasturba also had her contribution in this regard and is being revered for her sacrifices and her active participation in freedom fight. Gandhi worked not only for the political emancipation of women, but for the liberation of all the suppressed and oppressed of society. For Gandhi "when women, whom we call 'abala' become 'sabla', all those who are helpless will become powerful".⁸

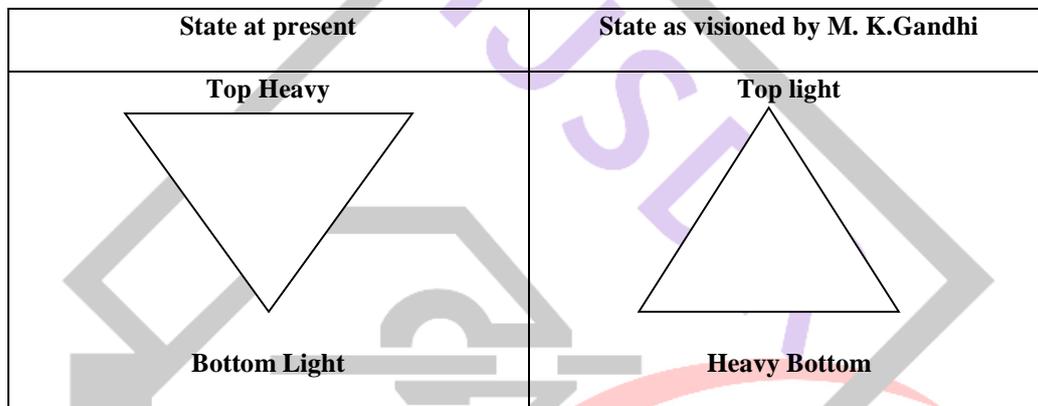
Here question arises how Gandhi managed to take women out of four walls in traditionally and culturally bounded patriarchal society. Gandhi encouraged women to take part in Satyagraha movement. He did not question the fundamentals of society. He did not ask women to leave house and to participate in public activities. He appreciated her as 'sabla' who can well perform at both the ends and that was the reason males of the society were not afraid of losing their supremacy over her. As a result during Salt Satyagraha 17 thousand of around 30 thousand persons arrested were women volunteers. With the message of Truth and Ahimsa, and with the objective of Swarajya, his call swept all the taboos and old customs. Women started attending public meetings, sold khadi, picketed shops of liquor and foreign goods, and came forward to face all sort of evils and problems. This gave them inner strength and power that can also be seen in movements which happened in India during that period and later on, for example,

Tebhaga Movement, Telangana Movement, Chipko Movement and Indigo Movement. Environmental movements show a picture of increased participation of women and courage during that period.

Gandhi could see women as connected with service and not with power.⁹ Gandhi's reply to a letter about women's political participation: "So long as consideration of caste and communities continue to weigh with us and rule our choice, women will be well advised to remain aloof and thereby build-up their prestige. Women workers should enrol women as voter, impart to them political education... release them from chain of caste... which will compel men to realise women's strength and capacity for sacrifice and give her place for honour. If they will do this, they will purify present unclean atmosphere ", wants women to make men realise but not to revolutionalise. Gandhi made it clear that he was 'uncompromising in matters of women's rights.' But he did not believe in legal reforms as a solution of problems, as above letter by Gandhi reads itself. Gandhi did not really challenge the established patriarchal order.¹⁰ Women were taken out during this period because it was considered by all that the women were ideally suited to carry on non-violent passive resistance. Gandhian leadership urged women to function in order of husband, family and country. If there was a conflict between family and country the familial responsibility would come first.¹¹

His mission was to reconstruct India from below upwards – a decentralized socio-political and economic order with India’s myriad villages as its base. His concept of rural construction and development were based on self-supporting, self-ruling and self-reliant village communities.

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Source- Prof. G. Palanithurai, (August 2011), *Governance from the Perspective of Gandhi*, Governance World Focus, p. 464.¹²

He imagined and supported a life like that of circle whose centre will be the individual, ready to perish for the circle of villages composed of individuals. He was against the system of rulings of apex over lower bodies and apex sustaining by the bottom. Gandhi was of the considered view that ‘power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. The concept of decentralization occupies paramount importance in Gandhian scheme of rebuilding India from below upwards. The more the centralization the less will be people’s participation and the less of democracy. Ambedkar had questioned the very idea of decentralisation to lower level. For Ambedkar, village was a ‘cesspool, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and communalism. He asked, ‘Why would we want to entrust political rule and development to it? Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will be oppressed by the upper caste ruling elite. In fact, upper castes will have total control in an unregulated decentralized system’.¹³ Further violence and the exploitation of the poor will be in the increase and women by default are a part of disadvantaged and unprivileged sections at grassroots. She is leftover among leftovers. In Gandhi’s view, Swaraj was the best form of governance, whereas, Nehru supported the institute of Panchayati Raj, cooperatives, and other village-level organization.

Gandhi envisaged an ideal political order in which everybody is his own ruler and he rules himself. The basic unit; village is a self sufficient republic or panchayat. The government of the village will be the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers both male and female. It is considered as the unit of local-self government. Gandhi had evolved a three-tier system of Panchayat Raj linking up the Village Panchayat with the Block and District levels. In Panchayat Raj system envisaged by Gandhi, people’s independence begins from the village level.

IV. Women in Decentralization and Planning

Women’s participation in public affairs has been subject of abiding interest in political science since days of Plato. Plato advised that women should join public life in their thirties after performing their primary roles. Marx argued about universal political participation as a means to manifest human freedom as an end. Until recently, most discussions on people’s participation in politics were mostly confined to voting in elections or other such activities.

Since the beginning of the First Five Year Plan in 1952, the focus has been on encouraging rural development and planning. Decentralised and integrated district level and local level planning is being implemented to promote balanced development, especially in rural areas. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution have bestowed greater responsibilities and powers to the local bodies, positioning them as the third tier of governance. This decentralisation of power has opened new opportunities for local level planning to effectively implement and monitor development programmes.

The significance of role of women in the planned economy of the country was recognised and given considerable thought by planners since the beginning. In 1947 a sub- committee of the National Planning Committee was appointed to deal with the place of women in the planned economy of India. The prime concern of planners was to bring women into mainstream of development. The government consciously fashioned an enabling policy environment, reflecting women's issues and addressing them seriously. The objective of these efforts was to make women economically independent and self-reliant.

However, women in these earlier plans were considered as subjects of "welfare" and clubbed together under the category of disadvantaged groups such as destitute, disabled, aged etc.¹⁴ After independence, planning was based on welfare approach by Government of India. Women got recognition in the Sixth Five Year Plan. From this plan onwards the emphasis has been on the promotion of preventive and development services. In recent Five Year Plans, there has been a gradual shift in favour of women's empowerment programmes as compared to the women's welfare oriented approach of earlier plans.

Phase I – welfare phase (1951- 74)

All the five year plans had been giving importance to development of women. The concept of first Five year plan was welfare oriented. Under the first Five Year Plan, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was created in 1953 to fulfil the welfare perspective for women. The Second Five Year Plan (1956- 61) organised women into Mahila Mandals to act as focal points at the grassroots level. In this plan, objective was to help rural women to raise their status by training them in home science and various types of useful crafts. Women's education was on high priority in Third, Fourth and Interim Plan (1961- 1966, 1966- 1969, 1969- 1974). The main approach was generally to view women as the beneficiaries of social services rather than as contributors to development.

Phase II- development phase (1975-85)

In the Fifth Plan (1974-79) the schemes related to women welfare such as establishment of training-cum-shelter workshops, workshops for destitute women and girls fall under the head "welfare of poor and destitute". In 1974, Towards Equality Report saw a significant change in the government's policies for women. Women were viewed as critical groups for development. A multi sectoral approach was adopted in the Sixth Plan (1980-85) and a shift from welfare to development was witnessed during this period. Establishment of 'Mahila Kalyan Sadans' and 'Protective Homes for Women' to safeguard them from evils of urbanization and industrialization are the two main objectives of women welfare programmes. During this period legislative measures were taken to provide protection of women against discrimination, exploitation, atrocities and violence. A chapter on Women and Development was included for the first time in this plan document.

Phase- III empowerment phase (1986 to date)

Seventh Plan (1985-90) has a separate chapter on women, titled "socio-economic programmes for women". It operationalized the concern for equity and empowerment which was articulated by the International Decade for Women. In the year, 1985, the Department of Women and Child Development was set up as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The department has been implementing Integrated Child Development Programme, which provided a package of services and also focused on programmes of women's empowerment through education. The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) provides direction for all round development of women. This plan targets on raising women's economic and social status. There was a definite shift from development to empowerment of women in the Eight Plan (1992-1997). A major thrust in strategy of this plan for women's status was on formation and strengthening of grass root level women's groups which articulate local needs and play important role in decentralized planning and implementation of programmes.

Ninth Plan (1997-2002) stressed the importance on "Gender Development Index" to monitor the impact and implementation in raising the status of women from time to time. Through this plan an environment was created enabling women to do things freely within the house and outside the house, as equal partners with the men. An integrated approach was adopted for the empowerment of women through convergence of existing services, resources, infrastructures and human power available in both women- specific and women- related sectors. In this plan the concept of Women Component Plan was brought into action as one of the important strategies by directing both the Central and State governments to ensure that 30 percent of funds and benefits flow to women from all development sectors.

Tenth Plan (2002-2007) also suggested sector specific three fold strategies for the empowering women through social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice. Through this, government wants to create enabling environment through various affirmative schemes policies and providing them easy and access to all services to realize their full potential in every field. Apart from that various measures like women's police station, Family Court, Mahila Court, legal aid centre, awareness programmes of women's rights, legal literacy etc had been taken in order to eradication of atrocities against women and girls on India. Eleventh Plan (2007- 2012) articulates for further acceleration in the empowerment of women. The major objectives proposed

for eleventh plan are to build a network of women's groups, SHGs, clusters and by linking them directly to credit institutes to undertake decisions in financial development. It focuses on executive and legislative reforms to ensure representatives of women in organized sector employment. State Level Resource Centre for Women, technical institutes and research institutes were involved in the eleventh plan.

Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) entitled as "Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive Growth" recognised that societies which discriminate by gender tend to experience less rapid economic growth and poverty reduction than societies which treat men and women more equally. Gender equality and empowerment would, thus, need to be a core development goal if the growth planned in the XII plan has to be achieved as said in Report of the Working Group on Women's Agency and Empowerment. In previous plans there was not much about the cause of the women's position and condition in the society. The theory of patriarchy puts the question of women in a proper perspective. The Planning Commission is pushing for special dispensation for single women, particularly those who are single by choice, under various government schemes in the Twelfth Five Year Plan. In addition to reserving a certain percentage of jobs for single women under Centrally Sponsored Schemes, the plan has proposed promoting and strengthening federations of single women at the block and district level.¹⁵ The focus is on the following four key aspects of the Twelfth Five Year Plan viz., health, education, urbanization, governance. Schemes like Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) should be made with regard to education. There are multiple factor that hinder women and girls from developing their full potentials like lack of income, unsafe environment in the schools, curriculum not attuned to women's needs etc. Gender studies needs to be incorporated into the academic curriculum.

Reservation under Panchayati Raj system

Since 1993, when the 73rd Constitution Amendment came into force, women have moved forward and demonstrated their capacities and abilities to hold such positions and fulfil the mandate of their constituency. With every succeeding Panchayat election, women have been able to enlarge their representation beyond the minimum 33 per cent prescribed by the Constitution. Of the total 28 lakh elected Panchayat representatives, more than 10 lakh are estimated to be women, thus changing the profile of rural leadership.

In Bihar, while 50 per cent of the Panchayat seats and leadership positions are reserved for women, roughly 55 per cent of elected seats at the Gram Panchayat level are occupied by women. In Maharashtra, the representation of women in Panchayats is nearly 34 per cent and in Karnataka, it is around 43 per cent. Since further enhancement of reservation in Panchayats would lead to more women entering the public sphere, the President of India in her address to the Parliament on 4.6.2009 had mentioned the intent to provide fifty percent reservation for women in Panchayats as women suffer multiple deprivations of class, caste and gender. Ministry of Panchayati Raj laid a statement on the table of the house stating that "As per information received from 27 States and 02 UTs, there are around 12.70 lakh Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Panchayats".

Article 243 D of the Constitution envisages enhanced reservation for women in PRIs leading to greater participation of women in the public sphere and also making Local Bodies more inclusive institutions. Moreover, gender equity and inclusiveness will lead to better delivery of public services, such as health, sanitation, early childhood care, drinking water, etc. that affect women's lives and make the PRIs more accountable to the rural populace. Reservation for women in the third tier of governance including in leadership positions in PRIs was itself a unique innovation in the governance area. Enhancement of the reservation for women in PRIs to 50% will further accelerate this process and make PRIs uniquely inclusive institutions.

With the proposed Constitutional Amendment, the number of elected women representatives is expected to rise to more than 14 lakhs from the present 10 lakhs. The States of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Kerala have already amended their legislation and reserved 50% of the seats for women. The State of Sikkim has also amended its legislation to reserve 40% seats for Women in Panchayats as per data of march 1 2013, In the Panchayat setup, overall 46.7% women are present; with maximum 58.6% in Jharkhand and minimum 32.3% in Goa. Uttar Pradesh with 7,73,980 women in Panchayat presents 40% representation of women in the Panchayati Raj system.¹⁶

In this context, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has submitted socio-economic profile of Elected Women Reservations in the country, State-wise as under: "A nationwide survey was carried out by the well-known firm of AC Nielsen ORG Marg, which covered 23 States, 114 Districts, and 228 Blocks and 1368 Gram Panchayats of which 907 were women headed Gram Panchayats. Based on this survey, the information on the social category, age, education, primary occupation and economic category are available, State-wise."

The state wise data shows that Uttar Pradesh, being the most populous state represents highest number in both the Houses. There are 13 women MPs out of 80 in the Lower house from Uttar Pradesh. Going with variables chart shows the number and percentage of first time elected women candidates from all the sates and UTs. Assam, Bihar, Chandigarh, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan, Telangana are the states where there is one candidate had won the election for the first time. Uttarakhand, Tripura, Punjab, Puducherry, Nagaland, Lakshdweep, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu Kashmir, Jharkhand, Goa And Chattisgarh stands on zero. From which, Goa, Haryana, Jharkhand, Lakshdweep, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Puducherry, Tripura and Uttarakhand send zero number of women representatives in the Lower house. Uttar Pradesh represents 13 women MPs out of 54 (female seats) (total number is 80) where as 9 have been elected for the first time. West Bengal has 12 women members out of 23 seats for women where as 8 female candidates have been elected for the first time.

V. Training and Capacity Building programmes for Elected Women Representatives

It was only in sixth Five Year Plan the policy shifted its orientation towards women. Development of women has been considered as a separate issue replacing welfare policies for women. Government has initiated many schemes for women. They are the social welfare, education, health and nutrition, income generation, gender equality, empowerment of women hostels for working women and crèches for children, review and streamlining laws concerning women etc. Ministry of Women and Child Development is a nodal agency looking into all the matters related to welfare, empowerment and development of women.

However, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj does not have any separate scheme exclusively for training women elected representatives of PRIs except **Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA)**. It has been submitted that the Ministry also provides assistance for training and Capacity building of elected representatives of Panchayats including women representatives under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana and the Backward Regions Grant Fund (in 250 selected backward districts). One of the sample districts for the study is also backward district viz., Pratapgarh. This training is conducted through the State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRDs).

Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA), conceptualised by Ministry of Panchayati Raj, targeted at EWRs and elected youth representatives (EYRs). This scheme is to encourage the political participation by women in Panchayati Raj, The scheme has two facets, namely:

- (i) Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan (PMSA), and
- (ii) Panchayat Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PYSA).

It aims to build on the substantial representation of women in Panchayats. PMSA provides women with specific kinds of support that goes beyond the usual training given to PRI representatives. It addresses the lack of technical knowledge, communication and administrative skills to fulfil their leadership role. The main objectives of Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan are to enable women and young Panchayat leaders to come together, to articulate their problems as Panchayat leaders, discuss issues regarding the institutional mechanisms for their empowerment and come up with a charter of issues to be mainstreamed into policy and advocacy support so that their concerns are addressed by the process of development adopted by the State and the three tiers of PRI system.

Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA) focuses on enhancement of capacities and effectiveness of Panchayat and the Gram Sabha, promotes people's participation, capacity building of Panchayat, strengthen Gram Sabha as basic forum for transparency and Panchayat as democratic self governing body. Under this state government will need to prepare perspective plan for five years and annual plan for strengthening Panchayat and dealing out activities of schemes. It focuses on strengthening of Mahila Sabha and Ward Sabha. with launch of this centrally sponsored scheme, many old schemes like Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojna, Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan, Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Initiative Scheme, E-enablement of Panchayats, Resource Support to State have been subsumed in the RGPSA.

"Nayi Manzil"- the Scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women, has been brought out by Ministry of Minority Affairs. Keeping the social and educational status of women belonging to minority in mind, Ministry has reformulated the scheme in 2011-12 and renamed it as **"Scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women", 2012-13**.¹⁷ This scheme includes women belonging to all minorities notified under section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992, viz. Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and Jains. However, to uphold solidarity and unity among women, schemes permit to mix non-minority communities not exceeding 25% of the proposed project. The objective is to empower women from minority community, instill confidence in them so that can enjoy their rights and assume their leadership roles. The scheme is providing training through selected governmental, Non- governmental organizations.

VI. Conclusion

In this connection, enactment of 73rd and 74th Amendment Act, regular election to PRIs and ULBs has proved to be a milestone towards enlightenment and social political consciousness of women as a section. Government is trying to implement the proposed schemes to make the Local Self Government a great success in India. However a part of the fault lies in the system. There are some areas of concern in local bodies. Wide gap between the aspirations of the people and the performance by the grassroots institutions, mismatch between the financial resources of the local bodies and the functions allotted to them, inefficiency in devolution of 3Fs to lower level of governance are few areas of concerns. These flaws further weakens the working of Gram Sabhas and leave unsolved the plight of local people and double the challenge of local bodies. And these factors work together against women coming in politics at lower level.

Local Bodies have become money churning machines for political leaders and local elites. Panchayats and Municipalities have become a body to implement central and state funded schemes rather than a Self Governing Body. In such situation, where women are fighting for breaking traditional and social barriers, these politically motivated muscles and money games not only threaten her but her family too. First it is important to let the local bodies guard themselves, let the local bodies change their attitude, policies, technology and systems and get empowered for better governance.

The ethos of democracy can find real nourishment only when power reaches the grassroots level. For the ordinary citizen, it is local democracy, which can have real meaning and significance. Women's participation requires men's support and healthy atmosphere to work. In a vast country where large masses are still unlettered, Village Panchayats and participative democracy can do wonders. If the aim is to establish a democratic society, there may be no alternative to Panchayati Raj or Local Self Government Institutions.

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