

TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATORY LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE

Jyotsna Nisha* & Sayantani Bagchi**

ABSTRACT

The overall progress of the Indian villages depends upon the upliftment of rural masses, socially, economically and politically. Effective people's participation in the democratic processes provides voices to the otherwise voiceless rural masses who toil under extreme conditions of poverty, illiteracy and inequality. The present model of Panchayats was created keeping in mind the Gandhian ideology of Gram Swaraj and self-sufficiency of villages. Gandhi said: "The village problem has to be solved by the villagers alone." Gandhi's idea of people's participation in development of rural areas is still applicable to Indian villages. However, despite the constitutional status granted to Panchayats as a body responsible for local self-governance in India, the overall progress of villages and implementation of a large number of development schemes is not at par with the desired outcome. The increasing gap between Panchayats and the results that they were created to ensure has to be reduced and people's active involvement can go a long way in achieving the same. Through the present paper, the authors have traversed through the road towards ensuring effective people's participation amidst the system of local self-governance in India. A descriptive method has been adopted for the purpose of analysing the evolution of people's participation and identifying the present developments in that direction.

* Research Assistant (Law), Centre for Regulatory Studies, Governance and Public Policy, West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata. E-mail id: jyotsnanisha91@gmail.com

* * Research Assistant (Law), Centre for Regulatory Studies, Governance and Public Policy, West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata. E-mail id: [sayantanibagchib1@gmail.com](mailto:sayantaniibagchib1@gmail.com)

1. INTRODUCTION

The central tenet that runs across the Constitution of India is democracy. Democracy is essentially a tool in the hands of the country's masses to liberate themselves from despotism and inequality as reflected in Gandhi's words, "freeing a man from political and social enslavement and from economic exploitation" is democracy. In harmony with such a notion, is also the opening sentence of the Preamble of our Constitution "We, the people... adopt, enact and give to ourselves this Constitution" which signifies that the power is ultimately vested in the hands of the people. Ideally, the expression 'people' should constitute all the people living in this country, including those residing in the remotest corners. Democracy would be truly inclusive when these people acquire a sense of self-governance through community participation. Through universal adult suffrage, people do participate in the democratic processes but the outcomes of it might not be at par with their expectations. Here it is necessary to empower them in such a manner so that they can be in control of their immediate needs and social, political and economic aspirations.

Therefore, for a democracy to become meaningful, strengthening the grassroots institutions is of utmost importance. Local self-government institutions are bodies constituted at the grassroots level for the better administration of local affairs. These institutions comprise representatives directly elected by the local people at regular intervals of time. The objective of these institutions is to meet with the local needs, relieve the centre and the state governments of administrative burden, secure an effective development administration, promote political consciousness among the rural masses, decentralise power and authority and make participatory democracy a success. Importance of local governance in a democratic set up can hardly be underestimated. In developing countries such as India, local self-government institutions provide impetus to democratic principles and at the same time act as a means to provide the much-needed participation of the masses in the socioeconomic transformation of the nation. Given the unjust circumstances and gross inequality that the villagers in India live with, the need for adequate measures designed to voice their grievances and to ensure their participation cannot be denied. The State being the supreme authority entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of its citizens must discharge its solemn responsibility "to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as

effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life. The State shall, in particular, strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.”¹

2. LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS OF HISTORY

Throughout the ancient and medieval periods, Indian people despite being governed by some authority or the other have all along enjoyed a greater say in their political lives. The idea of ‘grama’ (village) and ‘jana’ (people) go hand in hand. Concepts of ‘Vidatha’² in the ancient Indo-Aryan literature, ‘Sabha’³ in the early Vedic periods and ‘Samitis’⁴ in the post-Vedic period indicate that not only did these bodies exercise effective check on the tyrannical exercise of authoritative power (by the kings) but also ensured adequate autonomy to the people of the society.⁵ Similarly, accounts of villages acting as units of self-administration and ensuring popular participation can be gathered from Kautilya’s Arthashastra, Mahabharata, Manusmritis and other primitive documents.⁶ Evidence of self-governance during the rule of the Chola, Pandya and Chalukya dynasties in the southern part of India provide a convincing picture of popular participation in local-level decision-making. Mauryan rule, which was more of a centralised nature encouraged the village folks in improving the conditions of the villages and rewarded those who played exemplary roles. During the Gupta period, village autonomy grew stronger and gained considerable authority.⁷ It may be assumed that till the end of the Mughal period, the villages continued to be regarded as units of self-administration though the magnitude of independence given to them kept varying. However, the position began to undergo significant changes in the colonial period with the advent of the British rule. The British in its venture to convert the Indian

¹ Art. 38 Constitution of India

² A social institution representing wide number of folk population performing a number of functions in an democratic set up

³ ‘Sabha’ comprised the elite members who exercised effective control over the king’s power.

⁴ Samitis were considered to be a popular assembly.

⁵ Lakshmeshwar Dayal, *State and The People: Political History of Government of India* (Mittal Publications first edition 1998) 50,51

⁶ Pratap Chandra Swain, *Panchayati Raj: The Grassroots Dynamics in Arunachal Pradesh* (APH Publishing, 2008)14, 15.

⁷ Lakshmeshwar Dayal, *State and The People: Political History of Government of India* (Mittal Publications first edition 1998) 50,51

model of local self-governance into a western model of local government robbed the Indian model of its rootedness. One reason behind this may be the fact that their main purpose behind coming to India was to trade and then they eventually designed the system of governance to suit their own needs overlooking the needs of the rural masses. The colonial government expanded its operational ambit through a handful of bureaucrats and elites who were totally indifferent to the people's needs. The poorest of the masses with no voice of their own ended up as the worst sufferers in the hands of the zamindars, bureaucrats and the upper castes.

In the initial years, efforts towards establishing local governments were made by Lord Mayo, who passed a resolution on Provincial Finance in 1870⁸ and thereafter Lord Ripon who passed the Resolution on Local Government in 1882.⁹ In 1909, certain recommendations were passed by the Royal Commission on Decentralisation.¹⁰ This process gained momentum in 1919 with the Montague-Chelmsford reforms through which local self-government became a provincial transferred subject and the idea of popular control in the local bodies was given recognition. In 1928, the Simon Commission was entrusted with the responsibility of studying the role and efficacy of the local self-government in India and the system of administration in general. The Commission recognised local self-governance as 'a vital link in the chain of organisms that make up the Government of the country' and was instrumental in bringing to the notice of the Government certain irregularities with respect to local governance in India.¹¹ Thereafter, the Government of India Act, 1935 which marked the end

⁸ Under this resolution of 14th December 1870 passed by Lord Mayo, certain subjects were transferred to the provincial governments by the Central Government. Provincial governments were allowed to devise for themselves a mechanism whereby local taxes could be collected to meet the expenses of the local people.

⁹ Lord Ripon who introduced the elective system at the local level is considered to be the father of modern self government in India and the Resolution of 1882 passed by him (which is considered to be the Magna Carta of local self governance in India) marks the beginning of local self governance in India. He considered that administrative efficiency and public education constituted the primary reasons behind empowering local governments. See Ram Narayan Prasad, *Urban Local self Government in India* (Mittal Publications 2006) 109

¹⁰ The Commission recommended for the devolution of administrative powers on the local governments. In addition to that the commission recommended that the local governments must be entrusted with powers with regard to finance, public works, hospitals, land revenue, taxation (subject to the scrutiny of the Centre and provinces) etc. see M. Anees Chishti (ed), *Committees and Commissions in Pre-independence India, 1836-1947: 1903-1912* (Mittal Publications 2001) 79-84

¹¹ Kartik Chandra Rout, *Local Self-government in British Orissa, 1869-1935* (Daya Books 1988) 17

of diarchic administration brought about extensive development when compared to all other steps taken under the British rule in the realm of local governments by assigning the task of local self-governance to the Provinces.

In the post independence era, the concern for local self-governance found a symbolic expression in the country's supreme law, i.e., the Constitution, in the form of a directive to the States. The opinion of the Constituent Assembly varied significantly on the question of incorporating the idea of Panchayat into the Constitution. While a major chunk of the members argued in favour of the outlook of Ambedkar expressing strong disapproval towards such incorporation, the others sided with the ideology of Gandhi who believed in the power of the villages in bringing about path-finding changes. Amidst strong disagreements, the idea of Panchayats found mention in the Constitution in the form of Article 40, which directed the State to "take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government" primarily due to the efforts of K. Santhanam, A. Ayyangar and Rajendra Prasad.¹² However, this symbolic incorporation did not provide formal recognition to the Panchayats. Such a deliberate omission to guarantee local institutions with constitutional protection gives adequate reasons to infer that an inclusive democracy suited to the needs of the Indian masses was not something that was desired for at that point of time and rather transplanting the model as envisioned by Ambedkar was considered to be a pressing need.

3. AMBEDKAR V GANDHI

The Constituent Assembly chose to remain silent on matters concerning village empowerment and, hence, the concerns of the rural masses remained distant from articulation at the time when the Constitution was made. Despite repeated demands by some members of the Assembly, the role of villages as units of administration was overruled. The difference in opinion arose out of two sets of ideas born in the minds of two of the greatest visionaries of that time.

¹² K C Sivaramakrishnan, 'local government' in Sujit Choudhury, Madhav Khosla, Pratap Bhanu Mehta (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution* (OUP 2016)562
Lakshmeshwar Dayal, *State and The People: Political History of Government of India* (Mittal Publications first edition 1998) 303

Mahatma Gandhi was perpetually against the notion of centralisation of power and relied on the effectiveness of a decentralised form of government as evident from his remark, “True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.” His idea of democracy was directed towards the poor and the helpless. He went further in saying that India should not imitate any western model of governance and rather should build its own suited to its needs. Indian villages should be ‘self-contained,’ capable of managing its own affairs and ‘self-supporting units’ is what he actually wanted. He laid emphasis on the development of Indian villages as Gandhi believed that true democracy lies in emancipating villages from the clutches of all forms of inequality. The villages and its people were central to his idea of Gram Swaraj and he was convinced that with intelligent guidance, villagers could serve as the agents of change. An ideal village with Panchayats to govern them in his eyes should be armed with education, medical needs, sanitation, light, ventilation, capacity to grow crops and vegetables, strong willpower, postal and telegraph facilities, etc.

Members like M.A Ayyangar in the course of the Assembly debates expressed his strong resentment towards the decision of non-incorporation of Panchayati Raj provisions saying that ‘Democracy is not worth anything, if once in a blue moon individuals are brought together for one common purpose, merely electing X, Y and Z to the Assembly and then disperse.’ Arguing on the need to empower villages in the Assembly, Arun Chandra Guha, observed that “the Gandhian and the congress outlook has been that the future Constitution of India would be a pyramidal structure and its basis would be the village Panchayats...I admit that we require a strong Centre but that does not mean that its limbs should be weak.” In the context of the Panchayat framework in India, this observation seems quite appropriate.¹³

On the other hand, Dr. B. R Ambedkar considering the notion of villages as units of self-administration as undemocratic in nature adopted an extremely hostile approach towards the empowerment of villages and described villages as “a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism.” He strongly believed that involving

¹³ Constituent Assembly Debates

villages in the democratic processes would yield negative results since villages were the source of regressive actions.

The basic problem that lies with the arguments of both the erudite men is that none of them could provide a workable solution to the problems of the poor, the needy, the ignorant and the hungry. While Gandhi emphasised on the need of developing an ideal self-sufficient village, Ambedkar looked down upon the village as units of ignorance and communalism. Yet, Ambedkar's views cannot be criticised merely for the sake of it since his outlook was shaped by the then conditions of Indian villages in which powers were concentrated in the hands of the so-called elites who believed in the subjugation of the village folk and to an extent by his own experiences. The village men have all along been chained prisoners in the hands of casteism, poverty, prejudices, illiteracy and ignorance. However, the saddest part is, both Gandhi and Ambedkar held extreme views on the question as to whether villages have the potential to emerge successfully as units of local self-governance and such a discourse provided no practicable solution. At that point of time, the conditions of the villages were such that absolute power of self-governance could not logically be vested on them since India was in the process of reviving from the heap of ruins and the need for a strong centre could not be dispensed with. May be that is the sole reason why the strong dissent of Ambedkar had to bend before Gandhi's ideal and all that could be done was to provide a mention of Panchayats in the Constitution as a token of respect for the great visionary Mahatma Gandhi.

4. THE EFFICACY OF THE 73RD AMENDMENT AND BEYOND

The Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act 1992 has a chequered history. With the passage of time, the Constitution, as it stood originally proved its incapacity to run on the basis of the structure assigned to it initially. The need for a much more inclusive form of governance grew stronger. With the aim of securing adequate community participation and involving people at the grassroots level, A Study Team of the Committee on Plan Projects (Balwantrai Mehta Committee) was appointed by the Government of India which served as the forerunner in the matter of establishing Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The Ashok Mehta Committee was appointed by the Janata Government in 1977 under Morarji Desai

(which expressed strong interest in assigning a meaningful role to the Panchayati Raj) to examine the state of affairs pertaining to the PRIs. Realising the potential of the villages as gathered from the experiences of Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Committee through its report dissected the existing position with regard to PRI implementation highlighting the need for granting autonomy to the villages in terms of administration and finance.¹⁴ The Report also focussed on the need for utilising human resources in the developmental processes, suggested a viable organisation of grassroots councils to mobilise the participation and active support of the people and also laid down a future course of action. Further, the Committee suggested structures with a development orientation at two levels-district Panchayats and Mandal Panchayats (covering 15,000 to 20,000 people) at the grassroots level. Its other recommendations were open participation of political parties in Panchayati Raj elections and constitutional protection to further extend decentralisation of power. The Committee recommended that these institutions participate in development activities in the areas of agriculture, forestry, cottage industries, welfare activities, and the like. With the expansion of anti-poverty programmes in the 1980s and the creation of district rural development agencies and other similar organisations at lower levels, it was necessary to integrate the local system with these programmes.

The C. H. Hanumath Rao Working Group on District Planning was set up in 1983¹⁵ and then the G. V. K. Rao Committee in 1985 to review the existing administrative arrangements for rural development and poverty alleviation programmes.¹⁶ The latter recommended strengthening the Zila Parishad level, endorsed the recommendations for district-level planning of C. H. H. Rao's working group, and suggested better integration of bloc and lower-level planning with lower-level PR councils. Another Committee headed by L. M. Singhvi in 1986 prepared the concept paper on Panchayati Raj¹⁷ that said PRIs should be closely involved in the planning and implementation of rural development programmes at lower levels, and recommended that the Panchayats should be made financially viable by

¹⁴ Lakshmeshwar Dayal, *State and The People: Political History of Government of India* (Mittal Publications first edition 1998) 307

¹⁵ *Report of the Working Group on District Planning, vol. I and 2* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 1983).

¹⁶ *Report of the Committee to Review the Existing Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes* (CAARD) (New Delhi: Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, 1985)

¹⁷ *Concept paper on Panchayati Raj*, Ministry of Agriculture, New Delhi.

combining two or three villages in one Mandal Panchayat. It also supported the recommendations of the G. V. K. Rao Committee for integration of the government's administrative structures with the PRIs.

It took nearly three years for the legislative Bill to become an Act, it began with the Rajiv Gandhi government's introduction of a Panchayati Raj Bill in 1989. That measure was passed by the Lok Sabha but failed to gain the requisite majority in the Rajya Sabha. The V. P. Singh government tried to push a Panchayati Raj Bill in 1990, but it lapsed with the dissolution of the then Lok Sabha. In 1991, the Congress government again introduced a Bill on Panchayati Raj with some modified provisions; it was referred to the Select Committee, then was considered by a Joint Parliamentary Committee, and finally went to the full Parliament. It was passed by the Lok Sabha on December 22, 1992, and by the Rajya Sabha on the following day. After ratification by 17 state assemblies, including West Bengal and Bihar (both opposition-ruled states), the president signed the Bill and it went into effect on April 24, 1993. Since then, it has been implemented in all the states. The need for constitutional base for Panchayati Raj was felt because state governments were not enthusiastic about the creation of Panchayati Raj bodies and having to share power with them. In fact, some states even took power back from these bodies. Giving constitutional status to these bodies lent them a certain dignity which is essential to make these bodies viable and responsive institutions. In India's Constitution, local self-government and Panchayati Raj was a state subject, and the central government could not pass any legislation concerning them. Hence, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.¹⁸ The Amendment has the effect of introducing Part IX (Articles 243 to 243O) and the Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution.

The main characteristics of the Act are: (1) establishment of a Gram Sabha comprising all the voters in the Panchayat area, and establishment of a three-tier PR system (except in states whose population is under 2,000,000) with Panchayats at the village, intermediate, and district levels (2) provision for direct election by the people of the members

¹⁸ Hoshiar Singh, 'Constitutional base for Panchayati Raj in India- The 73rd Amendment Act' Asian Survey Volume 34, No.9 p. 818-827

of all Panchayats (3) provision that members of the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha and the State Legislative Assembly from the area would continue to be members of Panchayats with the right to vote in their meetings but not in the election of chairpersons of intermediate and district-level Panchayats, nor to be those chairpersons (4) establishment of five-year terms for each Panchayat, with elections to be held under the supervision, direction and control of the state election commission, and if superseded in midterm, an election to be held within six months for the remaining period of the five-year term only.

The Act provides for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in proportion to their population in a Panchayat area, and has further reserved chairperson seats for SC and ST candidates in all three tiers in direct proportion to their total population in the state, with one-third of these seats reserved for SC and ST women. The Act also provides that one-third of the seats in the Panchayats at all levels will be reserved for women, including SC and ST women.¹⁹ It directs the states to carry out that reservation by rotation in every Panchayat at each level. It has left to the states the question of reserving seats for backward classes.

Thus, the concept of Panchayati Raj has undergone changes since its inception, expanding to cover areas of rural development and economic planning but it is still suffering from a number of shortcomings. Firstly, the present concept does not consider these bodies as agencies that can play an important role in the overall development of rural areas, that is, not as planning and implementation agencies for various rural development programmes. Secondly, there is no clarity about the relationship between these bodies and development administration, because the former has no separate cadre of administration. The dual responsibility of the central administration towards state departments and PR bodies creates confusion and complications. Thirdly, there is no systematic method to involve the 'weaker' sections in the functioning of PR bodies. There is a feeling that PR leaders do not involve the poor in the councils and, therefore, the administration has to intervene to provide the benefits of growth to the poor; on the other hand, the involvement and control of Panchayat office holders in rural development activities is increasing continuously. The only way in which

¹⁹ In 2009, the Union Cabinet increased the cap to 50% for women in local self-government bodies.

these people may participate is through a Gram Sabha, which “is a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level.”²⁰ However, the amount of powers and functions to be vested on the Gram Sabhas is dependent upon a state legislation being brought about to that effect. In most of the cases, the people of the villages are not even formally consulted before laws in that direction are made. Finally, no clear trend is emerging on decentralisation of power. There is a lot of talk about decentralisation to district and lower-level bodies but central government schemes are increasing both in number and in size, raising questions about the kind of decentralisation that is projected. In spite of these shortcomings, the Panchayati Raj system has great potential and capacity to play a major role in the overall development of the economy and polity of a big country such as India.

5. TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE PARTICIPATORY MODEL

People’s participation has become more of rhetoric today. Participation ideally should include the notions of contributing, sharing or redistributing power and resources, benefits, knowledge and skills to be gained through active involvement of the general masses in making decisions, which concern them. One of the founding fathers of the concept of grassroots democracy, J.S. Mill, wrote, “The only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is the one in which the whole people participate.” Participation is a voluntary process by which people, including the disadvantaged (in terms of income, gender, caste or education), influence or have a say in the decision that affect them. Thus, participation in terms of rural development includes “people’s involvement in decision making process, implementing programmes and sharing it in the benefit of development programmes and involvement in effort to evaluate programmes.”²¹

In this context, throughout the world, a uniform solution has been found, that is, devolution of powers and development with a theory of subsidiarity. But the nuances of practising decentralisation processes vary from society to society and from region to region. Local conditions solidify the nature of decentralisation. It is based on the exercise and re-

²⁰ Art.243 and Art.243A, Constitution of India

²¹ A. P Barnabas, ‘People’s participation in Planning: A realistic approach’ in Ramesh K. Arora and Minakshi Hooja (eds), Panchayati Raj Participation and Decentralisation (Rawat Publications 2009)31.

evaluation of the traditional forms of political representation. While making this exercise it is found that direct democratic mechanisms are increasingly being drawn upon to enable citizens to play a more active role in the decisions affecting their lives. Here also the question unanswered is: how can weak and meek move into the corridors of power? This is followed by the efforts to deepen democracy through decentralisation of powers from the federal government to local institutions through state governments. Democratic decentralisation and participatory governance are the development discourse due to the growing sense of disillusionment with centralised governance. Governance at present is being delivered through different agencies at different levels in a widely spread spectrum. It is strongly believed that in a decentralised governance, the opportunity is wider for people to participate and it provides a wider representation to hitherto marginalised social segments.

The essence of participation lies in exercising voice and choice, and developing the human, organisational and management capacity to solve problems as they arise in order to sustain improvements. Participation must be, therefore, understood as a process by which the people are able to identify their own needs, and share in the design, implementation and evaluation of participatory action. Participation should not only stop at information sharing or consultation, but decision-making and initiating action are important and essential components of participation. Self-initiated actions are a clear sign of empowerment. Once people are empowered, they are more likely to be pro-active, to take initiative, and to display confidence for undertaking other actions to solve problems beyond those defined by the project. This level of participation is qualitatively different from that achieved when people are merely assigned tasks.

Who Participates? The most important characteristic that brings people together to take action is commonality of interest. A group of people who share vision and are willing to channelise their energies in the direction of a holistic form of development are ideal for lending strength to a more participatory local self-governance. As people participate in making new decisions and solving problems, learning takes place. It leads to changes in attitude, behaviour, confidence and leadership. Newly acquired knowledge is, therefore, the first outcome of participation. Empowerment is a result of participation in decision making.

An empowered person is also one who can take initiatives, exert leadership, display confidence, solve new problems, mobilise resources and undertake new actions.

Some of the ways that might lead to an enhanced degree of public participation at the grassroots level can be: Firstly, Panchayats should be empowered to make certain laws on their own which are binding on the population of the concerned village(s). The need for this is impending owing to the independent peculiarities attached to every village. Secondly, there should be a minimum educational qualification prescribed for the candidates contesting for the post of Sarpanch. Sarpanch as the village head is instrumental in guiding the people towards creating a better village setup and, thus, must possess some degree of educational qualification. Thirdly, generation of awareness among the village folk is of paramount importance. This can be achieved through the use of community radio for dissemination of necessary information pertaining to agriculture, natural calamities, etc. Another contribution in this regard can be made by the NGOs working at the rural level mainly focussing on adult education and training.

6. CONCLUSION

Panchayati Raj and people's participation are inseparable. There is an organic relationship between the two in the sense that there can be no meaningful and healthy existence of one in the absence of the other. The PRIs are basically meant to promote self-governance and self-sufficiency on the part of the people. This obviously requires that people should come forward and participate in the management of their own affairs. Similarly, people also require certain institutions with the adequate infrastructure through which they can participate in the development process. The PRIs facilitate this requirement. However, the present state of PRIs and people's participation in India is far from being fully satisfactory. Even after almost two decades of the 73rd Amendment, meaningful implementation of rural development programmes through PRIs and people's participation remains an unfinished agenda, a distant dream which is yet to be realised. Lack of political will on the part of the most of the state governments to really devolve power into PRIs, lack of awareness on the part of the PRI personnel as well as the rural people at large, etc, obstruct effective participation of people in the rural development programmes. The conflict between

the state government and the PRIs over the issue of devolution of powers is another basic hindrance that needs to be properly addressed. Merely providing reservations to women and other marginalised sections do not ensure people's participation in the process. There is a need to rethink that despite laws, representations, and reservations why are the results so depressing? Is there a need to change the way we think about village administration in India? Can a better participatory model voicing the concerns of millions of rural people be designed under the existing framework? We believe yes, once Panchayats are bestowed with wider powers of rule-making and awareness generation, they can push our village societies towards more effective local self-governance.