

SOCIAL ACTION

A Quarterly Review of Social Trends

CHANGING CASTE EQUATIONS AND ASSERTION OF OTHER COMMUNITIES

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Sourav Naskar

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Labour Codes: Challenges and Prospects

October-December 2024

(Last date to receive articles : 15 August 2024)

Women at Work: Paid and Unpaid

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Changing Caste Equations and Assertion of Other Communities

The caste system in India is a complex social system that has evolved over thousands of years, which divides human society into hierarchical groups based on birth and occupation. In spite of several efforts, both by the legal system and by social reformers, caste continues to influence various aspects of life in India -- politics, economics, social interactions and religion.

Historically, the caste system is rooted in ancient Hindu texts, and though it was more fluid and flexible originally, it became rigid over time, solidifying into four main varnas: *Brahmins* (Priests and scholars), *Kshatriyas* (Warriors and rulers), *Vaishyas* (Traders and agriculturists) and *Shudras* (Laborers and service providers). The fifth category consists of the outcastes, who are outside these varnas and are called the Dalits (formerly known as "Untouchables"). These were traditionally marginalized and were subjected to severe social discrimination.

The Indian constitution has abolished "untouchability" and has prohibited caste-based discrimination. Further, the Government introduced some affirmative policies and actions, such as, reservation, and these were implemented to improve the socio-economic status of historically disadvantaged groups. Despite several such legal measures, caste-based disparities are visible even today. As a result, the Dalits and lower-caste communities often face social discrimination, and they are deprived of access to resources.

Caste plays a critical role in Indian politics and it influences electoral outcomes, party strategies, and policy decisions. Political parties carefully cultivate caste groups and freely appeal to caste identities and sensitivities to mobilize votes. There are also caste-based political parties whose leaders openly advocate for the rights and interests of their communities.

Thanks to the politicization of the caste system, there are many positive and significant advantages, particularly to the marginalized caste groups, through legislative measures, policy initiatives and political mobilization. Consequently, these steps have enhanced the political power of the lower castes in many ways -- increased representation, socio-economic development, and a stronger voice in the public sphere, access to education,

leadership opportunities, improved employment opportunities, social welfare laws and programs, etc.

While the involvement of caste in politics has empowered marginalized communities in India, it also presents several disadvantages -- perpetuating caste divisions, fostering caste-based violence and conflicts, undermining meritocracy, and diverting attention from broader developmental issues, reinforcement of caste identities, sectarian politics, decline in the quality of governance, etc.

In the contemporary period, there are some new trends -- caste coalitions, changing identities of the caste system and practice, etc. There are different social movements based on caste identities, such as, the Dalit Panthers.

Contemporary trends and developments, such as, urbanization, globalization, education, social mobility, the social media, etc., have definitely brought about great changes in Indian society and its behaviour patterns, including those at the lower strata of society.

Despite remarkable changes and progress, the difficulties of eradicating caste-based discrimination still persist -- deeply ingrained social attitudes, economic inequalities, and the ineffective implementation of the legal protections.

Thus, we are witnessing the advantages and the disadvantages of politicizing the caste system. The task before the Indian society is to find ways and means to carefully balance between the advantages and the disadvantages so that the people of India can move forward as smoothly as possible.

This issue of *Social Action* presents seven different articles dealing with different aspects related to caste and the way the people who belong to the lower strata of society have been responding.

Manju Panwar studies the participation of the marginalized groups in local self-governance, in the context of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, which is an important instrument for the development of democratic decentralization in India. While pointing out how this Act guarantees the involvement of the marginalized groups in the local self-governance, this paper highlights the understanding of the marginalized groups of society and the historical background of local self-governance in India. It also examines the challenges faced by these groups in the decision-making of local self-governance

Rimli Rajan traces the history of the caste system, particularly the status of the Dalits. This paper studies how various kinds of caste discriminations take place against the Dalits. It also showcases the impact of the caste system on other religions as well and also highlights the reservation policy introduced to uplift the lower castes in India. The paper concludes by drawing attention to the drawbacks of the caste system in India.

Tariq Ahmad Bhat and Dinesh Chahal investigate the evolving caste and community dynamics in India and their impact on the restructuring of social hierarchies and points out how the traditional caste-based systems are under threat and changing as a result of urbanization, globalization, and greater social mobility. This study also examines the elements that have contributed to these shifts, such as social movements, political empowerment, economic growth, and education. Besides, this study looks at how these modifications have affected identity formation, social cohesiveness, and the general structure of the Indian society.

Atul Kriti addresses the impact of social media on the negotiation and contestation of caste identities, power dynamics, and social hierarchies. The study indicates the prevalence of caste-related content on the digital media platforms, being widely used to discuss caste-based discrimination, violence, and inequality. It identifies the dual nature of the social media as it acts as a platform for both amplifying marginalized voices and perpetuating existing inequalities.

Gosavi Shubhangi Ravindragir focuses on caste discrimination and its effects on the development of personality and mental well-being. This study brings out the intricate dynamics between social disparities, psychological processes, and overall wellness. By illuminating the psychological mechanisms underlying caste discrimination, the paper seeks to pinpoint how it impacts personality development and mental health.

Prachi Prabhu examines the process of empowerment and identity construction within the Gomantak Maratha Samaj (GMS) of Goa. This paper presents a well-rounded understanding of the process of shaping the community's identity and progress. It also examines assertions put forth by the community to initiate a reform of its collective identity.

Rajesh Ekka and Bhramara Tandia bring out how Bhima Bhoi, who was the foremost philosopher and poet in Odisha and who advocated the development of freedom for the oppressed community, has become the icon of the anti-caste movement against casteism, poverty, oppression,

discrimination and patriarchy. The authors also claim that the philosophy of Bhima Bhoi has revolted and attempted to restructure society toward the path of liberation.

Sourav Naskar studies the rise of the Matua Mahasanga as a Dalit voice in Bengal and how it has challenged the continued social discrimination, political deprivation, and economic exploitation to the marginal communities in Bengal. This study also brings out how the Matua community has emerged as an influential Dalit group in the political arena of Bengal. Finally, this article talks about the transformation of the Matua community from a peasant community to a politically conscious Dalit voice in the caste politics of Bengal. □

Sebasti L. Raj SJ
Guest Editor

Participation of Marginalised Groups in Local Self-Governance: Challenges and Opportunities

Manju Panwar*

Abstract

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 is an important instrument for the development of democratic decentralisation in India. The Act guarantees the involvement of the marginalised groups in the local self-governance. This Act has reserved seats to the marginalised groups, by which they get a chance to take part in the process of decision-making. In addition to this, articles in fundamental rights, directive principles, state-run legislatures, local self-government, municipalities, setting up SC, ST, and women commission is the testimony of the Constitutional guarantee to protect the oppressed section of the society. Despite providing constitutional provisions and positive affirmative action in terms of implementing schemes and programmes in order to uplift their status, the marginalised groups are still lagging behind in the development indicators and face numerous forms of discrimination and exploitation. Moreover, two decades of this Act has passed, but still the potentials of the marginalised groups have not been realised. Against this background, this paper highlights the understanding of the marginalised groups of society and the historical background of local self-governance in India. It also examines the challenges faced by these groups in the decision-making of local self-governance based on the focussed group discussion and interaction conducted in the training programme organised by B P S Women's University, the first state women university in North India, for the elected women representatives of Sonipat district of Haryana. Some suggestions are discussed in the end.

Keywords: Local self-governance, marginalised group, elected representatives, decentralisation, decision making.

Introduction

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 approved constitutional status to local self-governance in India. The Constitution of India instructed states to ensure equality and integrity to all its citizens. In addition to this,

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the majority of the Central and State laws has provided protection to this group. This Act is an instrument to bring 'inclusion' of the marginalised groups in the mainstream. Marginalised communities have been given representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through this Act. Reservation of seats is being done to ensure representation and participation of the marginalised group in decision-making.

Participation disables oppression and discrimination, particularly among the poorest and marginalised groups of the society. It becomes more effective when people themselves are interested to participate and raise their voice. In a democratic system, the people are involved in political activities to bring socio-political changes in the process of decision-making.

The final decade of the nineties saw a dramatic shift in the nature and possibility of engagement. Gone are the days, when political participation was limited to voting and approving of candidates, as today it also encompasses the inclusion of effective governance, in which the marginalized and underprivileged populations are involved in the decision-making process. Since the planning process commenced in the country, the most crucial priority has been the socio-economic growth and the protection of the marginalized groups against prejudice and exploitation.

Public goods and services can be effectively distributed through decentralisation. Local self-governance is an important step towards democratic decentralization. Decentralization of power means the transfer of powers from one level of governance to another and, in the same way, from one section of population to another. Power moves from the dominant to the oppressed, men to women, upper castes to lower castes and bureaucrats to people's representatives. However, power will not move on its own but has to be moved. So, a driving force is required to move power from one dominant group to a marginalised group. The task is not so easy as may be visualised, particularly in a very unequal society.

With the trickledown approach, the reservations of seats for the marginalised groups can be understood as a mechanism to empower them by electing them to local self-governance. The Government at the central and state levels, through numerous development strategies, such as participation in local self-governance, skills and wage development programmes, providing basic amenities through various schemes, etc., have been trying to move the marginalized groups into the mainstream.

Local Governance Institutions, called 'Panchayats', in rural areas were given significant position through the 73rd constitutional amendment, which came into force from April 24, 1992. It provided legal status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions at the district level and below. These institutions are made accountable for safeguarding the economic advancement and social justice to the rural people.

The decentralization of powers to the panchayats is an important step of this Act for ensuring political participation of the marginalisation group of the society in decision-making. Research conducted in this field and grassroots realities reveal that despite providing constitutional provisions and positive action safeguards in terms of implementing schemes and programmes to uplift their status, the marginalised groups are still lagging behind in the development indicators and face numerous discriminations and exploitation. Though a number of efforts have been made to bring them in mainstream, still their low social status continues to prevail.

Objectives

The objective of this study are: a) to find out the historical evolution of local self-governance in India; b) to understand the concept and status of the marginalised groups in society; c) to understand the challenges encountered by the SC and women elected representatives in local self-governance; and, d) to provide suggestions for the inclusion of the marginalised groups in a decentralised local governance.

Methodology

This paper is the result of the proceedings and discussions held in the training programme organised by B P S Women's University, the first state women university in North India for the elected women representatives of Sonapat district of Haryana. Grassroots realities, based on focussed group discussion, observations techniques and other methods of participatory approach were adopted by the author along with her students to understand the challenges and overall performance of the marginalised groups in the local self-governance. The paper has also used data from secondary sources, which consist of the study of related legislations, initiatives of government and non-government organisations and experience of author as an administrator, educator and researcher in her university. This paper has four sections. The first section delves with historical evolution of local self-governance in India. The meaning and status of socially disadvantaged groups, particularly SC and women, are covered in the second section.

Challenges faced by this group are covered in the third section and the fourth section focuses on the suggestions to include the marginalised groups in the mainstream.

I. Historical Evolution of Local Self Governance

Earlier, panchayats were viewed as an important foundation to maintain unity and solidarity in the villages. The main step towards decentralisation was taken by the Royal Commission in 1907. It emphasized that decentralisation of power is possible only when efforts are made to organize and develop village panchayats so that they can manage and develop their villages on their own. Lord Rippon, known as the father of local self-government in India, was in favour that of local self-governance and he proposed that “there should be local bodies for the well-being and improvement of rural people in India” (Mathew, 2003, pp.155-162).

After independence, a need was felt among the national leaders to support the local governance. As India is a country of villages, there is a requirement to strengthen the villages for grassroot democracy. Mahatma Gandhi strongly believed in “*Gram Swaraj*”, and, according to him, the villages should be self-sufficient and self-reliant through elected panchayats.

The first Community Development Programme was launched in 1952 through Nehru’s socialist planning but it failed because of administrative limitations. In 1957, for the first time, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee suggested that democratic decentralisation known as ‘Panchayati Raj’ should be established at village, block and district levels (Verma, 1995). With this Committee’s suggestion, the Panchayati Raj system was applauded extensively throughout India and there was a hope of making the local governance strong. But after the mid-60s, issues like centralisation of power, irregular election, non-participation of the weaker section in decision-making, etc., led to the decline of PRIs.

Seeing the deterioration of the local governance, Ashok Mehta Committee was set up in 1977 and it recommended a two-tier panchayat system at the district and local levels for promoting local governance. This Committee was of the view that local self-governance is not only for ensuring people’s participation but also to strengthen rural development and micro level planning.

After Ashok Mehta Committee, another Committee under the chairmanship of G. V. K. Rao was constituted in 1985 for strengthening the foundation

of local governance. This Committee was of the view that the bureaucracy is one of the major stumbling blocks because of which development is not taking place at the grassroots level. Therefore, this Committee recommended that apart from proper representation of all segments of the society in local self-governance, there is a requirement to build the capacity of the people's representatives and the administrative staff of local self-governance. It also recommended that more power needs to be given to the Block Development Officer (BDO) for planning, implementing and evaluation of the rural development programmes (Ghosh & Pramanik 1999, pp. 215–216).

Likewise, the L. M. Singhvi Committee was constituted in 1986, when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister, to study the challenges faced by the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This Committee recommended that the panchayats should be provided additional funds and a constitutional status in order to make them stronger.

73rd Constitutional Amendment

After the recommendations of the L. M. Singhvi Committee, the PRIs were a given Constitutional status under Part IX of the Constitution. Further, the affirmative action of providing reservation to SC, ST and women in local self-governance was an important instrument to empower the marginalised groups through the trickledown approach. Article 243 D of the 73rd Amendment requires that the State Legislatures reserve the office of the Panchayat Chairperson to SCs & STs. It also requires that not less than 1/3rd of the seats reserved for women. The main provisions of the 73rd amendment are the participation of women as voters, women as members of political parties, women as candidates, women elected member of PRIs, participant of women in decision-making, planning, monitoring and evaluation (Narayan, Usha.1996).

No doubt, after the 73rd Amendment, a significant number of marginalised groups has entered the panchayats. According to the UN Women Regional Programme Director, South Asia, at the local level, India has around 1.5 million elected women representatives, which is the maximum number in the world, in terms of numbers. Indeed, it is a remarkable achievement. Besides, nearly six lakh elected representatives of SCs and STs have entered panchayat system, thanks to the provision for proportional reservation in all the tiers of local governance.

II. Meaning and Status of the Marginalised Groups

The definition of marginalization depends upon the historical and socio-economic context of a society. Marginalised group refers to a group of people who have been isolated to participate in the economic, political and social life of the mainstream society. Marginalization also refers to social exclusion, which arises when a segment of the population does not have access to the institutions and opportunities due to poverty and structural divide. "In the Indian situation, caste system symbolises economic as well as socio-cultural reductions, which describe the lowest caste (SCs) as a despised category" (Kabeer,2000). Women, SCs and STs have suffered societal and economic marginalization for a long time. They are even deprived of their basic rights.

A study related to disparity on the basis of caste and development in India have highlighted that at least one third of disparity in income generation is due to unfair treatment of the scheduled caste category (Borooah, 2005). Another study points out that the SCs comprised the major segment of the under-privileged people in Indian society (Sundaram, Tendulker, 2013).

Marginalisation means social exclusion resulting from the absence of opportunities and obstacles to participate in decision-making. The term "marginalization" refers to the state in which certain people, populations, or groups are kept outside of 'mainstream society', who are also compelled to live at the periphery of those who have the advantage of authority, cultural domination, and economic power. Marginalisation is defined as a practice by which a group or individual is not allowed to hold any important position in the society. A marginalised group may have the numerical majority, but they have to be distinguished from the minority group, which may be small in number, but has the right to political or economic power (Marshall, 1998).

The decentralization of powers to the panchayats, through the 73rd Amendment, is a vital step towards bringing the marginalisation groups into the process of decision-making. It provides an opportunity to the elected representatives for influencing policies and to bring about positive change in the society at large. But the sad reality is that despite several legal provisions and legislative methods, the harassment of the marginalised groups is still present in our society. The socially marginalized groups are still lagging behind in the matters of literacy, health, etc., in comparison with the other sections of the society.

The Status of Scheduled Caste and Women

The marginalisation of different groups is visible in Indian villages, which are stratified on the basis of caste, class, culture and gender. As a result, the major chunk of the population in the rural areas are living in a miserable state. As per Census 2011, Scheduled Castes constitutes 16.6% of the entire population. The people of this community are spread all over the country but the bulk of them, i.e., 76.4% live in rural areas. Moreover, around 45% of the SC households are landless and they get the major part of their income from manual and casual labour. They are engaged in lower-income employment. As per the Census Report 2011, around 71 per cent of SC farmers are agricultural labourers. They do not have their own land but work for wages by working in the land of others. The literacy level of this group is 66.1 per cent, which is much lower than the all-India level of 73 per cent. Female literacy among them is also low and is at 56.5 per cent against the all India level of 64.6 per cent (Census Report, 2011). In spite of their miserable condition, they have a major role to play in the development of the country.

As far as the condition of the females in general and SCs in particular, they face numerous obstacles and find it challenging to join in the political process. The SC women also face lot of problems associated with gender discrimination, mainly due to a lower level of education. They are largely dependent on unskilled, low-paid and hazardous manual jobs. They not only face discrimination in employment and wages but also face violence and sexual exploitation. In the Indian social structure, SC women are the most socially excluded and marginalised and they consider themselves as 'the Dalits among the Dalits'. "It is important to understand that women's marginalisation is not one dimensional, i.e., caused only by gender. It is, instead, an outcome of the intersection of the subordination conferred by caste, class and ethnicity, as well as gender" (Agrawal, 1997 and Gibson 2001).

III. Challenges of Disadvantaged Groups in Local Self-Governance

Research conducted in this area reveals that elected representatives from SC communities and women face massive discriminations and harassments in performing their role effectively. This section of the paper highlights the challenges faced by women and SCs in local self-governance based on the discussion with them and the outcome of the training programmes conducted by BPS Women's University for elected women representatives

of Sonipat district of Haryana.

1) Nominal Participation in the decision-making of Gram Sabha Meeting

Gram Sabha (GS) is the elected body at the village level. The GS supports the Panchayati Raj and plays a vital role for village development. People use this forum of GS to discuss the local problems of the village and prepare need-based plans for the development of the village. Effective planning at the grassroots level can only be envisaged if a large number of the GS members actively participate in the planning process.

As part of the field work, the present author, along with her students, have mobilised and made the people, particularly from the marginalised section of the society of the adopted villages of the university, to participate in the GS meeting. But despite awareness programmes and focussed group discussions, it was found that the participation of SCs and women remain minimal in the GS meeting. There are two important reasons for their low participation. The first one is the prevailing social cultural realities and power equations and the second one is their indifferent attitude towards the GS. After interacting with the majority of SCs and low wage workers, it was found that they do not want to lose their wages by attending the GS meeting. Besides, more than fifty per cent of the women were not allowed to participate in the GS meeting by their husbands.

2) The Prevalence of Traditional Panchayats

Traditionally, the Panchayats consisted of elderly and wise people, selected by the local community, who used to settle disputes between individuals and villages. The caste panchayat is also called as '*khap panchayat*' where a group of people provide justice and deal with cases like domestic violence, love affairs, and land lease problems. Caste panchayat members and many others avoid going to the institutions like police station, court, etc. The realities at the field level reveal that due to the sanctity of the traditional caste panchayats, the leaders keep local governance in their hands. They take decision on their own by ignoring the elected representatives and implement their traditional codes. As a result there is a battle of power between the traditional panchayats and emerging new leadership from the marginalised groups of the rural areas.

3) The Dominance of the Elite Group

It was observed in the field that any discussion associated with the village development is limited to and handled by a small group known as the village

elites who have muscle and money power. The upper caste people are not interested in following the decisions taken by the SC leaders. Instead, the higher-caste and class people regulate the SC elected representatives and pressurise them to work in a certain way. That was the main reason why Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was critical of the PRI System which “he thought would inevitably strengthen the hold of dominant castes in rural areas” (Ambedkar, 2005). The majority of the elected women representatives expressed during the training programme that women in general and SC in particular face harassment and humiliation by the upper caste people. The patriarchal society and traditional cultural beliefs, become the stumbling blocks for their empowerment in local governance. “Villages were places of violence, discrimination, and communalism for Ambedkar. Human rights of SCs will be harmed if they are under the control of upper castes and they will continue to suffer for years (Aiyer, 2014).

4) Institutional Barriers

Two-child norms, rotation of seats and no confidence motion are the main institutional obstacles for the ineffective participation of the marginalised groups in decision-making. No confidence motion against SC leaders is a common practice in rural areas. This has restricted the entry of SCs to exercise their rights in local self-governance. The two-child norm has discouraged women to enter the panchayats.

5) Caste-based Violence

Discrimination and oppression are the caste-based violent practices in India which target people belonging to socially marginalised groups of the society. A number of cases of massive and extensive violence against the marginalised groups by the upper caste are reported frequently and these practices the upper caste people try to uphold their domination over the marginalised groups. Due to such violations, the caste-based violence, marginalised groups continue to suffer despite legal protection and several affirmative provisions. A report by the National Commission of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1997) states: “there are incidents of violence, rapes, mass killing whenever the marginalised groups muster the courage to organise themselves for the protection of their rights”.

6) Indifferent Attitude of the Government Officials

A proper communication and interaction between the elected representatives and the higher government officials in administration is needed for the smooth functioning of local self-governance. But grassroots realities show

that an indifferent attitude of the government officials is one of the major challenges faced by the elected representatives, as they treat them with disrespect and throw their weight around in order to keep them under their control. Such outlooks and practices towards the elected panchayat representatives belonging to the oppressed section of the society discourage them to execute their tasks efficiently. Field observations reveal that most of the SC and women representatives do not get cooperation from the government officials and the upper caste members of their Gram Panchayats. These problems are not confined to Haryana only but exist everywhere and it is found that gender, illiteracy, and lower caste identity are the key reasons for the lack of proper and prompt communication by the higher officials.

Though empowerment of disadvantaged groups has been the upmost priority in the agenda of any development but they are lagging behind in the society. Patriarchy and caste are the major barriers because of which women and SCs are not able to join in the decision-making process.

IV. Suggestions to Empower and Enable the Marginalised Group into the Mainstream

1) Constitution of relevant committees and utilisation of funds

Awareness about the constitution of Social Justice Committee (SJC) for protecting the interest of the disadvantaged groups from discrimination and exploitation need to be created. The SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, needs to be implemented effectively for preventing any atrocities against them. The Panchayats have been given a major role to play in the implementation of the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) whose objective is to develop the infrastructure of the backward areas of the country. The Panchayats have been given the responsibility to identify the critical gaps through a participative planning process for the development of their areas. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, can utilise BRGF grants for SC elected representatives. In addition to this, the Scheduled Caste sub-plan fund is earmarked in each state whose main objective is to allow a SC family belonging to below poverty status. This fund can be used to for promoting income generating schemes, skills development and also organizing programs to bring up the marginalized out of the cycle of poverty. But the unfortunate fact is that much of this fund remains underutilised. This budget should be utilised for the improvement of the SC headed panchayats.

2) Training Programmes for Government Officials

The Government officials, particularly those at the district and block levels, should be sensitized through training programmes so that they realise their responsibilities towards the marginalised group as per the constitutional provisions. The provision of incentives and punishments should be ensured so that officials work in the true spirit of the constitutional framework.

3) Collaboration with Civil Society Organisations

The empowerment of the disadvantaged leadership through panchayats is a first step but the major responsibility lies on other stakeholders like the central and state government and the civil society organisations which must work in tandem to bring out the hidden potentials among the disadvantaged leaders and lead them into the mainstream. There is a requirement of collaboration between the Commission related to SC and women with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for the empowerment of the marginalised group. These Commissions need to take up research activities with the civil society organisations and create awareness about the programmes and schemes meant for the empowerment of the marginalised groups. Various committees are to be strengthened for the effective functioning of the local self-governance. For this, elements of social capitals, like Self Help Group (SHG), youth clubs and farmers club must be made aware of their prominent role in local governance. Organisations outside the government system should be roped in for building the capacity of the community based organisations, since government administration may not take much pains towards activating the local institutions (Pal, 2003).

4) Capacity building of the elected women representatives:

Women are rarely given a chance to participate in the decision-making process because they are used as proxies by their husband or any other male member in the family. Women leadership in local self-governance can gain strength by linking them with women's organisations through which they can improve their capabilities for action by sharing their experiences with each other. Training programmes must include topics such as the understanding of relevant Acts, civic accountabilities, transparency, digital technology, communication, team building, etc. Exposure visits can be arranged for the elected representatives to areas where exemplary work for village development are being carried out so that they can learn and replicate the same in their own jurisdiction.

Conclusion

The 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution comprises procedures for the State to strengthen the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions, which has generated a lot of hope for empowering the weaker sections of society. It is for the first-time legal reservation has been provided to the marginalised group. It was a milestone in the history of local governance, as this is a powerful tool for not only strengthening grassroots democracy but also to address various issues related to people's participation, gender equality and social justice. With the efforts of constitutional provisions and policy formulations, there has been a development of leadership among the oppressed sections of the society with regard to their political awareness and participation but still a lot more need to be done. The participation of the marginalised group in the decentralised governance is one of the important objectives of the 73rd Amendment. But the ground reality reveals that the dominant group does not allow the marginalised groups to empower themselves. It is a sad reality that decentralization through Panchayat Raj has not become a reality. Research studies conducted in this area also reveal that the elected representatives belonging to the marginalised sections hardly participate in the deliberations of village development and are not able to exercise their own judgements in decision-making. Effective leadership is essential for the development of any inclusive society. The leaders of the marginalised groups need to be sensitized towards their roles and responsibilities in the democratic institutions. A positive step in this direction would give an impetus to the empowerment of the marginalised groups. □

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